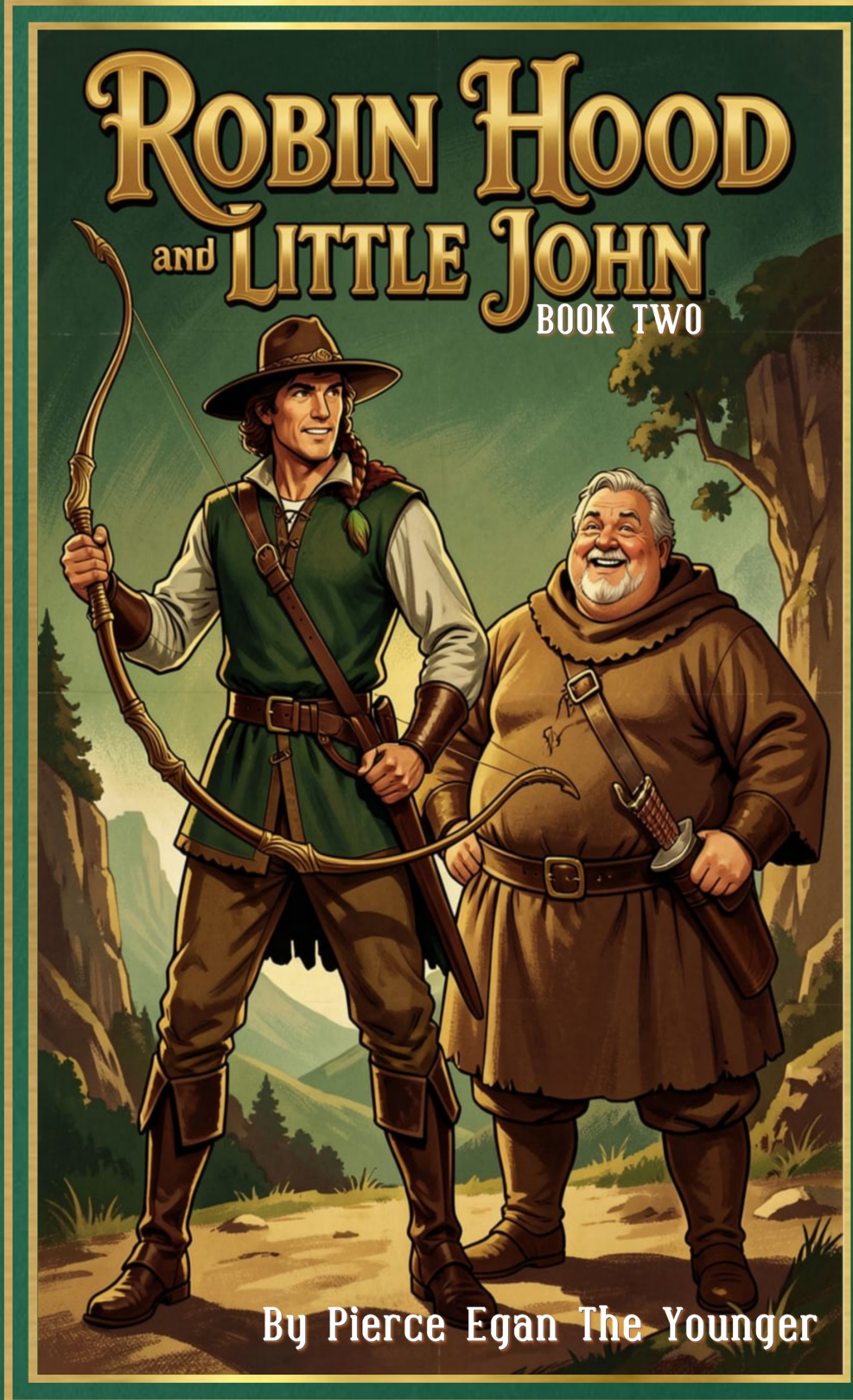

ROBIN HOOD
and LITTLE JOHN
BOOK TWO
By Pierce Egan The Younger

Dedicated to Ernest and Mary

Robin Hood and Little John

By Pierce Egan, The Younger
REPRINT

BOOK TWO

YOUR PERSONAL PURSUIT of HAPPINESS

"*Oath of Happiness*"

"*The Pursuit of Happiness*" is the central theme of the Founding Documents of the United States. It was based on the ancient Greek concept of '*eudaimonia*', which means "*happiness, blessing or flourishing*".

To achieve that state of mind, the Founders recognized that citizens needed a government that was just and which would enable and encourage everyone to live their best life.

Eudaimonia is achieved through each individual's **R**[oots] ----- *Their families and their education*--- **A**[nd] their **W**[ings] ----- *Their Communities* ----- working together to unleash both personal and community **R.A.W. Power.**

The framework is freely-available to everyone in the U.S. Constitution.

But, for many, if not most people, "*The Pursuit of Happiness*" often gets stalled because they don't know about the "*Oath of Happiness*".

"*The Oath*" is a silent promise to yourself at the start of your day that you will accomplish two things

1. Do something extra for someone and
2. Learn at least one new thing.

And then, before you fall asleep, you silently review what you did and what you learned. (Something that can be as simple as

"*Today I smiled at a stranger and I learned that I don't like green eggs and ham*" or as amazing as "*Today I saved someone's life and I learned a useful life hack*").

The first change that you experience will probably be almost immediate ---- More restful sleep.

But, in a relatively short time, you will find other improvements in your personal and professional lives, in addition to gaining more respect from both friends and strangers.

Before you write this off as foolishness,
you will lose nothing if you try it for a day or two.

CONTENTS

Summary of "Robin Hood and Little John: Book Two"

"Robin Hood and Little John: Book Two" is an engaging narrative that continues the legendary tale of Robin Hood, exploring the rich emotional and adventurous fabric of his life and those around him. The story is set in the medieval period, entwining love, revenge, and the pursuit of justice against the backdrop of social hierarchies and feudal conflicts.

Key Characters & Relationships

- **Robin Hood**: The legendary hero known for stealing from the rich to give to the poor.
- **Little John**: Robin's loyal friend and companion, characterized by his strength and loyalty.
- **Gilbert Hood**: Robin's uncle, focused on securing Robin's rightful claim to the title of Earl.
- **Will Scarlet**: A brave and impulsive character who loves Maude Lindsay.
- **Maude Lindsay**: A kind-hearted woman who grapples with her own feelings, showing affection towards both Will Scarlet and Robin.
- **Marian**: The embodiment of kindness, providing emotional support to Robin and others.

Plot Overview

The story begins with a retrospective, indicating a six-year gap since the previous events. Robin and his band continue to face challenges while seeking to restore Robin to his rightful status after experiencing loss and upheaval. Gilbert Hood conveys the need for legal action to reclaim Robin's title, projecting the minimal chance of success against powerful adversaries.

The love stories intertwine with the larger saga. Robin is depicted as a man deeply in love with Marian, while Will Scarlet pursues Maude, who is struggling with her feelings for Robin and her loyalty to Will. Despite their mutual affection, Maude feels a sense of unrequited love as her heart leans towards Robin.

Central Conflicts

- **Love and Misunderstandings**: The love triangle creates tension among the friends, showcasing how feelings can complicate relationships. Robin's silent love for Marian contrasts with Will's open affection for Maude, leading to emotional struggles.
- **Revenge and Honor**: Amidst personal stakes, Gilbert Hood and Robin Hood plot against Baron Fitz Alwine, who had caused significant harm to their families. They seek vengeance while also trying to navigate the dangerous political dynamics of their time.

Major Themes

- **Love and Friendship**: The friendships among Robin, Little John, Will, and the women they love are pivotal, illustrating loyalty and the trials that accompany romantic entanglements.
- **Justice vs. Injustice**: Robin's fight against the oppressive Norman rule reflects the theme of social justice. The narrative encapsulates the struggle of the common folk against a corrupt and powerful elite, as Robin Hood emerges as their champion.
- **Fate and Destiny**: A sense of doom underlines the tale; the characters are often shaped by their past and the legacies they carry, which complicate their struggles for a better future.

As the plot progresses, Robin and Little John prepare to confront their enemies, setting the stage for conflict. The emotional dialogue between characters unveils their vulnerabilities and deep connections, providing a richer understanding of their character motivations. Robin's unwavering commitment is tested, illustrating both personal loss and the longing for justice.

"Robin Hood and Little John: Book Two" takes readers on a journey filled with adventure, romantic angst, and the timeless battle against injustice, anchoring its themes in love, loyalty, and the relentless pursuit of honor and justice.

In **Book Two** of "Robin Hood and Little John," the narrative follows an exciting match between two formidable characters: Little John and Geoffrey Gurthfeld, a Norman soldier. The story is set in the context of friendly competition that evolves into a demonstration of strength, skill, and character.

Key Events and Themes

1. **The Wager and Contest:**
    - The scene opens with Little John engaging in discussions about height, with his friend Geoffrey arguing about their respective statures. This sparks a betting frenzy among bystanders eager to wager on the outcome of their upcoming wrestling match.
    - The wrestling occurs in a festive setting, symbolizing camaraderie and fair competition. The crowd is supportive, emphasizing the theme of community and sportsmanship.
2. **Wrestling Match:**
    - Little John demonstrates his incredible strength, easily tossing Geoffrey, despite the latter's attempts to overpower him. Their match ends with a mixture of triumph and humility, as Geoffrey acknowledges his defeat while still vowing to challenge Little John again, which strengthens the bond between the two men.
    - This theme of mutual respect is crucial, as it shows that even in contests, honor and courtesy prevail.
3. **Journey to Nottingham Castle:**
    - Amid the festivities, Little John expresses a desire to leave unnoticed as he undertakes a covert mission. Geoffrey, now a friend, helps him escape the attention of the boisterous crowd.
    - This sequence highlights the importance of friendship and loyalty, as Geoffrey offers to guide Little John to Nottingham Castle safely.

4. **Strategic Alliances:**
    - At the castle, Geoffrey proves to be a valuable guide, revealing details about the prisoners kept there and the layout of the castle. This information amplifies the tension surrounding their mission, creating a sense of urgency as Robin Hood's ally, Will Scarlet, is among those imprisoned.
    - The story shifts as Geoffrey showcases his Norman cunning, while Little John remains grounded in his Saxon roots, suggesting differences between their values and backgrounds.
5. **Conflict with Baron Fitz Alwine:**
    - The main antagonist, Baron Fitz Alwine, represents the oppressive Norman rule. Little John's confrontations with him exemplify the ongoing struggle between Saxons and Normans.
    - When Little John captures Baron Fitz Alwine, he cleverly negotiates for the release of the prisoners, showcasing his tactical thinking and loyalty to his friends. This highlights the rebellion of the Saxon man against a corrupt system, with the theme of justice being central.
6. **Robin and Marian:**
    - Another subplot revolves around Robin Hood's affection for Marian, and their heartfelt exchanges highlight the emotional stakes of the story. Their love is tested by turmoil, and Robin's consideration for Marian's well-being demonstrates his character's selflessness.
    - The emotional weight of their potential separation emphasizes love's endurance amidst hardship.
7. **Climactic Battle:**
    - As preparations grow frantic at Gamwell Hall, the villagers rally behind Sir Guy to defend their home against the Norman soldiers. The narrative builds to a climax, anticipating a confrontation that embodies the spirit of resistance against tyranny.

8. **Message of Unity and Resistance:**

    - As villagers unite for a common cause, the story underscores themes of loyalty, courage, and the deep bonds of community in the face of adversity. It presents a vivid depiction of the Saxon struggle for justice against oppressive forces.

In summary, "Robin Hood and Little John: Book Two" merges themes of friendship, loyalty, honor, and resistance with action-packed moments and emotionally charged interactions. The characters navigate the complexities of rivalry and camaraderie while facing a broader struggle against oppression, making this chapter both compelling and resonant for readers.

In Book Two of "Robin Hood and Little John," we witness a fierce battle between the Saxons, led by Robin Hood and Little John, and the invading Normans. The opening scenes depict a strategically planned Saxon defense against a much larger Norman force.

The Battle Begins

- The Normans, realizing the Saxons were prepared for their attack, engage in a desperate fight to conquer the Saxon villagers.
- The Saxons use their knowledge of the landscape and their skilled archers to inflict heavy casualties on the Normans.
- Despite the initial setbacks, the Normans try a trick by pretending to retreat to draw the Saxons out of their defenses, but the Saxons maintain their positions.

Turning Point

- The leader of the Normans is killed, and his death demoralizes the Norman troops.
- Encouraged by their initial success, the still-undiscouraged Saxons set up defensive barriers and gather their forces, preparing for a stronger confrontation.
- Little John organizes the Saxons, reminding them of their courage and their reasons to fight, which include defending their homes and freedom.

Aftermath of Conflict

- Following the skirmishes, which showcased the prowess of Robin Hood's archery, both sides anticipate further attacks.
- News comes that a larger Norman force is approaching. The Saxons, under Little John's command, prepare themselves for another battle while implementing various strategies, such as setting barriers and practicing archery.

The Saxons' Victory

- The climactic battle unfolds with the Normans, despite their numerical advantage, suffering heavy losses against the determined Saxons armed with bows and clever tactics.
- Overcoming their initial fears and hesitations, the Saxons rally and ultimately defeat the Normans, driving them back and reclaiming their land.
- The victory brings a sense of elation to the Saxon villagers, but they also recognize the need for vigilance as the Normans may return seeking revenge.

A New Home in the Forest

- After the victory, fearing that the Normans would retaliate, the Saxons decide to leave their now-destroyed village and establish a new home in Sherwood Forest.
- The band of villagers, now dubbed Robin Hood's Merry Men, embrace this new life in the forest as outlaws, sharing duties and resources to aid each other.
- Robin Hood assumes the role of their leader, respected and loved by his companions for his bravery, skills, and commitment to their cause.

A Code of Conduct

- The group institutes a code of laws to ensure cooperation among them in their new community, emphasizing mutual support and the avoidance of unnecessary violence while handling their confrontations with the Normans.
- They engage in raids on wealthy Normans, taking from them to assist the needy, thus garnering a reputation as noble outlaws.

The narrative captures themes of courage, community, and justice. The Saxons, despite being outnumbered, prove victorious through their unity, strategy, and the strong leadership of Robin Hood and Little John. Their transformation from villagers to outlaws highlights their resilience and commitment to their cause, setting the stage for future adventures in Sherwood Forest.

The extract revolves around a dramatic narrative featuring a tension-filled encounter between Marian and de Boissy, a Norman knight with nefarious intentions toward her. The passage begins with de Boissy fervently declaring his demand for Marian to be his, threatening her with violence if she refuses. He uses manipulation to pressure her into submission, calling upon her vulnerability and isolation to express dominance.

Key Characters:

- **Marian:** A strong-willed Saxon maiden who resists de Boissy's aggressive advances. She is determined to protect her dignity and identity despite the threat of violence.
- **De Boissy:** The antagonist who represents a Norman's oppressive nature over the Saxon people. His character moves from a threatening seducer to a desperate figure as the story unfolds.
- **Robin Hood:** The heroic outlaw who eventually intervenes to save Marian. He arrives just in time to thwart de Boissy’s intentions.

Important Themes:

- **Resistance:** The extract highlights Marian's refusal to submit to de Boissy's advances, symbolizing resistance against oppression. Her declaration that she would rather die than submit emphasizes her strength.
- **Love and Loyalty:** The shots of Marian calling for Robin Hood’s help signify the bond of trust and love between them. This ultimately leads to Robin's timely arrival and rescue of Marian from a dire situation.
- **Heroism and Honor:** Robin Hood’s swift action to protect Marian showcases his role as a protector of the oppressed and embodies the traits of a noble hero. He chastises de Boissy for his cowardice and threats, reinforcing the idea of honor in the face of villainy.

Climax and Resolution:

As Marian struggles against de Boissy, she suddenly hears a song sung by Robin Hood, which reignites her hope. In a climactic moment, as Robin rushes in to confront de Boissy, there's a swift and intense battle. Robin's courage not only rescues Marian but also serves justice against de Boissy. The duel ends with Robin victorious, solidifying his reputation as a defender of the weak.

Key Takeaway:

The passage underscores the values of bravery, resistance against tyranny, and the power of love. Marian's resolute character serves as an inspiration for many, illustrating that true strength lies in standing against oppression and fighting for one's dignity. Robin Hood's arrival not only serves as physical salvation for Marian but also represents the overarching fight against injustice against the Saxon populace.

In summary, this gripping excerpt from "Robin Hood and Little John" conveys themes of heroism, love, and the struggle against oppression, framed within a narrative rich with emotion and drama. Marian's courage and Robin's gallantry combine to offer a compelling representation of the fight for autonomy and justice in a time of peril.

The story revolves around urgent attempts to rescue Will Scarlet, who is imprisoned and facing death. Robin Hood is determined to save his friend while also dealing with his romantic rivalries, particularly concerning Lady Christabel, who is set to marry Sir Tristram—the "richest Norman in England."

Key Events and Characters

- **Robin Hood's Determination**: Robin Hood plans to confront Baron Fitz Alwine to claim Lady Christabel as his bride while also strategizing to save Will Scarlet. He firmly believes that he must act swiftly since Will is in dire straits, condemned to die at dawn.
- **Will Scarlet's Plight**: Will has been captured and is imprisoned. Despite his circumstances, he maintains his spirits—fearful of his fate but hopeful that Robin will come to his aid. An old pilgrim, who provides Will solace and performs his last rites, reveals to Robin that Will's execution is imminent.

- **The Baron and Sir Tristram**: Baron Fitz Alwine intends to marry Christabel to Sir Tristram, further complicating Robin's intentions. Allan Clare, Christabel's beloved, challenges this arrangement, insisting she should marry him instead.
- **The Rescue Attempt**: As Robin, Little John, and their companions approach the castle to rescue Will, they strategize to utilize deception and courage. The old pilgrim helps communicate Robin's plans, showing that every second counts.

Climax and Transformation

- **Robin's Boldness**: When Robin Hood reveals himself at the gallows where Will is to be executed, he declares he will have Will back. In a dramatic moment, he confronts the Baron and resets the narrative, claiming authority over the situation.
- **Successful Rescue**: The commotion leads to Will's rescue, showcasing Robin's cleverness and bravery. With the assistance of the Merry Men, they breach the gallows, causing shock among the guards and Baron.
- **Romantic Resolutions**: With Will's life spared, the story also establishes the romantic connections between Christabel and Allan, leading into the conclusion of both love stories. Marcian, meanwhile, has her own transformative moment of affection towards Robin Hood, solidifying their bond.

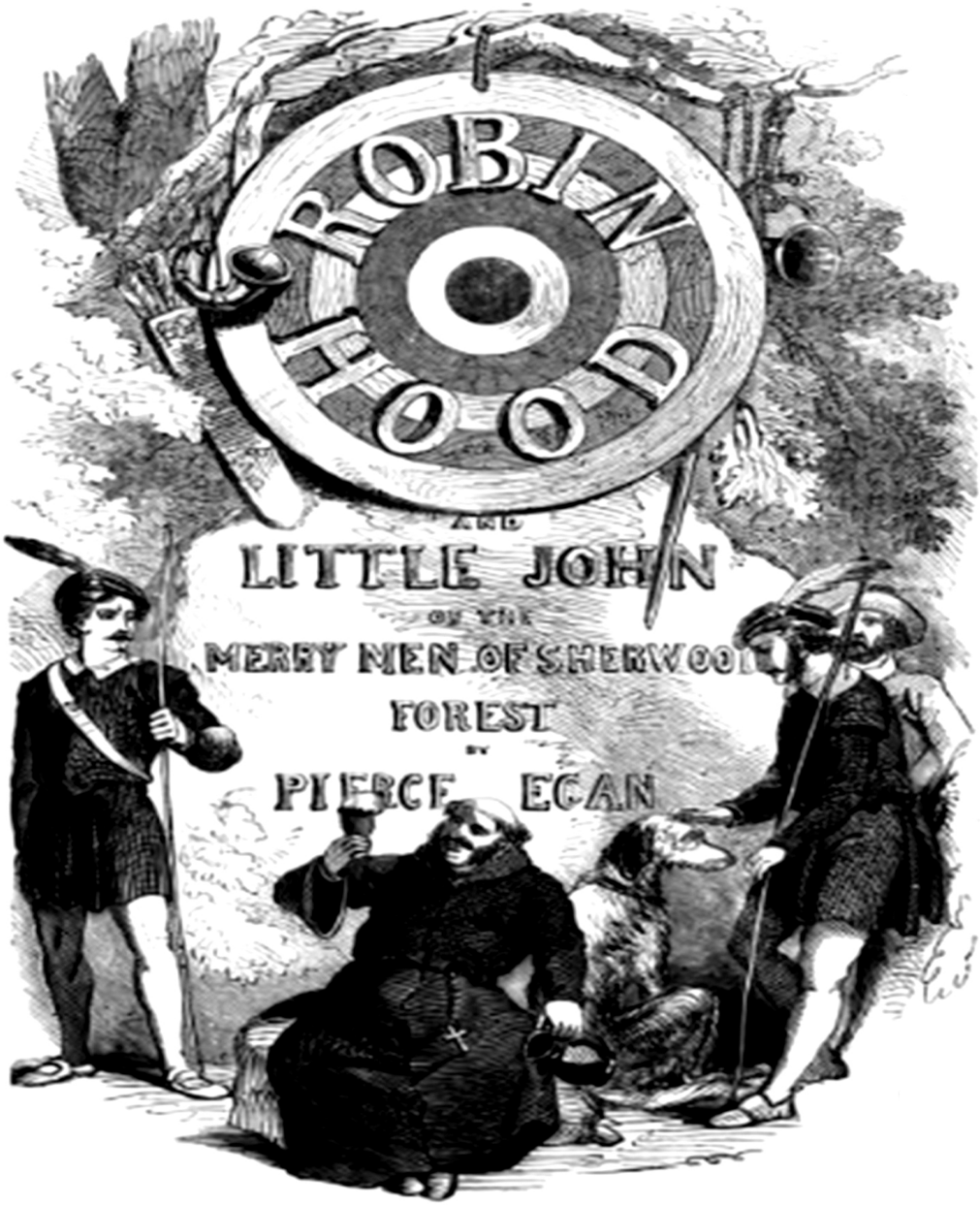
Themes and Lessons

- **Friendship and Loyalty**: The central theme of loyalty is highlighted through Robin's unwavering commitment to saving his friends, particularly Will Scarlet. This emphasizes the importance of camaraderie.
- **Love and Sacrifice**: The character dynamics revolving around love are complex, showing how various characters navigate their feelings for each other amidst turmoil. Christabel's struggle between her father's wishes and her heart's desires showcases the often-painful nature of societal expectations in matters of love.

- **Justice vs. Authority**: The chapter critiques the way political power is wielded—the Baron and Sir Tristram represent corrupted authority, while Robin Hood embodies the fight for justice and true love against societal norms.

Overall, this gripping tale unfolds a tapestry of heroism, romance, and adventure, accentuated with Robin Hood's wit and bravery. It delivers powerful messages about friendship, loyalty, and the triumph of love over power.

"Robin Hood and Little John" depicts a vivid tale of courage against tyranny, alongside the personal struggles of love and relationships that enhance the narrative.



EDITOR OF “THE HOME CIRCLE” AND AUTHOR OF
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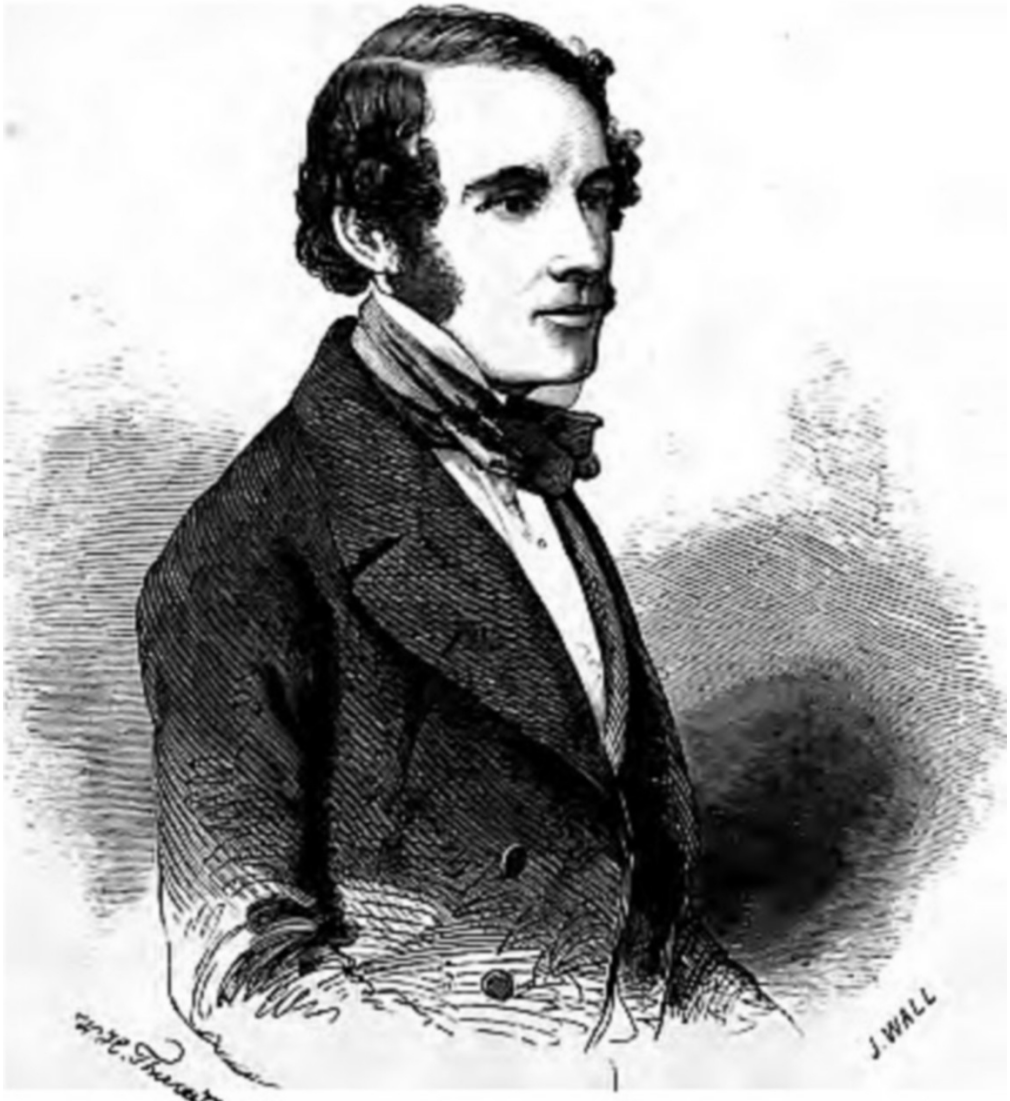

J. WALL

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The materials for a life of Robin Hood are but scanty; for, although his fame is universal, the existing details of his life are but few, and so surrounded by the mists and obscurity of age, that but little certain can be gathered. Many traditions have been handed down respecting him, bearing some stamp of authority, if it be only in the fact that the feats narrated are within the bounds of credibility, while they illustrate the customs and manners of the period; yet, on the other hand, there are many which are quite beyond the pale of human belief, and must be discarded accordingly.

Among his biographers, some have contended for the nobility of his birth; others have repudiated it: the latter have labored hard to support the proofs they have advanced, but they have little foundation in fact, and, in truth, tend more to mystify than to enlighten the enquirer on this subject. The view taken by one writer on this question, though not original, is, perhaps, nearer the truth than any other speculation concerning the famous hero which has yet been formed. It is, that he was the last Saxon who made a positive stand against the dominancy of the Normans; that, in fact, his predatory attacks upon them were but the national efforts of one who endeavoured to remove the proud foot of a conqueror from the neck of his countrymen.

His means were all unequal to accomplish this noble and daring design; but his efforts were unceasing, and must have been the source of constant alarm and harass to the Normans within his three counties, as well as of much uneasiness to the governments under which he lived.

But this, though probable and feasible, is, after all, only a speculation; there is no positive evidence to prove it, although the collateral proofs are very powerful, His popularity among the common people was universal, and has come down to us as fresh and untarnished as it must have been in his own day. There is not an authority but has a good word for him. Fordun, a writer and a priest in the fourteenth century, calls him *ille famosissimus siccarius*, "that most celebrated robber". Major styles him "the most humane and the prince of all robbers." He was compared by the author of a curious Latin poem, dated July 1304, to William Wallace, the hero of Scotland. The renowned Camden speaks of him as "the gentlest of thieves." Shakespeare, in As You Like It, in his description of the Duke's mode of life, in allusion to its happiness, says "He is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him, and there they live like the Old Robin Hood of

England and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the Golden World." Drayton, a charming poet, in his Polybion, a work of extraordinary ability, thus characterises him:

What often times he took, he shared amongst the poor.
The widow in distress he graciously reliev'd,
And remedied the wrongs of many a virgin griev'd;
He from the husband's bed no married woman wan,
But to his mistress dear, his loved Marian,
Was ever constant know.

Geoffrey Chaucer hath named him in kind terms: indeed, were we to enumerate all who have made mention of his name in their works, in strains of eulogy and tones of panegyric, we should exhaust the patience of our readers; we may sum them up in the words of a gentleman who has most ably edited a very handsome edition of the "*Robin Hood Ballads,*" and whose title to his opinion, from his very close research into the subject, is unquestionable. In concluding his life, he says, "He was a man who, in a barbarous age, and under a complicated tyranny, displayed a spirit of freedom and independence which has endeared him to the common people whose cause he maintained (for all opposition to tyranny is the cause of the people); and in spite of the malicious endeavors of pitiful monks, by whom history was consecrated to the crimes and follies of titled ruffians and sainted idiots, to suppress all record of his patriotic exertions and virtuous acts, will render his name immortal."

This is an opinion formed after the most careful and impartial investigation of almost every record existing respecting him extant, and it goes far to bear out the opinion upon his real position, and the object by which he was influenced, already mentioned.

He has been the subject of poems, ballads, songs, and versification, without number, of dramatic exhibitions, written by the best skilled poets of the time. For years, May Day never passed without seeing Robin Hood, Maid Marian, and their renowned followers, among the motley members of the festivals, and Robin Hood is, perhaps, the only instance of a man of his class, although not actually canonized, having "a festival allotted to him and solemn games, instituted in honor of his memory; which were celebrated until the latter end of the sixteenth century, not by the populace only, but by kings or princes, and grave

magistrates, and that as well in Scotland as in England; being considered, in the former country, of the highest political importance, and essential to the civil and religious liberties of the people."

His character, traced through every rhyme, ballad, song, tradition, proverb, or tale, in which he figures, is that of a man noble in spirit, unequaled in courage and daring, active and powerful, prudent, patient, just in his awards, generous and kind hearted in his dispensations, of charity unbounded, and so full of every estimable quality, that he was not only devotedly beloved by his followers – no instance of anyone proving unfaithful or treacherous appearing in any ballad or tradition extant – but he was revered by the people at large, at least, of the three counties in which he ranged, as a generous benefactor – as the true and faithful friend who stood between them, starvation, injury, and oppression.

In the following pages the Author had no material for the earlier portion of Robin Hood's life but such as his imagination supplied him with; the latter portion embodies the exploits contained in the best ballads yet existing, and he trusts, from the extraordinary success with which this humble effort of a youthful pen has been attended, that in combining the imaginative with all he could obtain of the actual, he has not failed in his desire to please.

In conclusion, he wishes to make especial mention that this is the ONLY edition which he has revised with scrupulous care, and, without abridging, in many parts re-written such portions as appeared to him weak or defective.

Entered at Stationer's Hall, 1850

A Slight Token of Esteem and Gratitude, for many kind and affectionate services,

The accompanying, humble production, in all sincerity of heart, is inscribed to

BENJAMIN WEBSTER, ESQ.,

(Lessee of The Theatres Royal Haymarket and Adelphi)

By his highly obliged and attached friend, Pierce Egan

Dawn Corleone's Foreward

We transcribed and edited ***Robin Hood and Little John*** to re-create both digital and printed editions that didn't reflect the damage suffered to the original, centuries-old copy. That damage made the archived, digital version less than a pleasure to read.

The original archaic and British-English spellings were retained in the transcription, but we corrected several typographical oversights that the original proof readers failed to uncover. An abundance of words that may appear to a modern reader to be typographical errors in this remastered edition are, in fact, now-outdated spellings.

We did not condense any part of the story. As is often the case with serialized stories, publishing deadlines that conflicted with author rough drafts resulted in the concluding chapters speeding the narrative's pace and minimizing the quality of detail that was the standard earlier in the story.

To provide added perspective, we annotated and included a Medieval map of England on the next page of this book.

We added definitions of some of the lesser known, outdated vocabulary.

Except in the most extreme cases, we retained the original punctuation, the run-on paragraphs and the run-on sentences. Many words like 'merrie and merry', phrases like 'by-the-bye and bye-the-bye' (Also 'by-and-bye' and 'bye-and-bye') and surnames like 'Lindsay and Lindsey' were left with whichever spelling was originally used at their locations in the story.

Mr Egan's innumerable uses of '*ellipsis*' — omitting words to create a conversational tone — were also retained. (For example: 'We must there' instead of 'We must go there')

For the sake of clarity, we re-positioned many of the original illustrations to more relevant locations in the story. We reduced their sizes to improve their visual appeal. (Their original placements often represented previews of future chapters of the serialized story and, frequently, they were not accurately placed when the serialized issues were assembled into the anthology of the completed work. Multiple artists account for the lack of uniformity in the appearances of various characters in this presentation of the legends.)

We retained the use of the surname 'Hood', which Egan adopted in Chapter 2. As a later evolution of the family name 'Head' or 'Hode' (according to Mr Egan), it would have more accurately appeared much later in the story. (In Chapter 2, Robin's foster father is referred to as both 'Gilbert Head' and 'Gilbert Hood'.)

We retained references to the ‘merk’ or the ‘mark’, a coin that wasn’t circulated in England until over 300 years after the events described in *Robin Hood*. In at least a few of the original ballads that are cited by the author, ‘merks’ were identified as ‘pounds’ or ‘poundes’. (At the later, actual period of its use, the merk’s value was approximately the same as a shilling. However, in this story, a single ‘gold merk’ was a sufficient offer for the purchase of a cow and nearly equal to the daily income of a successful feudal estate. But, at other times in this story, it was referred to as ‘a sorry sum’ or as little more than walking-around-money)

We also retained references to ‘Lincoln Green’ which wasn’t referred to by that name until 300 years after the time of Robin Hood.

The original anthology, published in 1840, was assembled from the forty-one issue series that was published in 1839 and 1840 by Foster and Hextall. This 1850, author re-edited, anthology of the series was one of many serializations and books that followed Egan’s initial publication date. These works included five re-serializations of his original story throughout the 1840s.

In years following, other authors published an edition of the old Robin Hood ballads, *Robin Hood and His Merrie Foresters*, *Maid Marian, the Forest Queen*, *Little John and Will Scarlett*, and *The Outlaws of Sherwood Forest*.

This serialized version of the Robin Hood legend was popular during the youth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), so it is believed to be the version that his fictional character, Tom Sawyer, found inspirational for his adventures during that same period in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. (“*I am Robin Hood, as thy caitiff carcase soon shall know*.”, etc.)

However, some sources have claimed that the story *Robin Hood and His Merrie Foresters* inspired Twain, despite the fact that it was less dramatic (making it less appealing to young males) and it was published after the Egan treatment of the story. Mr. Twain is still unavailable for clarification or comment.

Perhaps it was from both authors’ interpretations of the legends, and from the Biblical personalities and events that the original legends had contemporized.

The Egan story was written for adults, but it was so popular among young boys that it immediately inspired serializations and books that were created for the youth market in Great Britain and the United States, making this book a great-great-godfather of comic books and graphic novels.


Note:
The red lines underneath the names of some provinces signify that they were to be transferred to the King of England after the death of the Countess of Poitou, which took place in 1271.
ENGLAND
AND
FRANCE
1259.
0 20 40 60 80 100
English Miles
SCOTLAND
ENGLAND
WALES
IRELAND
NORTH SEA
IRISH SEA
ENGLISH CHANNEL
BAY OF BISCAY
SPAIN
North Channel
St. Georges Channel
Bristol Channel
Golfe du Lion
I. of Man
I. of Wight
Dublin
London
Oxford
York
Normandy
Brittany
Maine
Anjou
Poitou
Touraine
Berry
La Marche
Limousin
Perigord
Guienne
Gascony
Toulouse
Auvergne
Flanders
Artois
Vermandois
Champagne
Burgundy
Isle of France
Orleannois
Blois
Chartres
Perche
Angoumois
Saintonge
Quercy
Agenais
Alby
Foix
Bearn
Aragon
Longitude West
Longitude East

Chapter 1

With every morn their love grew tenderer,
With every eve deeper and deeper still;
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
But her full shape would all his seeing fill.
And his continual voice was pleasanter
To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;
Her lute string gave an echo of his name,
She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same.

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch,
Before the door had given her to his eyes:
And from her chamber window he would catch
Her beauty faster than the falcon flies.
And constant as her vespers, he would watch,
Because her face was turned to the same skies;
And with sick longing all the night outwear,
To hear her morning step upon the stair.

----- John Keats

Giana! My Giana! Ah! We will live
As happily as the bees that hive their sweets
Oh! My own love, divinest, best –
Thou shalt be my flower perennial,
My bud of beauty, my imperial rose,
My passion flower,
I'll love thee mightily, my queen.
Thou shalt be
My household goddess!

----- Barry Cornwall

We must beg of our readers to show their amiability to us by freely granting a privilege readily and frequently accord-ed to playwrights, which is that of supposing a lapse of years to transpire between the acts, and we ask it to take place between the books. We are quite satisfied that the *generous public* will not deny us this boon, and we are free to confess that, if they did, we should — such is the perverseness of our nature — suffer it to have no influence upon our intent.

Such being expressed and understood, we will believe that a lapse of six years has occurred, which brings us to the year eleven hundred and eighty-two, at which period our story will recommence. At the same time, we think it necessary we should refer to a few events with which were

connected most of the characters already introduced, in order that the reader may better understand the position of those whose fortunes he is about to follow. And having done that, we shall proceed with our tale.

Some short time after the burial of Margaret Hood, Allan Clare so far recovered as to relate that while riding with Christabel towards Gamwell Hall, upon the occasion with which the reader is acquainted, he suddenly rode into the midst of a troop of mounted retainers, who, recognising the lady, instantly surrounded him. And, despite his most desperate efforts, tore Christabel from his grasp, inflicted the gash on his forehead with the butt-end of a crossbow, and galloped off with their prize, leaving him senseless upon the ground.

It was ascertained, in a visit Hal paid to Nottingham, that Baron Fitz Alwine, having his daughter once more safely is his power, had proceeded to London, and thither did Allan, when sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigues of such a journey, determine to follow, and then make use of a secret which he possessed, to Fitz Alvine's detriment, unless he resigned his daughter to him.

Gamwell Hall, presenting so comfortable a home, and such earnest wishes on the part of its owner's family for his sister to remain there, decided him in carrying into effect the step he had resolved on pursuing. Accordingly, taking a tender farewell of her, a hearty and sincere one of his friends, he departed to London, to find on his arrival, that the Baron had quitted with his daughter for Normandy. Thither he followed, and there we leave him, and proceed to show what was done in attempting to reinstate Robin in his right as Earl of Huntingdon, and what success was met with.Gilbert Hood related to Sir Guy of Gamwell Hall, the history he had received from Roland, relating to Robin Hood, the truth of which Sir Guy at once acknowledged by explaining to Hood that the mother of Robin was his brother Guy of Coventry's child, and therefore Robin was his grandnephew, and not his grandson, as Hood was led to believe. Sir Guy of Coventry, Robin's grandfather, was no more, and his son was at the crusades, but Sir Guy of Gamwell said he would peril heart and hand, house and land, in Robin's service, while there was a hope of restoring him to his proper station.

These efforts had been made, and were still in progress. Recourse had been made to law, but the case was not yet decided, albeit several trials had taken place. Robin Hood's chance of legal decision in his favour was but slight. He was antagonist to a most wealthy churchman, at a time too when clerical power was working itself to an equal, if not higher position, than regal power. His principal witness, a man of no character, was dead. The sheriff, in whose hands de Beasant had placed the money, was suborned by the Abbot of Ramsay and there was but the unsupported testimony of Gilbert Hood in his favour.

It was true Sir Guy of Gamwell could take oath that his brother's daughter had disappeared from Huntingdon, where she was staying on a visit at the very time Ritson named, but his knowledge went no farther.

Thus, although there was no moral doubt that Robin Hood was Earl of Huntingdon, there was a great legal one. It was expected how the case would end legally, and the distance between Huntingdon and Gamwell, besides the want of numbers, would prevent him hoping to obtain his right by force of arms. He therefore quietly awaited the issue of an appeal to King Henry II, and resolved to act as circumstances might dictate.

Robin Hood was, at the time we are about to present him to our readers in this second book, residing with his uncle, Sir Guy. Gilbert Hood was with him, but an altered man. His mirthful cheery nature had changed to one of silence and reserve, and he walked about, the shadow in all things of what he was before the death of his wife.

Marian, the sister of Allan Clare, was also there, the beloved of all, both for her beauty and her manners. Her conduct to both her equal. and inferiors was of one uniform sweetness — a kindliness of bearing which created in the males a respect amounting even to veneration, while the females felt not the jealousy which her superior attractions excited, because she never made them feel the inferiority of their charms. Each year had more fully developed those beauties which, when she was first introduced to the acquaintance of our reader, were comparatively budding.

She had not reached her twenty-first year, nor did she appear as old, for albeit her appearance when fifteen anticipated a later age, it had quietly remained, and she seemed but to have grown lovelier, not older. There was a native grace in her manner, a disposition endearingly amiable, and a person of wondrous beauty.*


* *In the ancient ballads concerning Robin Hood, the name of Maid Marian very rarely occurs, although Percy says "In the ancient songs of Robin Hood frequent mention is made of Maid Marian", but he gives only one song in support of his assertion. The existence of these 'ancient songs' seems to have been a secret which Dr. Percy has carefully guarded, for there is no trace of them left to gladden the eyes of the most indefatigable searcher.*

In the old plays of Robin Hood, Maid Marian took a prominent part in 'The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon.' Her character is an important one, and in the masques and morris dancers on May Day, for successive centuries, Maid Marian formed one of the constituent characters.

Shakespeare mentions her, but not in very handsome terms. This, however, arises from the fact that her character in the masques and morris dances was always supported by a man whose claims upon decency and morality were probably rather slight.

Although the records respecting her are few, there can be little doubt that Robin Hood had a fair companion bearing this pleasing cognomen, living with him in his greenwood home.

It is therefore to be expected that Robin Hood, who felt a kind of love at first sight for the gentle lady, should have had that predisposition strengthened by being much in her society, until it grew into a deep and lasting passion, a love unquenchable, enduring, and unchangeable.

It was strange that he could never tell her so. Somehow, there never seemed an opportunity, and yet they were often alone, but he could not tell why it was the conversation never led towards it. Still he thought she must know it, for his language, action, tone of voice, were all different when directed to her, than when they were to others.

But if she was aware of his love, she never let the knowledge escape her — she treated all with the same sweetness of manner, the same kindness of tone in her voice when she spoke, and so, though he was satisfied she did not dislike him, yet he could not tell if she loved him. Her brother's absence seemed to have a quieting influence upon her, repressing a flow of spirits which were decidedly more natural to her than the gentle, still manner she assumed.

Much, however, as she was respected, esteemed, admired, nay, loved, there was but one aspirant for her love, and that was Robin. There was a superiority in her carriage, beauty, language — in short, everything, which appear-ed to lift her above the station of all around her. But it was so natural, and sat so perfectly easy upon her, that it was understood and treated accordingly.

Robin was not slow to discover this, and notsorry that such was the fact, or he would not have rested so quietly without popping the question directly or indirectly. As it was, he resolved to trust to future events, and whenever a circumstance transpired either for or against him, then to act with vigour in carrying his wishes into effect.

Maude Lindsay lived still at Gamwell Hall. Her father had lost his life one night by accidentally falling in the moat, while in a state of inebriation. She had, at his request, purposed returning to Nottingham Castle, previous to this unfortunate accident, but it transpired ere she could accomplish her intention. She had been offered an asylum at Gamwell, which she accepted.

Her foster brother Hal, had returned to Nottingham Castle, through the influence of Herbert Lindsay, and now fulfilled an onerous situation, which he longed to get rid of, but the bright eyes of bonny Grace May, which had been peeping out of their lids for eighteen years, about the same period as his own, still shed forth their daily splendour in Nottingham, and as they were more attractive than his situation was oppressive, they had the power to keep him where he was, particularly as they would shine on him more kindly than anyone else. And there was a pair of lips a short distance below them, oh, so sweet! There was no going away from

Nottingham while they dwelt there. Maude occasionally received a visit from him, and he came with “a kiss from Grace May” on his lips, and the last words when he quitted were, “I shall carry a kiss for you to Grace May?”

“Our friend Giles Sherborne, famed Friar Tuck, when he discovered that his love for Maude was not returned, nor likely to be, like a wise man, quaffed an extra flagon of ale, took

his auld cloak about him and
Wandered away no man knew whither

That Maude loved Robin, and that devotedly, even in their first short acquaintance, her actions denoted, but when she came to see Marian, she wondered not at Robin’s love for her and with the shrewd perception, not exactly of a jealous woman, but of one similarly influenced, she saw that if the love was not returned — there was a decided tendency that way — with great probability that it would ultimately occur. She therefore buried her love in her own bosom, and tried to appear cheerful, with a painful heavy load in her breast — it was the deepest and bitterest disappointment she had ever experienced, when she saw that she must love without hope.

But she tried to meet it the best way she could, to hide the grief in her young heart, and dress her face into smiles for the sake of those who were kind to her. However, her efforts could not carry her far, nor could make her the merry lighthearted thing she had once been. But whatever change took place in her manner and appearance, it was attributed to her father’s loss, rather than to the right cause.

Among those around her who were kind to her, there was one who was the kindest of the kind, who sought by every act and deed to make her as happy and comfortable as lay in his power, and that was Will Scarlet.

Once a week, regularly, he made a declaration of love to her, invariably to meet with a kind denial. But he, nothing daunted, still went on loving with all his might, and his transports before the week was out would reach such a height that a proposal was sure to be the consequence. He had none of that delicacy which kept Robin from making scarcely an indication of attachment — he could not see the *fun* of it; and so he proceeded in his affair, leaving nothing undone which might advocate his cause, and giving Maude no opportunity of forgetting she had a lover.

Maude was a girl after his own heart — she had just the face and figure to attract his fancy, and the voice and manner to keep it when attracted. Maude to him was the loadstone of life, the only thing which he concluded a man ought to live for. Maude was everything, nothing could be done

unless he consulted Maude. He wore the colours she preferred, he called his dogs after her, and his favourite weapons were distinguished by her name. There was his '*Maude yew bow*,' his '*Maude spear*,' and '*Maude arrows*'; and he tried all his persuasive powers to coax from Hal of the Keep his sweet little nag *Flying Maude*, but that was a fruitless task — he met with a flat denial. But nothing daunted, he procured one as thoroughbred as he could get, and named it '*the incomparable Maude*.' Everyone in, about, or near Gamwell knew the name of Maude — it was forever on his lips.

If he had a favourite of any description, animate or inanimate, *'Maude*' became its name immediately. She was his household goddess, whom, if he worshipped in the roughest fashion, yet it was with the most earnest and sincere devotion, and as such it had its influence on her.

We seldom feel a dislike for those who love us, and when we find a heart really devoted, we return its affection more or less, as circumstances may compel us. But when such an event occurs after we have given our love to one from whom there is no hope of return, we naturally turn to the one who does love us, and seek in its sympathy a relief for our own disappointment. If we cannot return the love, we can the kindness; and it rests with us, that they who love shall not find we but make them a vehicle to supply our want of sympathy.

Every day brought forth some little act of Will's to Maude, which could not fail to excite in her a kindness towards him, and if they were not done with that delicacy which sensitive minds deem essential, it was only the honest roughness of his nature which understood it not, but they were not the less to be appreciated. Maude knew this — and what female does not instantly understand a kindness which springs from love? — and in her turn tried to please him, by performing a thousand little things which she knew would gratify him.

But the effects of her good nature was to throw him into ecstacies, vow eternal love for her, and wind up by asking her if she loved him yet, and if she did not, if she thought she ever could? This question she had tact enough always to evade without giving him a decided refusal, and yet at the same time not leading him to believe she even indirectly loved him. She did not do this with the idea of keeping him as a lover, for on that ground she would have given him a decided refusal for now and forever, but she saw he was enthusiastically attached to her, and she feared an utter denial might have an influence on his impetuous nature, productive of effects hurtful to himself and others. He was sanguine to the very *echo which applauds again* and so fancied, if denied today, she would consent tomorrow.

An eventual refusal never crossed his imagination. He had asked her about three hundred times if she loved him yet, and told her about twice as many more that he doted on her. And although he had been gently put off three hundred times, he was quite ready to put the question three hundred times more, without thinking there had been any lost time.

Maude's heart did not, however, require such prolonged siege. She was of a warm, affectionate nature, and this was all in Will's favour. The chances were, therefore, that some fine morning, when Will popped the question for the fourth or fifth hundred time, she would hold out her little hand and give herself away with it. There was nothing to prevent it, and when Maude came to look at his personal qualifications, there was but little unfavourable to be seen.

He was tall and well formed, his features were regular, but his complexion was so florid, accompanied by a profusion of hair — really very red — as to obtain for him the nickname of Will Scarlet, but it nevertheless was luxuriant in curls, and hung down on his shoulders with a grace to be admired — if it had been any other colour —

As he grew older, it was expected to grow darker, but it belied expectation, and, if possible, grew redder. Will's hair would not change and as mustachioes, beard, and whiskers began to appear, he seemed almost to be a second edition of William Rufus, *the red king*, so named from his visage and hair. But to counteract in some degree the effects of this personal disqualification, Will had large blue eyes, bearing a most pleasing expression, added to which was a smile continually illumining the features, and giving them a good-humored appearance, which, when under the influence of any excitement, and that was frequently the case with him, considerably diminished the ruddiness of his aspect.

Maude, albeit she had given her heart, saw plainly there was little prospect that her hand would be given to her heart's choice, and being in the constant receipt of kindness from the Gamwells, most particularly from Will, she, in her desire to do all in her power to merit it and return it, began to consider Will with a feeling very like affection. She had a kind heart, and could not bear to give him pain, but she had really declined his offer so many times that, though now somewhat disposed to accept it, she did not like; she did not know, in truth, how to manage it, and it now became a matter of more difficulty. From a feeling of delicacy, which may be understood and not expressed — to consent, than it had been hitherto to refuse.

This was the state of affairs in the year eleven hundred and eighty-two, precisely six years subsequent to the events related in the first book of this work. The reader being now, we hope, perfectly satisfied as to the disposition of the characters, we proceed to open the campaign.

It was on a beautiful night in the very earliest part of June, when the May moon was at the full, when every breathing thing was hushed into stillness, if not into sleep — when the warm air was undisturbed by even a faint breeze, the leaves upon the trees, the flowers among the grass, were motionless –

And light and sound ebbed from the earth

It was upon this night that an expedition had been planned by Gilbert Hood, who had never let his hopes of revenge slumber, to intercept a body of Baron Fitz Alwine's men returning from abroad with their lord, attack them, and as he entertained no doubt of overpowering them, change garments, ride on to Nottingham Castle, gain access, and then burn it to the ground. Their intelligence of the movements of the Baron and his party had been obtained through Hal of the Keep, who had mentioned the Baron's return, quite unconscious of the use which would be made of his information. ***Robin Hood and Little John*** had both sworn to aid him in his revenge, and now they were called upon to fulfill their promise. They were ready to redeem it to the fullest extent.

Robin deeming it almost as incumbent on himself to pursue this design, conceiving that he was almost as much injured — as much a sufferer as Gilbert Hood — and when a chance offered itself of repaying in the same coin the injury he had endured, he grasped at it with a readiness which showed how deeply he felt the loss of the only mother he had known.

Little John, who never went from his word in anything, who had become strongly attached to Robin for the kindness, the utter absence of selfishness his nature exhibited, as well as for the extraordinary superiority of his acquirements in a forester's arts, was as ready, nay, as eager, as either Gilbert or Robin to retaliate upon the Baron the mischief he had occasioned. He therefore gathered among the vassals a goodly number of followers, well-armed, aided by the seven sons of Sir Guy — Will Scarlet decidedly objecting to be left behind — and thus a band was formed of men resolutely bent upon carrying their point.

Gilbert Hood had determined to slay Baron Fitz Alwine if he came across his path, while Robin, knowing this intention, had resolved it should be otherwise. He hoped to get 'old *Boreas*' [*Greek god of wind and winter*] in his power, and make him render some account of Allan Clare, of whom nought had been heard for four years preceding, a circumstance which was having a wasting influence upon Marian. And Robin, feeling satisfied that Fitz Alwine must have some knowledge of Allan, who had avowedly followed him, expected to be able to gain such intelligence of him as to set the mind of Marian at rest, and thus do her one of the best services her situation required.

It was with feelings of this nature, that when the men were marshalled and nearly ready for departure, he sought an anteroom adjoining her chamber, with the hope of meeting her, and telling her he had some chance of gaining tidings of her brother. With this intent he sprang lightly up the stairs, and entered the chamber. He saw Marian standing by an open window, gazing upon the moon and speaking unconsciously aloud. She had not heard him enter, and he felt awkwardly situated. He did not like to break upon her soliloquy abruptly nor to retreat, nor to listen to what she was saying.

While agitated by these emotions, she continued, and so the question was settled, for he gradually became absorbed in what she said, and stood, cap-in-hand, gazing passionately upon her who seemed, in the pale moonlight, to be a visitant from Heaven rather than a being of earth.

“And what to me,” she uttered in a low sad tone, “is all this beauty, if only from its presence I can draw addition to my grief? It is wrong to question the dispositions of Him who made us, and dispenses the circumstances which made for us good or evil, yet it seemed strange, beyond my understanding of justice, why I should be made thus the sport of fortune – I, who have ever bowed meekly to His will, who have worshiped and fulfilled the duties His law imposed on me, cheerfully, devotedly. Who never wronged a fellow being in aught, who have ever sought to make in all things those around me happy.”

“Why should this be? Holy Mother! Do thou lend me thy blessed aid, and strengthen me to bear, unrepiningly, a lot which seemed harsh to me, which I feel is wasting me away daily, hourly.”

“From a child, my portion has been sad to the dregs of sadness. Bereaved of parents, the dearest, kindest on earth – ever honoured and revered be their memory – I have had none to look up to, to cling unto but Allan, my dear brother, who in all things sought to supply their place to me. Oh! Allan, why have you left me? While you were by my side I could draw some consolation, some hope of future joy, if it had been only in the contemplation of thy anticipated happiness — but that hope is denied me. Thou, too, art gone from me, perhaps never to return, and I am, indeed, now alone, even unto bitterest loneliness. All around me are kind to a degree which is acutely painful, for I have no means of returning it, or doing aught which can make my situation less dependent on their bounty – and, added to this, comes the painful certainty that my heart is another’s. Heaven help me! To whom shall I turn for consolation, for guidance!” and she sobbed aloud as she concluded the sentence.

Robin’s heart leaped within him, as he heard her say her heart was another’s and then he awoke to the situation in which he stood, as an

eaves dropper. The blood rushed to his brow, and he made her aware of his presence on the instant, by saying to her in a low tone, “Marian, may I crave a few words with you?”

She started, and slightly screamed. On finding it was Robin, she somewhat recovered, bowed her head, but spoke not. She could not – her heart was too full. “I have your pardon to request,” proceeded he, addressing her by her name, fulfilling a request she had made that all should call her thus, rather than they should think her birth or previous state above theirs. Robin, with the rest, called her Marian, and it was more grateful to him to be enabled to do so, because it made them more familiar, would assist to make them more on a footing as lovers whenever an opportunity might arrive to declare his passion. “I have your pardon to request for being an eaves dropper,” he continued. “I know not how to excuse myself, but by a dislike to interrupt you, and certainly no desire to be guilty of a meanness.”

“I then uttered my thoughts aloud, and you overheard them?” faintly demanded Marian, blushing.

“’Twas even so, Marian – but be not angry with me, I had no thought to do anything to pain or displease you, the Virgin be my judge!” said Robin earnestly. “I came but to speak a word with you ere I depart on an affair of some importance, and if I spoke not upon my entrance, it was because the sound of your voice chained me to the spot. You will not be angry with me, or think me base and pitiful, for having thus robbed you of a few sad thoughts?”

“I am not displeased with thee, Robin,” said she, half smiling; “I should rather chide my own thoughtlessness, for giving utterance to words which should have never been spoken.”

“You will not, I trust, feel offended if I refer to those words. You speak of being alone in the world, of being without friends, save those allied by the common ties of humanity. I, who am an orphan – although I have not felt the loss of parents so deeply as you must have done – yet can feel keenly your situation, and I presume upon the little service I was able to show your brother the first two days we were known to each other, to offer to supply his place, now he is away, in all things in which a brother’s presence or counsel is needed. Do not deny me this, and you shall find hereafter you have not misplaced confidence in one who would gladly risk limb and life in aught that would render you a good.”

“You are very kind,” murmured Marian.

“Nay,” he replied, “I would be so – I seek to be so – I would have you think I strive to be so, for indeed there exists not one I would so earnestly

endeavor to make happy as yourself. Your grief becomes mine, your joy equally so, and no path which would lead to thy bliss should be left untrodden by me. You never had one to sympathize with you. Confide in me – I pray, I intreat you. Think not I offer unreflectingly, or without a sincere desire that you will do so, and find in me a friend as a friend should be, in the unpolluted sense of the word. Look you, Marian, I will confess the truth – I will honestly acknowledge I am moved to this by the love I bear you."

"I do, dear Marian, passionately, devotedly, adore you – have loved you with an increasing affection from the first hour we met. I do not ask you to return it, nor would I have given utterance to this, for the disclosure might pain you, but that I would show you how earnest, how devoted a friend I would be. Believe me, I would not presume upon that privilege, for loving you as I do, thy happiness, thy free and unconstrained wish would be my constant object to effect.'

"I will not deny I heard thee say thy heart was another's. I ask not whose, and shall ever respect thy choice, nor seek by any act, covertly or directly, to transfer thy affection from him on whom it is bestowed, to another, even though that other be myself – thou dost hear me, Marian? And dost believe me, I trust. Do not deny me. I will be thy friend and brother, if thou will it so – a dear and most affectionate brother in all things. Thou hast known me six long years; thou mayst judge of me by my acts. I will not deceive thee. Should I, may the Holy Virgin inflict her bitterest punishment on me here and hereafter! You will I shall be thy friend, Marian, wilt thou not? I await thy reply."

Marian murmured some words inaudibly, but turned away her head.

"You are angry with me – are displeased – I have done wrong!" uttered Robin, hastily. Marian extended her hand to him, and turned her face and eyes upon him, they were suffused with tears. He took her hand, and fancied he felt a gentle pressure upon his as he received it. She remained silent for a moment, and then said –

"Robin, I do hear you, and with feelings I have no words to describe. I have known you for some years, nor have known during that time one act of thine which should prevent my gladly acknowledging thee as a dearly-prized friend. In the absence of my brother, you have been a brother to me, and it is with a pride and gratification, for which I am most thankful, that I have witnessed thy performance of every-thing, important or trivial, which might render my residence here a pleasure to myself and less burthensome to the kind-hearted beings in this family. For this I am most grateful, and should regret most deeply if you thought otherwise. If I said I felt alone, it was that I have none near me who should be my guide, to whom I could look up for counsel and for direction."

“Everyone around me have their relatives – even you have your foster father. I have none, and it was that painful knowledge which made me utter those words. And now, Robin, I do require the aid of thy kind consideration. You heard me say my heart was another’s, and accompanied it by a generous – most generous sacrifice of feeling. I cannot suffer myself to be outdone in generosity even by you, Robin”.

“Do not think lightly of me, if, in return for all your kindness, I should feel compelled – feel it a duty, to set aside a maiden’s bashfulness, and own that thy kind thoughts of me are equaled by mine for thee – that – that my heart is – is thine, Robin. Why should I blush to acknowledge it? I love you even as you love me, and though, perhaps, I should not confess it so boldly, yet I esteem the truth that should be, even as dear friends, between us, so well, that my heart will not suffer me to be silent.”

There are times when we have all felt that the commonest language has borne a powerful influence over us, and perhaps were we to trace it on paper, would read marvelously dull and spiritless. But it is not the words which make the interest, it is the tone, the accompaniments of eyes and hands, and the time, which make words, comparatively simple, have a passionate effect. Thus was it, in the foregoing colloquy. It was not what was said but what was conveyed, that produced upon their young hearts an effect like pouring oil upon fire. They were warmly, devotedly attached to each other, had been for some years, but until now each kept the secret in their own breast. Robin’s admiration, and eventually love, had been created by the beauty of her form and strengthened by the sweetness of her demeanor and general disposition.

While the constant kindness of Robin to Marian, aided by no mean personal qualifica-tions, had produced a like result in her. This feeling on both sides had gradually increased, until an opportunity occurring, a mutual avowal was the consequence. We will not repeat what words on this subject followed those already detailed, for they cannot be invested with the interest, the earnestness, and devotion with which they were given. But it was a sweet sight to see the two fond hearts kneeling down in the bright moonlight – their faces upturned to the clear blue heaven, which glittered with pale stars, like a diamonded robe – vowing to love each other truly and devotedly, and never change in bright or adverse circumstances, while a pulse continued to beat in their glowing hearts.

Chapter 2

Perhaps I was void of all thought:
Perhaps it was plain to foresee,
That a nymph so complete would be sought
By a swain more engaging than me.
Ah! love every hope can inspire,
It banishes wisdom the while;
And the lip of the nymph we admire,
Seems forever adorned with a smile.

----- Shenstone

As the sea tide's opposing motion,
In azure column proudly gleaming,
Beats back the current many a rood,
In curling foam and mingling flood;
While eddying whirl, and breaking wave,
Roused by the blast of winter, rave;
Through sparkling spray, in thundering clash,
The lightnings of the waters flash
In awful whiteness o'er the shore,
That shines and shakes beneath the roar,
Thus, as the stream and ocean greet,
With waves that madden as they meet –
Thus join the bands!

----- Byron

Hist, Maude! – Maude Lindsay, hist! cried a voice, as that young lady was wandering pensively through a grove of fruit trees, looking at the moon, and wondering why the course of true love never did run smooth. That such was a disagreeable fact she had had painful experience. But the wherefore and because was a tristful mystery. It was an enigma insoluble by her, still she could not help instituting a mental inquiry, in the depths of which she was plunged, when the voice before mentioned broke on her ear.

"Hist, Maude, hist!" it repeated in tones which left her little difficulty in recognizing who was the owner, and somehow or other she was not displeased at the interruption of her meditations, so she stayed her walk, and awaited the arrival of Will Scarlet – for he it was who was the intruder.

"I am so glad I have found you, Maude, for I want to speak to you," cried he as he reached her side. "I have been looking everywhere for you, and at length have found you."

“I am glad you have, if it will please you,” replied Maude.

“Of course it will,” returned he. “What a lovely night it is, Maude!”

“Most beautiful,” was the reply. “But is that what you have sought me for? Is that what you had to say?”

“Oh, Lord, no!” he cried laughingly; “But this is the night for a stroll – just the night to undertake anything in the woods, eh, Maude?”

“Most like. Are you then going in the woods, deer hunting?”

“Not deer hunting, but – oh, I forgot, I was not to tell – however, I am going on an expedition in which I may get a broken – oh, I forgot – nothing – but I came to say good bye, dear Maude!”

“It is nothing dangerous you are about attempting, I hope – is it?”

“Oh, Lord, no! Not while I have a good bow, a stout staff, a strong – oh, I forgot, I mustn’t say that – it’s nothing, Maude!”

“Then why must you not speak of it?”

“Oh! Of course not. Because if it was known, or to get to the ears of any one of the soldiers, you know, it might – oh, I forgot – no, no, it’s only a frolic, and I am going out with ***Robin Hood and Little John***, that’s all. So before I went I came to say farewell, dear Maude, in case we should never meet – oh, I forgot! No, I mean in case, no, that is, I never like to go anywhere without bidding you good bye, do I?”

“I cannot say you do.”

“And why do I do it?”

“It is not for me to say. I don’t know that I can say it.”

“Oh! Can’t you? Why, you know, Maude, it is because I love you better than all the world beside, father, mother, and all. I could go out for weeks and never say a word to the old people – except my mother – and I can’t go away from you for a few hours, but I must bid you good bye, and yet you don’t love me, do you? Ah! But I hope you will someday – I can wait. Don’t put yourself out of the way, or hurry yourself to do it, dear Maude, for I would not have anything disturb you. Only some day you may say to yourself, ‘Well, I love Will a little bit now,’ and then bye-and-bye, you will love me a little bit more, and so on until you love me as much as I do you – oh, no – poh! That’s impossible, but you may be able to love me a good deal, and then you can say to me, ‘Will, I think I love you now,’ and I should say, ha! aha, ha, ha, ha! – I don’t know what I should say, I should leap over the moon. Oh, Maude! Only try, just begin, say that you love me

a little bit now, only a little bit. Perhaps tomorrow you will love me a great deal, and next day you can perhaps tell me so. What do you say, Maude?"

"And you really love me, Will?"

"How can I prove it, Maude? Only tell me how, and I'll show you that I do love you, heart, body, and soul. I'll fight for you, die for you, and happy to get the chance of doing it!"

"I believe you love me."

"I believe you, I do."

"But supposing I love another!"

This was a circumstance which never struck Will as being possible – or rather we should say it never struck him at all, at least until Maude made the supposition, and then it did, like a thunderbolt. He was perfectly stunned. His heart throbbed violently, and putting his fist over it as if to repress its violent pulsation, he said in a faint voice –

"But you don't?"

"Listen to me, Will," said Maude gravely. "I do sincerely credit the truth of your attachment to me, and feel flattered and honored by it."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Will.

"Let me proceed!" she exclaimed, raising her hand. "I do honestly believe you love me, and wish I could return it with all the sincerity it deserves; but Will –"

"Don't say you can't Maude – don't say that," Again interrupted Will. "I cannot bear it – I could not bear to hear you say it!"

"Do not interrupt me, hear all I have to say, and then you shall say whatever you may think right or proper. I know what it is to love without a hope of return. I know its bitter, sickening hopelessness, and would not let you suffer one pang of it, were it in my power to prevent it – I say this, meaning truly and sincerely. But ere I saw you, I gave away my heart to one who could not, cannot, will not return it"

"He shall, Maude, if you wish it!" burst forth Will, dashing a tear from his eye. "He shall, by the Mass! Or I'll beat him to a jelly with a quarter staff, and then he shall, for I'll beat him till he loves you with all his might and main."

"Nay, Will, 'tis not required – I will not have compulsory love. Besides, he I speak of deserves not such proceedings. Before we met he loved

another – he did not keep it secret. He behaved in the kindest, most affectionate, most honorable manner to me: but he loves another, and will continue to do so while life dwell in him."

"I therefore look not for his love, hope not for it – expect not. At the same time, Will, I must be a stock – a heartless creature, if I could be insensible to your continued kindnesses. They have wrought strongly upon me, and if you will accept a heart divided, such as it is, it shall be thine."

"Look you, Maude," returned Will, in a low, thick voice, "I was foolish enough to fancy that if you didn't love me, you didn't love anyone else. That I am grieved to find it otherwise, you may believe, and should be more so if I thought I had hurt your feelings in producing an acknowledgment of it. I also know what the kindness of your disposition would lead you both to say and do, but shame on me were I to take advantage of it."

"No, Maude, I scorn it. If I had known this, I would not have troubled you as I have done. But you will forgive me, for I knew it not. I don't say I am not cut to the heart by what I have heard, but I will say, if you can bear that feeling as you have done – so patiently, so gently, so uncomplainingly, it would be worse than villainous of me to make an outcry. Although you offer me your heart, yet I can well see the motive which impels you to do so, and a pestilence on me! If I wrong you by accepting it, when I can see you would do it with pain and a self-sacrifice, rather than you should think I suffered on your account."

Maude was about to explain that he mistook her in supposing her consent was extorted from her by such a supposition, and to give him a more flattering view of the offer of her heart, when a voice, which sounded loudly in the air, cried –

"Will Scarlet! Will Scarlet! Hillioh hoh!"

"I am called, Maude. Good bye, God bless you! May you be as happy as I can wish you. If we should not meet again, think sometimes kindly of poor Will Scarlet." So saying, he pressed her hand passionately to his lips, waved his hand, dashed amid the trees, and was out of sight in a moment. Maude felt vexed that he should have gone away laboring under such a mistake, and fully determined that tomorrow should explain it all.

Tomorrow – ah!

Assembled beneath the broad boughs of an oak tree were twenty stout vassals, armed with spears, swords, and bows and arrows. A short distance from them, in a little circle, stood six of the Gamwells, Little John, and Gilbert Hood.

“Where can Robin be loitering?” exclaimed Gilbert, impatiently. “It is unlike him to be a laggard where his presence is needed.”

“Nay, you are too impatient,” returned Little John; “I warrant me there is cause for his stay. And besides, there is still a short time for grace, – he is not the only loiterer, too — here is young Will absent yet.”

“He can be done without,” returned Hood, hastily; “If he comes not at all, it matters not, but Robin is sworn to his duty, and should be foremost in it.”

“He will, in its execution,” said Little John.

“I believe so,” replied Hood.

“I know so,” replied Little John. “Hark a footstep! ‘Tis Robin’s – two – Will and he are together.”

Robin and Will evidenced the truth of his words, by appearing at that moment.

“How now, Robin. You lag, boy. We have waited for you some time,” cried Gilbert.

“Have you so?” returned he. “I am sorry for that, but we will make it up in the expedition. I will not be backward, when the time arrives for forwardness.”

“I said so but now,” said Little John.

“Ha” replied Robin, “Little John, you are always my friend, back and edge, foot to branch, nock to nock. I thank you for it, worthy John, and when the opportunity occurs, will repay it to the best of my ability.”

Little John laughed. “You make a mountain of a molehill,” he said. “You overrate my liking for you.”

“Let us on at once,” interrupted Gilbert Hood. “Little John, your friends know our errand.”

“Aye, and will do your bidding manfully.”

“We may depend upon them?”

“As upon myself.”

“Enough! We will proceed. Our enemy come through Mansfield, on their way to Nottingham. They will proceed along the roadway, and, at a post I will point out, we can easily intercept and make them prisoners, were there treble our number. You know the rest?”

“I do,” replied Little John; “Now, lads – now, Saxon churls – hounds that ye be, see if you can’t find a hold for your fangs in these Norman wolves. On! Lads – on! We must have no shirking or shrinking. If we shew the broad of our backs to aught, it must be to the green grass, and then our faces must front the sky. On, lads!”

The men gave a shout and obeyed, Little John taking the lead, while Gilbert and the six Gamwells followed. Robin, with Will Scarlet, brought up the rear.

“How is it, Will,” said Robin, “you look dull – there’s a shade upon the bonnie Will Scarlet! What’s come to thee, lad – do you not like your trip?”

“That’s a strange question to ask of me,” replied Will, rousing himself from the abstraction into which he had fallen. “Does a hound like following a deer – a hawk its prey? Why do you ask me if I like my trip?”

“Oh! Merely because you, who always throw life and spirit into the party which you join – the most light-hearted, boisterous, and merry being among them – should now draw your bonnet over your eyes, drop your hands to your legs, and lag afoot without a word. ‘Tis so unnatural to thee, Will, I can’t but ask, what ails thee? Something, I am sure, hath damped thee mightily.”

“Nay ‘tis naught; you shall find me first in the fray and last to leave it this night, Robin.”

“So you ever were, Will, where danger existed. But it was not with such a face and air as you wear now. I am satisfied something has occurred to deaden your spirits. Let me but know if I can serve you in aught which may restore you to yourself. Espouse your quarrel, if quarrel it be, or do anything which may again make you bonnie, frolicsome Will Scarlet. I’ll do it, spite of the Evil one!”

“Yet, Will, think not I would pry into your secrets. If you would not wish to speak the cause of your dullness, do not let thy friendliness for me, or my seeming importunities draw it from thee. I shall not think it unlike a friend of thee, for do I not know, Will, that where a friend’s aid was warmly needed, thou would’st come to me and now I but seek to know the cause of thy sadness, in hopes that I might advise or suggest something to restore to thee thy peace of mind.”

“’Tis not so much a secret, Robin, that I should deny thee the knowledge of it, nor isn’t so much that I should hang my head thus. For if I had troubled my head to think about the matter, I might have expected the upshot. Still I have a strange feeling upon me, which makes me dislike mentioning the matter even to you.”

“Then do not,” interrupted Robin, warmly but kindly.

“Nay,” continued Will, “It is but right you should know it, and I will conquer the weakness which would induce me to keep it from thee. Yet it so far masters me as to make me request of thee that none else should know what I am to tell you.”

“Thou need’st not fear that from me. Even now, if one thought lurks in thy mind that at a future time you may regret having disclosed that which you are now on the eve of putting in my possession, I would sincerely wish thee to take the benefit of it, and say nothing of this matter to me.”

“No, Robin, I had determined to tell thee, and therefore there is no likelihood of my repenting at any future time that I had made thee acquainted with it. Besides, can I forget, Robin, we were little children together? And long ere we knew we were relatives, we were fast friends. When did we ever quarrel Rob? Never.”

“If one bigger than myself struck me, did you not always beat him for me? Did we not always fight side by side and back to back? Did we not together overtop every lad in the village in all sports? Who was there among them could swim, hunt, fish, play at staff, or draw a shaft with truer aim than thou? And was I not next to thee? And did we not go together, hand in hand, heart to heart, like dear brothers? Hang it! I never loved my brothers, any of ‘em, half like to thee. And when we *made love* [‘*Flirted with*’] to the little village girls, would they not come to thou and I, one and all, when we wooed them to a dance round the Maypole or on Sundays in the dale – or to walk in the quiet green lanes – or in the moaning old wood by moonlight and in all these times, in all these things, when were the thoughts of each hidden from the other? And why should I now keep from thee, my old friend, that which in other times I should have told to thee, and felt a duty performed when I had done so?”

“Thou hast spoken truth, Will,” said Robin, affected by what Will had uttered, “We were more than brothers. Oh! Those happy, happy hours! Shall I ever meet a time of such unmixed, griefless pleasure again? Never, never!”

“You may, Robin, most like will. But I never shall,” continued Will, mournfully. “You know I have loved Maude Lindsay, how I – I haven’t a word strong enough to express how much I loved her, and she I find –”

“Well?” cried Robin, impatiently, a strange misgiving crossing his mind, as Will hesitated.

“I told her tonight, just as you called me, that I loved her very dearly, and I asked her if she would not try and love me some day. But she told me she loved another before she saw me, and so all my hopes are dashed to the ground. My disappointment is more than I can express.”

“Did she tell you who it was she loved first?” asked Robin, thoughtfully.

“No,” replied Will, “nor did I ask her. But she told me he did not love her. I, thinking him a stone, a brute, said I would make him, if I beat him to it. But it seems that they had all been playing at cross purposes, for she said he loved another before he saw her, but he behaved very kind, and very handsomely, and all that. She said something about my having done so to her too, and for that, if I would accept her hand, she would give it me. Now, Robin, I would scorn myself forever if I had taken advantage of her offer, and I told her as much, because I could see she did it to repay me for some good nature I had shown her – as if, loving her, I should not have done all in my power to please and make her happy. Just as I had a told her this, you called me, and so I bid her a hasty goodbye, and came away at once.”

“Ever since I left her, I have had such a lump in my throat, such weight in my chest, that I have felt as I can’t describe it – but I have never felt so before, until tonight, and I am sure I never shall feel again as I have done.”

“Come, come, cheer up, Will. It is not so bad as you think, for I know Maude’s disposition better than you do, because I can judge it better, not loving her –”

“Not loving her, but somebody else,” interrupted Will, with something approaching a smile.

“Be it so,” replied Robin, returning the smile. “Take my word that Maude is a kind, warm-hearted, affectionate little thing, and worthy of all your love, were it thrice as much as you bear her.”

“I am sure of that,” cried Will, fervently.

“Very well. Now I am sure that Maude, if she has met with one disappointment, deep as it may have been, and I can’t think that it is so deep as she has led you to believe — I am satisfied, I say, that next to her first love, she loves you.”

“No – do you think so, eh?” exclaimed Will, grasping with avidity at anything which afforded him a little hope.

“I do. Only just oblige me by letting me say what I have to utter without so many interruptions. I repeat she is very much attached to you; and it was an honesty, a brightness of feeling which you ought most highly, most proudly, to appreciate, that induced her, when she offered her hand to you, not to hide from you that she had loved another before you. You misunderstood her, and thought she was going to sacrifice her happiness by wedding you, at a time when she was pining after another in secret wretchedness, as a return for your kindness.”

“Now I know Maude better. When she weds you, and I hope that will be soon, she will do all in her power to forget her first love, and cling to you in a manner in which you will perceive no more difference than if she

loved you from the first, and nobody else before you; so make your mind easy, and the first thing tomorrow morning, take the earliest opportunity of talking the matter over with her, and you will find it is as I have said."

"I hope it may be, and I think it will be, for I don't know how it is, but you seem to know all these things better than any of us – and are always right. Ah! Robin, I shall never forgive myself having been the cause of Marian's brother losing the Lady Christobel, his being nearly killed, and then wandering after her unto foreign lands, until we don't know where he is, what has become of him, or whether he is alive or dead. If he had taken your advice, and cut across the forest, he would not have fallen in with Fitz Alwine's bloodhounds, and so lost all but life."

"It was done for the best, and you don't know but there may have been some of the troop in the direction I advised him to take, for they were dispersed in all directions. Therefore it is of no use to think of that. But come, this lagging will not do, we shall have Gilbert Hood calling for us in round terms. We are a quarter of a mile in the rear, and that does not look like good foresters, my bonnie Will."

"Very good, it does not. Come, let us try our speed: you shall give me a start of fifty paces, and we will see who reaches our friends first."

"Agreed," answered Robin; "Albeit, I don't think I can give you fifty paces and win. However, we'll try it."

No sooner said than done, away started the young men, Will keeping the lead, though Robin kept drawing on him until they were reduced to ten, then they became five, ultimately they were shoulder to shoulder; Will redoubled his exertions to again obtain the lead, but in vain. They had now arrived within a short distance of their friends, who, hearing their approaching footsteps, and not understanding the cause of their rapidity, stayed their progress, and awaited their coming in some anxiety. When they were within a hundred paces of the goal, Robin shouted out to his companion –

"Goodbye, Will," darted past him, and won by about fifty paces.

"How now, lads!" exclaim Gilbert, "What means this flying, are the hawks abroad? Speak."

"Only a race," said Robin, as well as his want of breath would permit him.

"Pshaw!" returned Gilbert, "Boys still! This is no time for idle play, Robin. The occasion should produce a different bearing than that of a thoughtless boy – let us have no more of it."

"Nay, never check the lad's humor," said Little John. "When there is need of men's bearing and actions, they will forget they are boys, as you have found they can. And to my mind, 'tis a pity to meddle with, or interrupt the light-hearted humor of free-spirited youths while they may enjoy it. For the time when it must cease creeps on so fast, there is little cause to stay it while it is with them."

“You are right, John,” returned Gilbert Hood, with much sadness in his tone; “You are right, and it was but a few years since I loved to see the boys merry, mirthful, and happy. But since my poor Maggie has been taken from me, I have felt as if all lightness of manner, all mirth, was a disrespect to her memory. I know it is wrong to feel thus, but I cannot help it. I have tried hard to shake it off, but in vain.”

“Often when in Gamwell Hall, good Sir Guy would make the old Hall shake with his festivity and rich humor, have I quitted it and wandered alone in the long wintry nights through the old leafless forest — it was more congenial to my thoughts. I have sought the spot where she was murdered, and I made miserable. I have knelt me down and repeated my oath to have revenge while I have life to accomplish it, and I will. I hope this night to pay off a moiety of the debt.”

“I hope so too” returned Little John; “It sha’n’t be for want of stout aid if you do not.” After this short colloquy, they proceeded in silence until they reached a favorable point of the thicket, in which they enscounced themselves, each taking a part favorable to their intended plan of attack. Ample directions were given to their companions both by Little John and Gilbert, and now they quietly awaited the coming of their expected foes. The bustle of their hiding had subsided a short time, and their whispers had ceased, leaving no sound in the air but that produced by the wind among the leaves, as if they were chanting a low and mournful song to the moon, who was spreading her sweet beams over them like unto a silver veil.

There was occasionally the running cadence from the throat of a bird, who, waking up, mistook for day the broad moonlight penetrating every unsheltered nook. Bye-and-bye the stillness was broken by footsteps, but they were very faint, indeed, scarcely perceptible. Robin was the first to announce them, and every man looked to his weapons. Then a slight breeze rustling the leaves, it was declared an illusion, but Robin said he heard them plain enough, and if they but waited patiently, they would find him correct. They did so, and in a short time the dullest ear knew that some person was approaching.

“Whoever it is,” said Robin, “he is alone, and on a nag’s back – I should say one of the forest breed, by the short quick step.”

“Right,” muttered Little John; “the tread of a town-bred steed is as different from one of our forest colts as a shaft from a quarter staff. He who comes, I’ll be bold to say, is less of foe than friend.”

The unconscious cause of this conversation came riding on, evidently in good spirits, for he was singing, most lustily, a ballad peculiar to the time, but probably written by and upon himself, for he used the first person all through, thus –

Who am I? what am I? can’st tell me that, God wot?

A yeoman bold and right merry;

A stout limb! a bright eye! and good lungs. Have I not?
And skin as brown as a berry?
When an hungered I eat;when athirst, then I drink,
If old wine, till ready to burst;
If I'm tired I sleep; if not, not a wink;
I'm clerk of Copmanhurst.
Skies are blue, water's white,
But what is the hue of wine?
Why of the glittering ruby,
A young girl's blush,or the crimson flush on this nose of mine!
Which bespeaks me no temperate booby.
Here's a staff and long shafts,
And what else would you know?
A voice which is none of the worst;
I'm a friar with missal; a yeoman with a bow
And I'm clerk of Copmanhurst.

"A plague on thee for a beast of no taste," cried the singer to his nag, when his ditty had ended. "Couldst thou not, when I warbled a strain, which I will go so far as to say was done with most exquisite skill – couldst thou not, I say, have pricked up thine ears and listened with a becoming gravity, without taking all sides of the path at once, never keeping to one, but waddling here and there, and lifting up thy voice with mine, to the utter destruction of all harmony. For dost thou not know, and if thou hadst been bred to the church thou wouldst, that a bass voice will not agree with a very shrill scream, which truth leads me to tell thee is the quality of thy voice; and though so high, it is exceedingly base, and base in thee to thrust it in one's ears, when it is most harsh and disagreeable. But thou art a female, and like unto thy sex exceedingly."

"Thou art wayward and wilful, always desiring change. When I wish one side, thou wilt take the other, thou wilt do what thou should not do, and not do what thou should do. Thou knowest I love thee, hussy, and thou wouldst, I have no doubt, be glad to change me for a new lover–I am sure thou wouldst. Like the sex, fickle, inconstant and –"

"What makes thee rail against women, friend" said Little John, advancing from the covert. Seizing the bridle, he stopped the nag, who seemed to require little exertion for that.

"I should be glad to know who thou art that stops a peaceful man on his journey, and has the impudence to call friend one far above him," said the stranger, surveying Little John from head to foot, with a glance very much like scornful indignation.

"Understand me, Sir Clerk of Copmanhurst, if that be thy title, which your boisterous bawling taught me to be it, that you are stopped by him

who would stop anyone from whom he wanted an answer, and one who is only beneath thee so much as thy nag gives thee in height," returned Little John, coolly.

"And understand me, Sir Cur of the Forest, if that be thy title, which thy ungainly manners teach me it is, thou hast stopped a man who will answer thee no question thou mayst ask of him, unless it please him, and one who, though above thee in that which distinguishes the noble from the hind, will soundly cudgel thee with a quarter staff, if thou utters any more of thy insolent prate, and do not instantly take thy paw from off this horse's bridle."

"Your great brawler is ever your little doer," replied Little John, contemptuously. "I have a lad in yon copse, who will make thee cry quarter with thine own weapon, ere thou hast dealt him a blow."

"Bring him forth! Bring him forth!" roared the horseman, hastily dismounting and drawing a staff from its resting place upon the horse's back. "Bring him forth, I'll crack the young villain's crown, and drub thee soundly after. Quickly, booby, quickly! I'm in haste to trounce thee."

"With all my heart, if thou can'st," returned Little John, and disappeared in the covert. In spite of the remonstrances of Gilbert Hood, who insisted he would spoil their plans, he persuaded Robin to play a bout with the stranger.

"If the troop," he said, "should come up while they are at play, they will be sure to look on, and while so doing you can surround them; or, if that is impracticable, attack them from any point you think most favorable. Besides, I have a mind to cudgel this saucy noisy monk, if one he is, into obedience, and make him answer a question or so which may be serviceable to us. Come, Robin."

Robin followed him, and as he got out into the broad moonlight he caught sight of the stranger. He started, and exclaimed, in a whisper to Little John–

"Why, as I live, it is Tuck, Friar Tuck – Giles Sherburne! Not a word, John. I have often longed for a bout of quarter staff with him, and if I can keep my face from his inspection I shall be able to accomplish it."

"Come on!" shouted the Friar, twirling his staff; "Come on!" His gown, for he still wore the habit of his order, was, as usual with him when he entered upon any of these freaks, tucked up considerably above his knees, and brought through his girdle. As Robin approached, Tuck flourished his staff, and scanned his antagonist's slight frame with intense scorn. Robin kept his back to the moonlight, so that his face was in shadow, and Tuck, therefore, being also too much excited to take particular notice, did not recognize him.

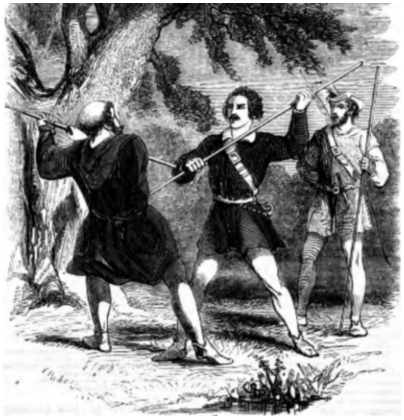
"Now, boy," he cried, "is your skull thick?"

“Not so thick as thine,” replied Robin, quite changing the tone of his voice, and speaking a broad Yorkshire dialect, “but it won’t break if thou hittest it, which I don’t think thou can’st.”

“I am afraid I shall,” returned Tuck; “but no words. Play!” he cried.

“Play” returned Robin.

“Do what you can as quick as you can,” whispered Little John.



Robin nodded, and to it they went. Tuck commenced by a flourish of his staff, with the purpose of throwing Robin off his guard – it did not succeed and he made a feint at the shins, but aimed at the head – it was stopped – and before he could understand how it was accomplished, he received a blow on the shin, and then a thwack on the side of the ear, which produced such a tremendous singing in his ears that he could not hear the loud laugh Little John gave, although he saw the extended jaws. He received half a dozen blows immediately after, in all parts, and in such rapid succession, that he grew quite confused. He guarded and hit at random, but blows rained so fast upon him, and his opponent exhibited such extraordinary agility, that he felt, for the first time, all abroad.

He lost confidence, and that, once destroyed, it was all over with him in a game where coolness and confidence are so requisite.

He would not cry quarter, but played desperately, franticly hoping yet to carry the battle by a *coup de main*, in which strength was to be his sole dependence. In this, too, he was disappointed, for in throwing all his force into his blows, he could not recover his guard with sufficient speed to prevent his opponent hitting him severely. He raged like a tiger, and threw away all chance he might have had — for he was a good player — by suffering his passion to get the better of judgment. At last, exhausted, in a tremendous perspiration, and his breath quite spent, he called a parley – not for quarter, he scorned it – but just breathing time. Robin readily granted this, for he was himself in a great heat, and fancied the joke had been carried on quite long enough.

“You play pretty well for a youth. You have been well taught, and I see you don’t mind a sore knock or two” said Tuck to our hero, breathing heavily.

“No, not when I get them,” replied Robin; “but you have not hit me once as yet.”

"'Tis very well to say so, returned Tuck, putting up his hand to his ear, and then holding it up in the moonlight, to have the satisfaction of perceiving a deep streak of blood upon it. "It's all very fine to say it, but I don't believe it."

"You know very well, Friar Tuck, that I never tell lies for vanity's sake," uttered Robin, rather loudly, and enjoying the start which Tuck gave.

'*Know very well, Friar Tuck*?' reiterated he with astonishment, suddenly advancing to Robin Hood, "Why, who are you that I know, and know me by that name?"

"Look at me, and see if your memory serves you rightly," said Robin, turning his face full in the moonlight. Tuck surveyed him in silence for a short time, and then suddenly cried out,

"Why, it is Robin Hood!"

"The same," returned our hero.

"He that ran off with my little sweetheart, the merry little Maude Lindsay!"

Ere Robin could make a reply, he felt his arm grasped with sudden vigor, and a voice exclaim with startling energy – "Robin, is this true?"

He turned to see Will Scarlet gazing on him with a look scarcely to be described. "Hush, Will," he returned quickly, in a low voice, "Not now; a moment hence I'll answer that question", then turning to Tuck, said to him, "There was no running off in the case — she accompanied her lady in her flight, and she left you because she did not like you well enough to return your love."

"No! Because she was like all women – fickle. She was tired of me. Your pretty face took her fancy, and so she changed."

"Tush!" cried Robin, knowing that poor Will was drinking in word for word with the most eager avidity; "The subject is too painful for jesting upon; her father is dead, and she mourns his loss deeply."

"Herbert Lindsay dead!" cried Tuck, with some surprise; "Honest, hearty old Herbert Lindsay gone! God rest his soul! How, when, and where was it?"

"That you shall know, and much more, anon. We want your assistance just now, if you will afford it," said Robin.

"In what way?" demanded Tuck.

"Briefly thus. You remember that Baron Fitz Alwine caused my foster father's cottage to be burned to the ground, and my mother to be slain.

We swore to revenge ourselves upon the first opportunity. One now offers in the return of Fitz Alwine and a party of his men, who have been in foreign lands these six years. They pass this way tonight, and if you have a mind for a bout, now's the time."

"I never cry nay to a pleasant offer, but you do not hope to do anything effectual with your two friends, yourself and I making four, perhaps to forty!"

"No; I have my foster father and a stout party of thoroughbred quarter staff men secreted in yonder copse."

"You have? Then we'll thrash thrice our number. Whoo!" Tuck twirled his staff round his head as he uttered this cry, exhibiting as much relish for the expected fight as a hungry man would at the prospect of a good dinner.

"Which way came you? And whither are you journeying?" inquired Little John of him.

"From Mansfield unto Nottingham, my small friend. I should know you by your form, did not six years' change make me doubtful of the truth of my memory, and else would I call you Little John, of Gamwell Hall, where I once spent six jolly days."

"Your memory is not treacherous in this. I am Little John, and your remembrance will befriend us if it enables thee to tell us whether you saw aught of a military cavalcade in Mansfield this afternoon?"

"I did. I took a stoup of wine at the threshold of jolly Sir John Cockle, the miller, and as I quitted, I saw a body of men from the Holy Land, looking fagged and weary, on jaded steeds, come slowly up the town, and stop at a hostelry for refreshment. Though objects of curiosity to many, they were none to me, and so, finishing my stoup, I took my sober way hither."

"Thanks, good friend.'Tis not impossible that we shall have these worthies here speedily and so we will, if it please thee, retire to covert, and await their coming."

"Most willingly, good Maypole, if thou wilt tell me what I am to do with this nag, who, in truth, is a most obstinate and self-willed beast, although a good one. Loathe am I to tell her failings, but she is fickle, and will have her own way. It matters not that I am her lord and master – she minds me not where her own pleasure is concerned; and, in consequence, if it be not of her inclination to go into the covert, she will not go in the covert, neither canst thou make her go into the covert."

"We'll try it, however," said Little John. "Do thou away, and leave her to me."

Tuck did as requested, and retired to the thicket containing Gilbert Hood and his friends. During this colloquy, a low but earnest conversation had been carried on between Robin and Will Scarlet, whose nervous anxiety would not suffer him to wait a fitting time for an explanation and he succeeded in ascertaining that Robin was him whom Maude loved and he would scarcely believe that Robin did not love her again, until, in self defense, our hero was compelled to acknowledge that he not only loved another, but had plighted his troth with her, and would do all in his power to induce Maude to transfer her affection solely and entirely to him, Will. He was somewhat appeased by this and when Little John desired him and Robin to return to their lurking place, he went with an easier mind and a better grace than before.

As it was deemed requisite there should be no vestige of anything betokening human presence, Little John cogitated upon the best place to secrete the nag, and accordingly, after a little reflection, he led it up the roadway a short distance, and finding a nook, which satisfied him that it would perfectly conceal the little damsel, he proceeded to enter far into its recesses.

But, as Tuck had observed, it was not her inclination to go into the covert, and so she exhibited at once such disinclination, by planting her fore feet firmly on the ground, and doing her best to resist all efforts to make her. Perhaps the young lady might not have thought it looked decorous or prudent to trust herself alone in a thicket with one of the male sex, and so her notions of propriety being severely shocked, she came to the determination not to go.

Now Little John was as equally determined that she should go, and as he was of a size which rendered it possible, if extremities were proceeded to, that he would carry her in, in all human probability he would gain his point. He commenced by dragging her by the bridle, which he held firmly near her mouth. The young lady, however, showed a most vixenish spirit, quite unbecoming one of the softer sex. She tried very hard to bite, and very hard would she have bitten had she succeeded, but failing in this, she threw her head about in all directions, reared up, kicked up her hind leg, squatted on her haunches, and exhibited a thousand vicious tricks — altogether unfeminine.

As she had forgotten all softness and modesty of demeanor, the attributes of her sex, Little John forgot his gallantry, and lent her several very hearty whacks with the butt end of a spear, which he carried with him. They were laid on with no very light hand and with true heartiness of purpose, but they had, we are sorry to say, very little effect in quieting the damsel. She spun round him like a top, until his patience grew exhausted, and in a fit of passion he threw down his spear, grasped the bridle still firmer, passed the arm and hand at liberty round her waist, and actually, by main force, pushed her into the covert, and then fastened her securely by the reins to a tree. The lady, like many ladies, was restive to the last,

but at length, finding resistance useless, having no alternative, submitted with tolerable resignation to the fate allotted her. Little John having thus accomplished a victory over a determined female – no joke, bye-the-bye – quitted her, recovered his spear, and joined his friends.

For some time, in silence, they awaited the approach of the troop they were to combat. The moon began to wane, and still they had not come. Eventually, they began to believe they did not intend to come that night, and they were well satisfied, that in the event of their being unable to enter the castle by stratagem, they could not carry it by assault. They therefore began to question whether it would not be advisable to defer the attack, until they could, with more certainty, ascertain the time of the troops' passing through the forest. While deliberating upon this point, they heard a loud neigh rise in the air, it was repeated with a quivering cadence.

"There sang my young lady," said Tuck. "Little John, you left her safe, did you not?"

"Oh! Safe enough. Bestrew me, if ever I came across such an obstinate little brute."

"I told you so. You did not take her fancy, she returns to her duty and longs for my presence; and as there seems no prospect of the rogues we are to drub coming, I shall bid you farewell and pursue my journey."

"Hold!" cried Robin, as he was about to advance into the open way."There fell the tramp of horses' feet. Listen."

Every ear was bent to the ground, and it was easily discovered Robin was right. On came a troop, and they made no secret of their approach, for they were laughing and shouting as if excited by liquor. Occasionally, as they drew nearer, snatches of song fell upon the ears of the hidden foresters, who each grasped his weapon and made ready for attack.

As they approached there was a great clamor among them, which suddenly ceased, and a voice of '*stentorian might,*' more loudly than musical, roared forth the following war song:

HURRAH!

The foe's advancing, They come from a distant land:
The sun's bright beams are glancing,
On the casques of that proud band;
We gallop forth to meet them, and
We shout about our word of war,
For our country, death or victory – forward, hearts ***Hurrah!***

With hopes our hearts are bounding
On the issue of the fight;

We hear the trumpet sounding,
To the charge! With mad delight:
Oh! Its pealing note we answer, with shouts that sound afar
For our dear-loved homes and victory – forward, hearts, ***Hurrah!***

Here's a cheer for those who triumph,
A tear for those who fall;
A blessing on our gallant chief,
The noblest, best of all;
In his words his soul seems burning,
his eye gleams like a star
For our country, death or victory –

Forward, Hearts, HURRAH!

"**Hurrah!**"

chorused the band, with tremendous power of lungs, at the end of every stanza, and when it had ceased there was a noisy burst of voices, as if they were especially delighted with the song and its performance. In the midst of the clamor, the neigh of the nag again rose clearly and distinctly in the air, with a very elaborate shake at the termination. It was immediately echoed by two or three of the horses in the troop, and a shout of laughter was the result. But there was also an exhibition of prudence with it, for the greater proportion reined in their steeds by command of their leader, and he was about to dispatch two men to search for the beast, and, as he supposed him to have one, his rider, and ascertain his cause for concealment, when out dashed the nag from the thicket, flew past the spot where Gilbert Hood and his party lay concealed, and galloped up to the troop, to their surprise, rudderless.

As she flew past, Tuck would have sprung out after her, had not Little John held him back by force.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed between his teeth. "Would you run into their very arms, and throw your life away without having a chance for it?"

"That's my little nag; they'll get it and keep it," said Tuck, struggling to get free. "Someone has cut her loose or else you didn't fasten her, or something. But I'll not lose her."

"She has bitten through her bridle, and got loose i' that fashion. A plague on thy brute! Let it go. Thou must not endanger our plan for a beast like that. I tell thee, man, there are hundreds better to be had for asking. An untamed, unbroken colt like to it is a gain, if lost."

“Not to me. Let me go. Mass! What do you mean, friend turret? I say I will go. I set a great value upon it — a peculiar value – the abbot of our convent blessed it.”

“To prove a curse to its equally mad-headed master. Away with thee, thou hot-brained monkish roisterer, after thy brute. Our company is well rid of thee.”

Little John released his hold, and Friar Tuck turned to him with a face crimsoned and a voice tremulous with rage–

“Hark ye, thou tower, thou moving spire, I go to gain my nag, but I fight o’ thy side, for I passed my word I would – and I will, having passed it. But the fight being done, I’ll crack thy crown for thee, thou walking column – or thou shalt drub me soundly.”

“As Robin Hood did, a short ten minutes agone”

But Tuck had not waited a reply. He broke out into the open way and raced along in the direction the nag had taken. He had but a small distance to run ere he came up with a body of mounted men and in the midst of them, prancing, kicking her heels in all directions, throwing up clouds of dust, and resisting all efforts to capture her, he beheld his little mare. He came up just in time to save the frolicsome lass from receiving a sound belaboring.

One of the troopers had dismounted, and had already, with pretty tolerable strength, inflicted a thwack over her head with the butt end of a spear, and was about to discharge a second, which was already whistling in the air, when he received such a tremendous blow upon his head from a staff, that, like a shot, he measured his length upon the ground, insensible.

“Mary, gently, Mary, my lass, woho!” cried Tuck, who had with his quarter staff, struck down the trooper. “Mary, my gentle damsel, come to me.” The pony pricked up its ears at the voice, and seemingly glad to hear the tones of one familiar to her, ceased her desperate antics, and, with a joyous whinny, trotted gently up to him.

“How now, knave! Who art thou who cometh knocking down our men?” cried the leader, riding up to Tuck as if he intended to ride him down.

“Respect the cloth,” said Tuck, striking the leader’s horse between the ears with his staff, so as to make the beast start and rear suddenly, and nearly unhorse his rider. “I am a friar, do’st thou not see?”

“No,” shouted the leader, enraged at being nearly thrown. “No, I see nothing,” he roared, “but an insolent knave.” and at the same time he delivered upon Tuck’s pate – he was bareheaded in both senses of the word, for he had neither hat nor hair – a blow with the end of his spear, which bid fair to crack it – at least, it sounded as if such a point had been accomplished, but nature had obliged our friend Giles with a skull of peculiar thickness, and although it was a sore knock – and he felt it so – it

did not break. It had the effect, however, of raising his passion to blood-heat, and shouting with all his might — "**Hoods to the rescue!**"

He dealt the leader a tremendous whack on the side of the head and face with the end of his staff, laying his cheekbone open as if it had been gashed with a knife. The man was completely stunned, and uttered a groan of agony, and had it not been that Tuck's agility stood him in good stead, he would have been dispatched by twenty swords and spears, which in an instant were gleaming round him.

"**Hoods to the rescue!**" he roared like a stentor.

"**Hoods to the rescue!**" was responded by the little band, and they came rushing from the thicket which had concealed them. As they broke into the moonlight, and came dashing towards the troop, which consisted of between fifty and sixty men, Tuck broke through his foes and joined them. The troop, immediately they beheld this band of armed foresters issuing from the covert, raised a shout, and immediately formed into a line as wide as the road, and prepared to ride them down, but they were met by a shower of arrows, which took effect on four or five of them.

The foresters, perceiving the numbers of their antagonists to be double their own, sought cover of the trees as the horsemen charged. From their sheltered position they sent their arrows with deadly precision. The troop quickly discovered the disadvantage under which they labored, being shot at without an opportunity of returning it, for they were only armed with spears, battle axes, swords, and bucklers and they dismounted for the purpose of dislodging their assailants. No sooner was this done than the foresters bravely advanced from their cover and fought hand to hand, shouting —

"**A Hood! A Hood! Revenge to the death!**"

which the troop returned by crying lustily — "No quarter! Down with the Saxon churls – down with the dogs!"

"**Beware of the dogs' teeth!**" cried Little John, as one fellow gave tongue to the cry, in a stentorian voice. "We Saxon dogs have a death grip of our own," he continued, and striking over his opponent's guard, he transfixed him through the throat to a tree at the miserable wretch's back, and left him writhing in the agonies of death, while he sought out a new foe. Gilbert Hood and Robin fought side by side – the latter fought with his spear, leaving the use of his bow to greater emergency. The Gamwells fought steadily, but gaining, not losing ground, although opposed to nearly twice their number, while the foresters, friends of Little John followed in the track which he made through the body of the troop, fighting desperately, but they were opposed to men who had served in many a

hard fought field, and who were more in their element when in battle than they were in quieter scenes. They were also nearly double the number of their opponents, and from use to conquest, confident of victory.

Our friend, Friar Tuck, did credit to his quarter staff, for he plied it in right earnest, and with amazing dexterity. He had received a lesson in coolness that very night from Robin Hood, with whom, if he could not exactly cope in the pure science of the game, yet could have matched him far better if he had not have given way to passion, and thus offered openings which, when cooler, he was good player enough to avoid. Now, however, when it came to a matter of life and death, and he was opposed to a fellow with a lance, he exerted all his knowledge, and stopped every thrust, occasion-ally repaying it with a blow of tremendous force.

When, as it so happened with two or three, he hit the temple, he killed them instantly — such was the extraordinary vigor of his blows. Will Scarlet kept by Robin, and fought also with a spear, and in that melée there was no braver heart than his, or one more reckless of danger.

Twice he saved Robin's life, and Robin returned the compliment by warding off blows aimed at him, which otherwise would have told with fatal effect. Desperate as the little band fought, it was soon perceived, even by the most sanguine of the party, that they must be defeated. It was utterly useless to attempt to conquer a body of disciplined men double their number; and Little John, who walked about with a battle axe he had wrested from one of his foes, cutting down all who opposed him, and, in turn, saw several of his friends cut down, tried to find out Gilbert Hood, tell him what must be done, and make the best retreat they could; as he thought where there was no chance of victory, it was little use to stand to be cut to pieces, even if they did sell their lives dearly. He kept his friends together as the only chance of securing a tolerable safe departure, and fell back upon his former position.

Here he found the Gamwells fighting away with increased ardor, and around them the bodies of several slain. Will Scarlet had got surrounded by four fellows, and they were trying hard to capture him; the greater his emergency the cooler he grew, he glanced from one to the other, keeping them at bay with his spear. Robin, seeing his danger, ran to his aid, and the two youths stood up manfully against the four, with a courage and skill which even their foes admired.

But, however much their admiration might have been excited, their forbearance was not, and they only increased their exertions to take them both. One of them made a desperate dash at Robin's spear, with the intention of whirling it out of his hands, but Robin, swiftly withdrawing it, the trooper missed it, lost his guard, and received Robin's spear through his body.

At the same moment Robin exclaimed with intense agony “Holy Mother of God! My father! Will Scarlet, Little John, to the rescue!”

Turning, he fled to his father’s side. Will Scarlet also turned and saw Gilbert Hood brained by a battle axe ere Robin could get to his side. He prepared to follow, but, having lost his guard, one of his opponents threw himself upon him, another followed. He was bound and carried away to the rear, prisoner. Robin saw not this, he arrived only to catch his father, who was attacked by a party of men, and cut down by one while keeping others at bay. It was then that Robin Hood drew his bow from his shoulder, his arrows from his quiver, and with the first shaft shot the fellow dead who had just killed his foster father.

He stood like a tiger at bay, his cap off, and his eyes gleaming like live coals. In less than as many minutes, four men lay stretched around him. The troop was closing around them, making numbers defeat bravery. The foresters fought with desperation. By degrees, Little John had lost his weapons, and he was opposed to one of the biggest of the troop – they were all tall men – with nothing but the butt end of a quarter staff, which had been cut through by a battle axe while he was opposing it to one, but with this he contrived to ward off the fellow, at times rap his knuckles, and ultimately so to confuse him, that when the other delivered a blow at him with his axe, he avoided it, sprang upon him, twisted it from him, hurled it away, and seizing the man by his throat and belt, hurled him over his head, as if he had been a mere bundle. The unfortunate trooper pitched heavily on his skull, fractured it, dislocated his neck, and lay extended a corpse.

Little John now got to Robin, and getting four of the foresters together, bade them raise Gilbert Hood, retreat with him, and they would cover them. And so, raising his voice, he cried:

“To the woods, lads to cover quick!”

The men obeyed, and the troopers shouted, “Victory! Pursue the Saxon churls – hunt ‘em down.”

But that ‘*hunting ‘em down*’ was easier counseled than executed, for most of the men had bows and arrows, which they had not yet used, and now brought them into play with frightful execution.

They were all good bowmen, and the short distance from, and the size of their foes, rendered their aim a matter of certainty. In the eagerness of pursuit, a dozen men flew after them, to meet sudden and certain death. Robin discharged no shaft from his bow which did not bury itself in the breast of an advancing pursuer. The extraordinary accuracy of his aim, even under such terrible excitement, drew shouts of approbation from the

foresters, and yells of rage from the baffled pursuers, who were met with such a steady and deadly discharge of arrows, each bearing death or desperate wounds, that after two or three miles, the chase was given up, and the survivors returned to their companions to relate their ill success.

Upon gathering their party together, Little John discovered that six of the party were missing, three severely wounded, and Gilbert Hood slain. Among those missing was Will Scarlet, and directly Robin became acquainted with that, he determined to go back in search of him. He left him, he said, fighting against odds, and he was fearful he was slain or wounded. In either case, it was a duty to recover the body of one who had several times that night exposed his life for him, and back he would go. They offered all sorts of opposition to him, but in vain; and begging of them to take all care of his poor father's body, he departed on his friendly errand.

He had hardly turned his back, when Little John gave directions to the Gamwells to make a litter and proceed with the body to Gamwell Hall. He would soon be with them, he said, and followed Robin on the same task. He felt it to be quite as much his duty as it could possibly be Robin's, for Will was always with him everywhere, was always entrusted to his care, was his pupil, and therefore he felt that if it was anyone's duty, it was his. So determining, he followed Robin's footsteps, but not to overtake him until he had reached the late scene of strife, and then he saw him alone; not a vestige of the fight was to be seen.

All was cleared away. The bodies were removed, and even the broken and scattered weapons had been collected together and borne off. Thus there was no clue to the fate either of Will Scarlet or the five foresters. The prospect of success in following and endeavoring to effect the escape of their unfortunate friends was utterly hopeless, and, therefore, such project, although advanced by Robin, was instantly abandoned. They agreed to return to their friends, and see what was to be done. On the morrow, ere those bearing Gilbert's body had reached Gamwell, they were overtaken by Little John and Robin, and all arrived at the Hall just at daybreak, to relate the melancholy issue of their adventure.

Poor Gilbert Hood had been killed on the instant, the axe having penetrated his brain and as recovery therefore was out of the question, preparations were made at once to lay him by the side of his wife Margaret. Two days subsequent to his death, Tuck, having performed the rites the church demanded, the body was ready for interment. Ere it was borne to its last home, Robin requested to be left with it alone for a short time.

His request was complied with and when he found that none were there to look upon him, he flung himself upon the body, and burst into a passion of tears, the first he had shed since the death of his foster father. For some time he wept in silence, and then he knelt, offered up a prayer, most ardently, for the future welfare of him who lay before him, in the sleep of death; then he kissed the cold hand and marble forehead rigid with death, and, in a voice low and broken, with emotion he said — “Farewell forever, my dearly loved parent! Parent, not in blood but in act. Farewell to thee, my more than father! For thou not having the need to do much for me, not being thy child, did more for me than if I had been thrice so. From my earliest infancy, thou didst bestow upon me thy tenderest care – thy fondest attention. No little act, thought, frolic, or whim of mine, but thou didst greet kindly, and give way to affectionately, making me love thee beyond all things else in this world, and ere I can repay thee for all thy tenderness, thy goodness, thou art snatched from me. Oh, God! Never to look upon thee again!”

“Never! Never! – but here in the inmost recesses of my heart shalt thou live bright and unsullied, while the breath of life animates me. Thy memory loved, honored, and revered; and no circumstance, nor time, nor change, shall dim the brightness with which it now shines, and shall continue to burn there. Farewell! Never again to meet on earth! But as we are taught to believe that the spirit of the good and virtuous, after the earthly life hath ceased, may watch over the actions of thou it loved in life – if it is permitted to thy shade to hover round me, do thou, oh my dear father, spread the influence of thy kindliness over me, leading me and guiding my actions to the path thou wouldst have most approved, hadst thou been living to direct me, tempering my will to my judgment, and in the wandering life which it will be my fate to lead – for now thou art gone, all prospect of wealth or hopes of independence are wrecked, and I must trust to my right arm to cut me out a scanty pittance – thou wilt keep me in the path of honor, not shaming the name which I will bear and keep, I hope, unsullied and untarnished by thought or deed, mean or disgraceful.”

“Hear me swear this, dear shade of my father, humbled in spirit, in anguish, agony most bitter at thy loss, in utter wretchedness, abject and broken-spirited, hear me swear that while I bear the name of Robin Hood, whatever acts neces-sity may compel me to perform, they shall be tempered with thy honor, thy kindliness, and thy justice. With my right hand on thy breast and my left to my God, I swear this, so come weal or woe as I keep this oath. And as I have sworn this in the direst misery grief can inflict, so will I in my brightest, happiest, and proudest moments hereafter observe it!”

For a few moments he bowed his head, and sobbed as though he had lost all on earth which could make life welcome. When the paroxysm had passed, he raised himself, and his eyes were dry, but his spirit was relieved. He gathered his friends together; the bearers of the body took the bier upon their shoulders, and, preceded by Friar Tuck, bore it away to the narrow home assigned to it. Robin followed, after him came old Lance, who had recovered from his wound, to be now almost slain by old age.

And then Lincoln, the serving man, who had nursed him when an infant, who had fought with him in the last fray, and now followed him to his grave. He had no tears to shed, nature had given him a temperament to which was denied such a consoling, soothing weakness, but his aspect, his manner, told his feelings, and he slowly followed, for the last time, a highly prized and loved master, a heart-broken man. The six Gamwells, headed by Little John, came next, and then a band of vassals and foresters, who had served under Gilbert Hood while forest keeper, an office taken from him by King Henry to bestow on Cockle, the miller of Mansfield.

Having reached the grave, the body was lowered into it, and Tuck, in a clear and solemn voice, repeated the prayers for the dead. When he had concluded, and the weapons of Gilbert were about to be placed upon his body and buried with him, Lance, the old hound, suddenly, to the surprise of many, leaped into the grave. He uttered a long, whining howl, and then stretched himself out on the body, and those who had looked over as they saw him leap in, knew that his breath was passed away, ere Lincoln said, in tones husky, even to hoarseness, with his deep emotion –

“The hound is dead. The good old dog!” he worked his hands and his teeth convulsively, when he had uttered it, and then he quitted his mournful companions to wander away alone.

The weapons were laid upon the bodies, and then the mold was heaped over them, and so the void was filled up, and the Mass of sad friends prepared to leave, except Robin, who stood with his hands clasped before him in the most intense abstraction, apparently as if watching the process of filling the grave, but really unconscious of aught around him.

He was roused from this state by a light hand laid upon his shoulder. He turned mechanically, and beheld the sweet face of Maude bathed in tears, looking earnestly up in his face. She pointed to the grave, and in a low voice said —

“It shall not want for flowers to grow over it while I am here, and have the power to plant them.”

“God bless thee, Maude, for that kind thought,” said Robin, scarce able to articulate a word. He squeezed her hand, and then he turned away, and joining the mournful cavalcade, returned to Gamwell Hall.

It was affecting to see how kindly he was treated by everyone there, as each and all endeavored, to the extent of their power, to make him feel his loss less. Everything which could tend to soothe and relieve his mind from its sadness was done.

In sadness, the heart naturally turns to those we love for a portion of their sympathy – it is not perhaps that we wish them to experience the same grief that we ourselves feel, yet we do not like to see them cheerful. When we are sad we expect them to be serious, because we are so; we want their sympathy, and the best consolation we can receive is to witness the actions and thoughts of those we love tinctured with the sadness which oppresses us. The desire to restore them to cheerfulness, makes us exert ourselves to shake off our grief, and it is rare that in such efforts we find ourselves prove unsuccessful. It may be readily imagined that Robin turned to Marian more than to any for sympathy, nor had he any reason to lament a want of it; it was exhibited in so sweet and delicate a manner, as to make it come with tenfold charm to him, and deeply did he appreciate it. But Robin Hood was not of a nature to remain inert, however oppressed by a calamity, when there was a necessity for action.

He could see that, although Will’s name was little mentioned, yet his loss was deeply felt. It was in an expedition for the benefit of Gilbert Hood that he was taken, and Robin would rather have died than he should not make every effort to restore him to his friends. Therefore, on the evening of the day upon which his foster father was laid in the earth, he communicated to Marian his intention of going to Nottingham at daybreak the following morning, and trying every method to discover whither he had been carried, and what possibility there was of effecting his escape. To Little John also did he make known his determination, and Little John, as he expected, resolved to accompany him. Accordingly, when the sun rose, it saw them upon their way to fair Nottingham.

Chapter 3

Little John,
A jolly brisk blade, right fit for his trade,
For he was a lusty young man.
Tho' he was called Little, his limbs they were large,
And his stature was seven feet high;
Wherever he came, they quaked at his name,
For he soon would make them to fly.
----- Robin Hood Ballad

And about, and about, and about they went
Like two wild boars in a chase;
Striving to aim, each other to maim,
Leg, arm, or any other place.
And knock for knock they lustily fought,
Which held two hours or more,
That all the wood rang, at every bang,
They played their work so sore
----- Robin Hood and the Tanner

Within four hours of their departure from Gamwell Hall, ***Robin Hood and Little John*** entered a small hostelry in Nottingham. They seated themselves close to a party of men who were drinking, and were rather noisy in their demeanour. They were soldiers, and their garb bespoke them to be retainers belonging to Nottingham Castle. They were talking loudly, and were clamorous in their actions.

Their conversation was of a desultory nature, principally relating to feats of arms. As the subject was roughly handled, there being more talkers than listeners, neither Robin nor Little John paid any attention to it. They drank their ale, and conversed apart in a low tone. They were nearly ready to depart, when one of the drinking party made an observation which attracted their attention, and induced their stay, with the hope of gathering some intelligence that might have a favorable influence upon the purpose for which they came.

"It is not known," said the retainer, "why they were attacked, whether it was by thieving outlaws or Derbyshire men – for as they passed through that country they played some desperate tricks – or whether they were vassals belonging to a neighboring estate, paying off some grudge perhaps their master may owe our lord the Baron. In that case the Crusaders must have been mistaken for us. However, they have got some prisoners, and I dare swear the whole truth will soon out."

"When did this take place, Geoffrey?" asked one of the listeners.

“Two or three nights since. Was not you in the castle when the Crusaders arrived?”

“No. I arrived here yesterday with the Baron. I went with the party to meet him as he came from London, and was therefore away when they came here.”

“Well, they are off to London tomorrow, and I believe they take the prisoners with them.”

“Was it a sharp tussle?”

“Rather. The troop brought about twenty of their comrades, desperately wounded, to Nottingham. However, they abandoned their intention, and buried them in the forest, a few miles from here. But they brought all the weapons they could gather, as evidence of the fray, and to afford some clue to their owners.”

“Who told you all this, Geoffrey?”

“One of the crusaders. He said something about the fray commencing through a fellow, in the habit of a monk, knocking down one of his comrades, and upon attempting to capture him, he called his followers from their lurking place, with the cry of ‘Hood to the rescue!’”

“*Hood to the rescue*?” echoed another voice, interrogatively. “Why, I remember, about six years ago, being in pursuit of a youth named Hood, who ran away with the Lady Christabel. We got the lady back, and the boy was knocked on the head.”

“A boy?” asked Geoffrey.

“Aye”, returned his comrade, “a mere boy, but he was desperately expert with his bow, and not afraid to use it, when opportunity offered. He knew every inch of the forest, and you would not believe how he kept us at bay, and eluded us, until at last, having stolen a horse from the troop, he was riding away with the lady as comfortable as may be, when he suddenly plumped into the arms of a party dispatched to intercept him. They succeeded in getting the lady, cracking his crown, and leaving him dead upon the road way.”

“That is very strange,” remarked Geoffrey, thoughtfully, “for the crusader spoke to me of a youth in the affair the other night, who made fearful havoc among the men with his arrows, never missing anyone he aimed at. Altogether, killed and wounded, there was a dozen out of twenty-five he might claim as his share.”

“Twelve?” echoed two or three voices.

“Twelve!” muttered Robin between his teeth. “Father, you are avenged!”

“Aye, twelve,” returned Geoffrey. “It seems incredible, but it is nevertheless true. They ascertained it by the shafts being of a different make to any other.”

“I should not wonder,” observed he who had mentioned the matter of Robin and Christabel – “I should not wonder if this youth you speak of is not the same boy we chased. If so, I should know him again, for I saw him two or three times on the night we were after him, six years ago, and there was something so remarkable in his appearance I am sure I should never forget him.”

They have a youth in the castle now, a prisoner. Perhaps it is him,” said Geoffrey.

“I’ll see when we return to the castle,” replied the man.

“We have heard enough,” said Robin in a whisper to Little John. “Let us go.”

“’Twill be as well,” answered he. “Besides, if that fellow rolls his eye this way, he may endeavor to prevent us, by making a discovery in no way to be desired just now. Be wary as you quit, Robin, and let him see naught but your back.”

“The men, in the course of their drinking and roistering had extended their circle, and got so spread as to make it impossible to approach the door without passing through the middle of them. Under the circumstances, this was an unpleasant fact which Robin gladly would have dispensed with, for, in the event of his being recognized, it would go a very long way to prevent his being able to assist Will Scarlet.

When he rose, therefore, he proceeded towards the door with as indifferent an air as he could assume, at the same time as quickly, without exciting suspicious notice.

Little John kept by his side, partly to shield him from the gaze of the man who professed to be able to recognize him, and partly to get out as close together as possible. As they passed through the circle, Geoffrey looked up at Little John, and exclaimed –

“By the Holy Paul, friend, thy pate hath an affection for the ceiling! By the Mass, if the mother who bore thee reached thy shoulder, she was tall enough for a crusader!”

“Does my height offend thee, Sir Soldier?” said Little John, turning suddenly round to Geoffrey, with the hope of attracting attention to himself, and thus enable Robin to escape unnoticed – a ruse which our hero understood and availed himself of.

“Nay,” returned Geoffrey, “so far from offending thee, it likes me much, inasmuch as I myself am of thy height, and fondly thought myself to be the tallest man of time, as I am the strongest.”

“He tops thee by six inches, Geoffrey,” cried one of his companions.

“Not by the sixteenth part of the eighth of an inch!” returned Geoffrey, somewhat nettled. “I’ll hold any man a flagon of ale that he is not taller than I, nor so strong in trying a fall, nor breaks my crown with a quarter staff ere I have soundly cudgeled him!”

“Done!” cried one of the party. “I’ll wager thee a flagon on each item.”

“Agreed!” cried Geoffrey.

“But thou dost not ask me if I agree,” remarked Little John, quietly.

“Thou canst not refuse such a chance of rare sport,” exclaimed his patron. “Such an opposer may not cross thee again! Besides, thine honor will be compromised, for have I not wagered on thy head, and thou wilt not lose me the prospect of winning three flagons of ale, man, of which, if thou gain them for me – and bestrew me thy lustly sinews tell something in favor of it – thou shalt drink the largest portion? Thou wilt agree, I see, friend!”

“I would give my challenger a piece of honest advice, ere I consent” said Little John, in the same quiet tone. “I would not wish to be thought boastful, but every man knows what nature has done for him, and what application he can make of her bounties. Now, she has given me a stout frame and a good heart, and, if I am expert at any two things more than others, it is in giving a fall, or a broken head with a good quarter staff. I would, therefore, in all good fellowship, persuade him not to try a bout with me in either, or I mistake my man!”

“Thou dost mistake thy man!” said Geoffrey, “and for one who does not wish to be thought boastful, art as great a braggart as I ever came in contact with. Marry, thy heart may be good, but seems a marvelously fearful one, or I am no judge. Come, if thou wouldst not be thought as great coward as thou art high, consent at once!”

“I freely consent, and am in no way loath to have a bout, were it only for the pleasure of it. I did but forewarn thee that I was practiced in the thing, that thou might not be deceived with the quality of him thou hadst to cope with. I will but speak a word to my youthful companion, and then will return to win the flagons of ale, if I can.”

“If thou canst!” roared Geoffrey, who, primed with ale, was quite elated at the idea of showing off before his companions. He was of a stalwart

frame and exceedingly tall, expert at the use of his weapons, but his size prevented him from putting his powers into play in a friendly manner, because he seldom met with one who was big enough, or cared to oppose him. The present opportunity was therefore hailed with vast delight by him, and it would have been something particularly important in its nature which would have prevented him foregoing the expected pleasure.

"*Thou wilt not leave us in the lurch if thou goest away, man, eh?*"

he cried, as Little John was leaving the room. This was uttered in a sneering tone, and a laugh from his companions followed the remark. Stung by the observation, Little John turned sharply back, and walking up to Geoffrey he said in a tone of excitement –

"Were I a Norman, as thou art, I might commit an act as despicable, but being a Saxon – churl it may be – such a thought never crossed my mind. If I was reluctant to meet thee before, it was because I did not seek thy hurt, but since thou hast made a sneering jest of my good will, thou hast absolved me from all consideration of thy bones. Therefore, *good swaggering Norman,* call the host and get plaster for thy broken skin prepared, and pay for thy ale, for so true as that ugly lump sits upon thy neck, so sure will you have need to do it. It is as well to be prepared for all things, but as a guarantee of my good faith to him who has not questioned it, and wagered upon me, I leave my weapons as a pledge of my speedy return."

"Nay replied his backer, "There is no need on't. Speed, good forester, on thine errand, beshrew me, thy return will be looked impatiently for. I long for the sport,"

"And I." said Geoffrey, chafing considerably.

"And I!" echoed several voices. Little John disappeared with a quick step, and a short distance from the spot found Robin waiting for him. He related what had just transpired, explaining that there was no possibility of escaping from it, and said they must appoint somewhere to meet, for as there was every prospect of being recognized, he must not get near the place where the retainers were likely to look upon him with too scrutinizing an eye. Much as our hero wished to be at the quarter staff play, and would have run all hazard to accomplish it, yet as Will Scarlet's chance of escape would be compromised by his risk of being discovered, he reluctantly consented to keep away, and meet by the castle at three o'clock in the afternoon.

He knew the residence of Grace May's parents, and hoping to meet with Halbert Lindsay, the foster son of Herbert, familiarly called Hal of the Keep, he took his way thither, while Little John returned to play the match.

There was a general movement among the guests when Little John again entered the hostelry. The number had been considerably augmented, and the news of Geoffrey Gurthfeld the Stalwart, being about to play a match with the quarter staff with a stranger, was noised about from one to another, and several who had been sitting when the match was made, had run and fetched two or three friends to see it.

Little John was surprised, undoubtedly not agreeably, at seeing such a quantity of visitors added to those he had left there, and he began to have slight misgivings himself, that out of the motley crew around him, there might be some officious knave who could recognize in him one that had been one of the sturdiest foes in the late fray. It was but for a moment that this passed through his mind, and he resolved to let it have no influence upon him, further than inducing him to make use of every circumstance which might further the object with which he had come.

He was placed, however, in no enviable situation, and many a man, boasting and possessing a good stock of courage, would have gladly excused himself from such a situation. Little John was not, however, one of this description – to say that he did not know what danger meant, would be false. But the sense of it affected him differently to what it would have done others. It was but a difficult strait in his idea, was viewed and treated as such, and almost inevitable death staring him in the face would not have moved him from coolly weighing and examining circumstances which would be likely to afford a loophole for escape.

There was no hurry or indecision in his conduct, excepting upon those points upon which he was perfectly unacquainted, and then he would readily give himself up to the guidance of those who did know them and could apply them, at the same time always reserving for himself a clause to act for himself when they branched into paths with which he was acquainted.

He glanced around the assembled people with a penetrating scrutiny, but with the air of apathy and indifference which the Indians are so famed for assuming. He was greeted by the assembly with something like respect, a favor for which he had to thank his person. He returned the salute by an a slight inclination of the head, and seeking out his antagonist, he advanced towards him. When he stood in front of him, he said quietly –

“Art thou prepared, sir Norman?”

“Ever ready, any and all times, when an antagonist calls,” replied Geoffrey, springing from his seat.

“Ere we begin,” said Little John, “I should wish to peril something of mine own in this bout, besides my head and limbs, if it be only that my good friend here, who has thought fit to hazard his coin on my ability, may not be the only one who loses a stake, should I be unfortunate enough to be beaten. Therefore, Norman, I will hold thee five marks, I give thee the first throw, and draw the first blood from thy crown, the winner to expend it in liquor upon those around us.”

“Agreed,” cried Geoffrey, laughing boisterously “and, my stout yeoman, if thou gives me the first back fall or crack my crown, ere I have made the blood trickle down thy pate, I will double the sum.”

“Hurrah!” cried the guests, who had all to gain and nothing to lose. “A gallant soul! A noble heart!”

This point having been decided, they commenced fulfilling the conditions of the wager. They both divested their feet from all covering, and then Geoffrey stood with his back to the wall, while a fellow mounted on a stool, placed a flat piece of wood upon his head, and from thence in a direct line to the wall, where it was held by one of the guests. Little John came and placed himself beneath it, and when he raised himself to his proper height, and stood quite upright, he raised the measure a good three inches.

It seemed to astonish everyone, Geoffrey not being the least – so much so did it, that he was asked again to stand to the wall. He complied, the measure was applied, and it was found to be true.

“I am fairly beaten,” said Geoffrey, with rather a mortified air. “I acknowledge it, yet I could have sworn I was at least as tall, and I am measured as six feet six inches, and you top me by three inches.”

“I call myself six feet six inches,” said Little John.

“You mean a short seven feet,” said his backer. “That part of the wager is settled, at all events, and there is one of my flagons won. Now, I will wager it to half one that our yeoman wins the fall.”

“Taken!” cried two or three voices.

“I do not take you all, but I will wager it twice.”

This was accepted; and then he turned round to the people with the purport of making a short speech, while Little John and Geoffrey restored their feet to their covered state.

“My good friends,” he began, “almost all here are known to each other, and the honest yeoman who has just won the first part of my wager is a stranger among us. Now, I know you all to be lovers of fair play, and

therefore I am sure you will treat him with that courtesy a stranger has a right to expect from us, seeing that no advantage is taken because we know him not, and giving him the benefit of any little favor his situation may demand, courtesy require, and our own honor dictate."

"And he who acts contrary in this, showing foul play may expect the full weight of my rage," said Geoffrey, "for my honor, too, is concerned in the stranger having fair play, and woe to him who seeks to prevent it."

"Well said, gallant heart!" cried the guests.

"I thank you, good folks, for your kind intentions and your courtesy, and I will not abuse it, and will show my sense of your feeling towards me by endeavoring, to the best of my power, to win," said Little John, when the clamor made by the guests' applause had somewhat subsided. There was a shout for him raised, and then it was proposed to adjourn to an open space at the back of the hostel, to carry out the other portion of the wager. It was no sooner agreed to than it was put into execution.

The place chosen for the wrestling was an area of considerable extent, and was used for dances, fêtes and the celebration of festivals. Here the Maypole was erected – one of the earliest and prettiest customs we could boast of, but now almost obsolete. It was covered with a carpet of green turf, even and beautifully green, and was admirably for the purpose to which it was now applied. He who had backed Little John now busied himself in making the spectators form a ring – he was assisted by two or three of Geoffrey's comrades.

When everything was arranged with satisfaction to all parties, Little John and Geoffrey advanced to the center of the ring. The former had divested himself of his weapons and his gauntlets, otherwise he had made not change. But Geoffrey had doffed his military habit, and appeared in a small doublet, tightly belted round the waist – his figure was thus displayed to more advantage than that of Little John, who wore a tunic of dark green, reaching to his knees, hiding half the fine limbs which supported his body.

When they met in the ring, each looked earnestly at the other. On Little John's face was settled a pleasing, yet indifferent expression, as though he was going about any commonplace action, while the features of Geoffrey, on scanning the make, the limbs, the sinews, and muscles of Little John, betrayed rather a nervous anxiety, as if he knew he had no chance to throw away if he wished to win.

"I am ready," said Little John, with a smile, to Geoffrey, after they had surveyed each other an instant.

"And I" said Geoffrey, holding out his hand, which Little John took, and shook in a friendly manner.

Having done this, each made their grip, by laying hold of their antagonist's shoulder and elbow. Each tried the other in various ways, to find that to throw the other was not easily to be effected — they turned round and round. At length, after several feints, Geoffrey gave Little John's leg a desperate jerk with his foot, and threw all his force into the lunge he made, in the hope of giving him a clear back fall. He might as well have tried to have moved a house. Those around having witnessed that movement, expected to have seen Little John thrown.

They raised a shout of anticipated triumph, but they were deceived and while neighbor was telling to neighbor that he thought the yeoman would have been thrown, Little John, in his turn, began to exert his powers to give Geoffrey the fall. It was then his extraordinary strength was shown and noticed, for he had stood immoveable when Geoffrey had used his greatest force, and now everyone could see that the retainer was straining every muscle to prevent Little John moving him to the right or left, yet he could not keep his ground, although his efforts to do it were tremendous.

Suddenly shifting his hand from his antagonist's elbow to his hip, Little John dropped on one knee; at the same moment he hurled his competitor over his head, and he fell on his back with a terrific crash. Ere Geoffrey's back had touched the ground, Little John was erect, and stood quietly awaiting the arising of his defeated opponent. Although the breath was nearly shaken out of his body, and for a moment he was stunned, Geoffrey arose, and forcing a smile, said;

"Although I do not consider it a fair back fall, yet as I did not believe anyone could have done such a thing to me, I am content that portion of the wager should be considered as won."

"Nay, friend Norman," replied Little John, "We of the borders consider that fling the fairest back fall we can give a man. But I'll throw thee the other way if thou thinkest it fairest – I would not win the wager by thy allowance, but by fair superiority. Come, let us begin again, if that fall hath not made thee faint."

"Faint!" echoed Geoffrey, scornfully. "Be it as you please, we begin again – this fall must decide it."

There was a great cavil and dispute when it was seen that they were about to again try their strength for a fall. Those who had wagered upon Little John considering they had fairly won, while those who had lost, glad of any chance of recovering the money, contended that although Geoffrey fell flat on his back, still it was not what was called a fair back fall. But all agreed that Little John behaved very handsome in giving Geoffrey another trial. The combatants again took firm hold of each other, and this

time the struggle was of short duration, for in a few minutes Geoffrey's legs came flying in the air, and his shoulders came to the ground with great force.

"A back fall – a clear back fall – hurrah for the yeoman!" shouted he who had won by Little John's success. The losers said nothing and Geoffrey, with a face betraying considerable chagrin, rose to try his skill with the quarter staff. If Little John had had a doubt about winning at the wrestling, he had none whatever at the staff. It was his favorite weapon — indeed it was that of most foresters. He had actually, as a boy, been enthusiastically a follower of it, pursued it with ardor, and acquired a proficiency in it almost incredible. He excelled in its use to the same degree of perfection Robin had already attained with his bow and arrow. He had studied it and schooled himself to its attainment with untiring perseverance. No one within ten or fifteen miles of Gamwell had attained any celebrity in the handling of the quarter staff but he sought him out, and, while yet a youth, never rested till he had defeated all. Thus, when he found himself about to be opposed by one who had only a commonplace skill in the use of the weapon, he laughed inwardly as he heard Geoffrey's friends offering to wager freely upon their comrade. He was satisfied as to the result; and, as the wagers were as readily accepted as offered, he determined that they should have a little play for their money.

Accordingly, the quarter staffs having been measured and found to be of equal length, and both Geoffrey and Little John refreshed with some strong ale, they stood forth to commence the play. Each held the staff at the quarters, and raised it diagonally. Full ten minutes elapsed ere either made a fair blow, and the expectations of the spectators having been wound up to the highest pitch, they began to manifest some impatience.

Geoffrey had already experienced enough of his antagonist's capabilities to not throw a chance away, and Little John had resolved to act upon the defensive, therefore little as yet was done. At length Geoffrey broke ground, and a quantity of blows were given and stopped with great rapidity. Little John discovered that he had no mean player opposed to him; and, at the same time, Geoffrey having made some of his most skillful efforts, his most favorite ruse, and, indeed, put into requisition all his knowledge of the game, and found himself stopped at all points with the greatest ease, discovered that he had a thorough master for an antagonist, and it behooved him to exercise all the skill and caution he was master of to win the bout.

To accomplish this, he thought his best plan would be to act on the defensive, draw his opponent out, and watch with the closest attention that opportunity to deliver the blow which was to make him the winner.

After a little while Little John discovered this, and, as he saw no prospect of getting Geoffrey off his guard so as to make him be well beaten before the decisive blow was given without, he did it by degrees. He altered his resolution, and commenced on the offensive.

Perhaps it was more to his advantage, so far as the opinion of the bystanders was concerned, to do this, for by it he evinced himself to be a complete proficient in the art. He commenced by making a series of rapid feints, and then delivered a severe blow over Geoffrey's legs before he knew whether a blow was really on its way to him. This he took care should be distinctly given, that all the spectators should see it, and at the same time see that it was done by skill and not accident. Thrice in succession did he give a blow in the same place without receiving one in return from Geoffrey. His feints were so rapid and so natural that they almost bewildered his antagonist, for they were new to him.

When he got more accustomed to them, and prepared accordingly to stop the real blow, or deliver one while a feint was being made, Little John changed his mode, and commenced a completely different style of play, which proved as successful as its predecessor. Geoffrey had received about fifty blows without having returned one, or suffering his temper to get the better of him. At last, he resolved to attack, and try and wear his opponent out.

He twirled his staff, dealt blows right and left, whirled it about, and dashed it here and there, his blows raining with such speed and force that his partisans were elbowing each other, following with eager eyes every blow, and expecting each instant to be enabled to cry out with stentorian lungs –

Hurrah! Geoffrey – he's won! He's won!

Still they could not see that one blow had taken effect. They observed wherever Geoffrey's staff fell, Little John's was invariably there to oppose it. It was true there was a great noise from the staffs as they rattled against each other, but it was '*great cry and little wool.*'

Little John backed here and there. As Geoffrey dealt his blows, and the latter followed him up step for step until he grew pretty well exhausted, without having succeeded in hitting his opponent. Immediately, Little John felt the blows to be less powerful and less frequent, he turned the tables and attacked Geoffrey, but with more effect, for although the latter played and stopped exceedingly well, still he received a vast many blows, until his legs and sides grew terribly sore.

Little John would have continued it much longer, for he had warmed up into the spirit of it, but he remembered Robin Hood and the difficulty he

should have in getting quit of his present companions, and so he resolved to finish him off, but to do it in style. He therefore ceased his violent play, and again they stood opposed to each other as they had before a blow was struck. He then began to work his feints, to appear to be striking at different parts with extraordinary quickness. When he believed he had thoroughly confused Geoffrey, he made a feint at his legs with such an appearance of reality that Geoffrey shifted his guard with rapidity to receive it.

He left his head unguarded, and the next instant he lay sprawling upon the ground with a broken pate, the blood flowing freely from his forehead. The blow had been so clearly given, and under such peculiar circumstances, that it created the highest admiration in all the beholders.

“Hurrah for the forester – the bold yeoman!” and twenty caps were flung in the air. The winners were uproarious, and the losers not by any means so noisy. Still most of them had the honesty to acknowledge that Little John had won well and nobly, leaving himself beyond all dispute Geoffrey’s superior.

“I have won this fairly, without any covert or underhand work?” he said, appealing to the spectators.

“Aye, aye; fair – all fair. Hurrah for the forester!” they cried.

Little John laughed inwardly. His competitor was worthy of coping with. It was something to master such a one as he, and consequently he felt gratified. But as it was not in his nature to insult a fallen foe by vaunting, boasting, or swaggering, he held his hand out in a friendly manner to Geoffrey, in order to assist him to rise, but the other rejected it with a sullen brow, and said bitterly—

“The day’s yours this time. It shall be but for a short while, for I’ll tear the laurels from thy brow ere thou’rt much older. I want not thy help, I have still strength enough to rise, and even to renew the fight in earnest, if thou showiest thy teeth in a bragging grin unto me, although thou hast drawn first blood and won thy wagers.” So saying, he sprung to his feet without assistance.

“Nay, never chafe, man,” returned Little John; “Thou hast been defeated in a fair and lawful manner. It would have been more strange if thou hadst won, seeing that I am expert at the use of the staff from great practice, and for the love I bear it. Besides, nature has fitted me to it, and we are all more or less gifted on some points – the quarter staff’s mine. You have yours I don’t doubt, and art one of the best at wrestling or quarter staff I ever stood up to. You will meet with many that can’t beat you, and yet believe themselves very good players.”

“So, Norman, here’s my hand, I offer it with all sincerity as a friend, or, if you like it better, as a foe but I hold you no ill will, and I forewarned you I was well practiced in the art of quarter staff playing.”

“Give me thy hand, forester,” said Geoffrey after a moment’s hesitation, and then added with an air of frankness, “Thou hast won well and fairly, and I have no right to chafe because I have been defeated at my own weapons. I am not cur enough to cry because I have lost, but will bear it as becomes a man and a soldier. Albeit, it is the first time I have been beaten, yet thou hast done it in so masterly a manner that I will not complain. There, good forester, is the grasp of a friend, and give me thy name that I may remember the title of him who was the first to thrash Geoffrey Gurthfeld.”

“I shake hands with all honesty, Norman, and my name thou shalt at some other time be in possession of. At present I do not wish to let it out of my own keeping.”

“As thou wilt, forester, but let me correct thee of one mistake. My name is Geoffrey Gurthfeld, I am by birth a Saxon, and not Norman as you have hitherto styled me. However, I have been away many years from England, and in Normandy much of the time. Therefore, I may have some of the Norman in my bearing, but not by my will.”

“If we are to be friends, I am glad thou art no Norman. We may meet again, perhaps, and under more friendly circumstances – I hope we may, and then you will probably find me more communicative. But having settled this question of length, strength, and science, let us distribute the ale we combated for.”

“Agreed,” returned Geoffrey, and he gave the necessary orders to the host. There was much rejoicing among the partakers, especially those who had won their wagers. The merits and demerits of each were canvased, and their healths drank uproariously. Little John began at length to grow anxious to get away, for he had so many admirers among the company, whose skins were full of ale, that he feared, if they observed him depart, they would follow in a train. Now this would be in the highest degree disagreeable, for he had made himself sufficiently notorious already to hazard his prospect of success in the undertaking for which he had expressly visited Nottingham, and, therefore, his principal object was to steal away quietly and unnoted.

But Geoffrey, who had washed his head and had it dressed, kept close to him. Not a movement could he make but Geoffrey took notice of it and ultimately he saw that he must enlist the aid of his late antagonist, if he wished to escape from these new found friends. He tried several times, but ineffectually, to withdraw. There was always some would-be, officious

friend to exclaim, “How now, wither away, noble forester? – I am with thee, good yeoman, thou’rt journeying my road I know when thou goes I will keep thee company, bold heart.”

It was of no use seeking to excuse himself, they would take no denial. So at last, when the time drew nigh for him to meet Robin, he said in a whisper to Geoffrey—

“Thou hast proffered friendship to me – thou canst serve me now.”

“In what way? Tell me that, and believe it done,” replied he.

“I would be quit of these swilling talkers, these roistering villains. I wish to leave this place alone, and unobserved, but the rogues stick to me like the juice of the pine tree to feathers. Canst thou not assist me to get clear of them?”

“Aye! Most willingly will I, but there is but one way”

“Name it.”

“You must with me to Nottingham Castle – they dare not follow us farther than the drawbridge, and then you can with me to my sleeping room, and I’ll guarantee that thou quittest the castle unobserved by any prying knave.”

“That is the only way?”

“It is, because thou hast signalized thyself, these fools will stick to thee, walk with thee, in order that they may be seen in thy company, and cry ‘Look you, neighbor, you met me yester noon, I was with – who, marry? Why, who but he who conquered Geoffrey Gurthfeld, he is my friend.’ so, honest forester, thou must e’en submit in thy turn, and if thou would’st escape the prattling and prying of these dogs, you must do as I say.”

“What does the dial say, host?” asked Little John of that personage, as he trotted about supplying orders.

“It is turned off two,” was the reply.

“And how long shall we be ere we reach the castle?” he demanded of Geoffrey.

“By three we can be there easily.”

Little John mused for a short time, and as

he perceived it was the only way to accomplish his object, he reluctantly said to Geoffrey –

“Well, it must be as you have planned it. I have no alternative. Let us away.”

“With all my heart; I am ready now.”

Little John gathered up his weapons, and Geoffrey bade his friends adieu. Twenty were upon their feet directly he uttered this, and pretended they must away too, but he requested their attention for a moment ere he departed, and having obtained it, said in a firm voice —

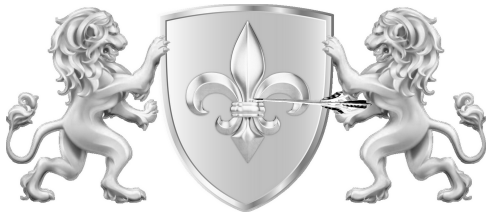
“Friends, I must leave you. This worthy forester accompanies me, but no one else – understand me, no one else. I have been surrounded by quite enough friends today to desire their presence on my way to the castle. Therefore, I shall consider anyone who follows me now, does it to dog and insult me, and if I catch them, by the Holy Saints but they shall smart for it.”

“But we live that way, it is our way,” said two or three melancholy voices in a faint mumbling tone.

“Aye, possibly,” returned him; “but those who do, will favor me by sitting a short time after I leave, and those who don’t, and may take it into their heads to follow me, must take the consequences. A fair day, friends, to you all.”

Farewells were exchanged, and when Little John bade them adieu they gave him a tremendous hurrah to help him on his path.

But bearing in mind the warning delivered by Geoffrey with such earnestness, there was no one left the hostelry to attend them. And thus did these two huge men, late opponents, but now friends, stroll up the town together, in the direction of Nottingham Castle.



Chapter 4

Do but look on her eyes – they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair – it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth!
Do but mark – her forehead's smoother
Than words that sooth her!
And from her arched brows, such a grace
Sheds itself through the face!
As alone these triumphs to the life
All the gain, all the good of the element's strife.

----- Ben Jonson

When Robin Hood quitted Little John, he sought, as he intended, the residence of the parents of Grace May. With the locality he was acquainted, but not with any of the ways, save by report. But, if description would make acquaintance, he might be said to be intimately acquainted with them.

He had not seen the 'bonnie Grace May,' of whom he had so frequently heard and his curiosity had been so excited by the warm and vivid descriptions of Hal of the Keep, that many times he had resolved to pay a visit to Nottingham, if it was but to satisfy the curiosity. He was now in a way to gratify, but not in a mood. The recent loss of his father weighed heavily upon his spirits, and when he arrived at the house, he craved admittance with a feeling of indifference as to whether Grace May or her grandmother opened the door to him. As he stood waiting and for answer to his summons, he hummed an air, quite unconscious of doing it, being at the time deeply lost in thought.

Such is the power of habit. Robin Hood was naturally of a gay and lively disposition and, whenever alone, was in the habit of singing ballads or humming airs, learned from his foster father, and many composed by himself. Although his mind was crowded with sad thoughts, yet he unknowingly gave way to the habit, until his quick ear detected an approaching footstep bounding along. The door hastily opened, and a voice, exceedingly musical, and enriched by the sweet laugh that accompanied it, exclaimed: "I knew, Hal, you'd come this morning. I said – Oh! I beg your pardon. I thought – I didn't know," said Grace May, for it was the little damsel, and blushed prodigiously, as well she might, for she threw herself into Robin's arms, and he received a kiss ere the discovery was made. He was rather astonished at his reception, and the young lady disengaged herself ere he could understand who it was embracing him, or perceive half her beauties.

There is no doubt she need not have hurried herself on his account, had he observed the remarkably laughing blue eyes, the pretty lips – small, and such a pink! The fair hair, hanging down in long ringlets, far more graceful than any tendrils the vine ever put forth, or the form that combined all these treasures in one being. She appeared embarrassed almost to a painful degree; besides, she was disappointed, and there appeared an expression over her features as if she was ready to burst into a flood of tears.

“I beg your pardon,” she repeated.

“Nay,” said Robin, in as kind voice as he could assume, “I have to beg yours, for not being the person you expected.”

”Grace raised her eyes in wonder at this sally, and then she smiled – a little confusion being still apparent.

“May I know why you have summoned me?” she asked.

“I am a very particular friend of him you mistook me for,” he replied, “even Halbert Lindsay. Circumstances prevent my seeking him at the castle, and your mistake is sufficient to satisfy me that he will be here. May I crave admittance until he comes?”

“It shall be readily granted. All Hal’s friends will find a welcome here. Pray come in.”

Robin entered, and a stool was speedily placed for him, and a stoup of ale and eatables set before him. The maiden was neatly attired, and exceedingly pretty, bustling about, and doing everything which she thought might add to his comfort.

“Have you walked far?” she inquired.

“From a little village to the left of Mansfield.”

“Gamwell?”

“Yes. Do you know it?”

“Oh! Yes – that is, I have never been there, but Hal’s foster sister lives there, and Hal goes over to see her now and then, and when he returns he tells me everything about her and everybody there, and the place itself. Ah! I know it as well as if I had been there dozens of times. I know you, too, in the same way.”

“You do?”

“Yes – you are Robin Hood! I am sure you are, because you are exactly like what Hal says of you tall and straight, large dark eyes, and so hand –”

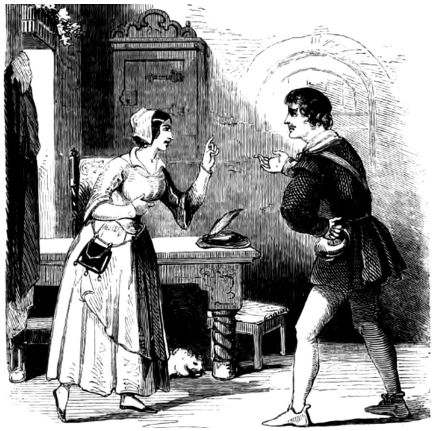
Here the young lady remembered what she was saying, and to whom she spoke. She therefore performed a blush of the very choicest rosy tint. Robin laughed and said “Hal’s kind feelings have made him over-color his description of me, but he has not succeeded in doing as much when he described you to me.”

“He said nothing spiteful of me, I am sure.”

“No; he said you were one of the prettiest, sweetest little creatures in the whole world.”

“And you did not believe him?”

“No. I am never afraid to utter what I think. Besides, whatever I may fancy, it cannot affect the remark I have just made. The lady at Gamwell Hall, as you term her, has so different a style of beauty to yours, that it admits of no comparison with thine. You are each the most beautiful of your style. But this sounds like flattery, so I will change the subject.”



Grace May and Robin

“Pray do, and utter a little truth.”

“Thank you, fair damsel,” said Robin, with a smile. “Perhaps you will utter a little truth in answer to this question. How come you to throw yourself into my arms without so much as glancing at me to see if I was Hal, or your grandfather, or some griffin?”

“You are very rude. But I will tell you to save my own credit. You were humming an air which is always in Hal’s mouth. I heard you as I crossed the floor, and supposed at once that, as I never heard any other than Hal sing it, it could be none but him. I dare say you think me very forward in my conduct, but Hal and I have known each other from children; we are like brothers and sisters when we meet –”

“Pray make no excuse. I do not wonder at Hal thinking himself the luckiest and happiest dog in the world, nor that should your name be mixed up with every sentence he utters.”

“And yet you would not change with him,” said Grace, with a merry laugh.

“Why, that is –” Robin was rather embarrassed, he could not say he would, he felt so satisfied that Marian’s equivalent did not exist, and yet to tell a young damsel he’d rather have another than her, was awkward. His embarrassment lasted but a moment, and he answered quietly –

“My fair Grace, when we have placed our affections upon one object, are dazzled by its beauty, and glorify its work, we cannot bring ourselves to believe it can have an equal. Still, we can believe that others may be almost as fortunate as ourselves, and on looking upon you, I still repeat it. You might fancy ‘the lady of Gamwell’ to be fortunate when you look at me. Mind, this is but supposition –”

Grace nodded, and laughed.

“And yet, although you thought so, you would not change Hal for me.”

“Oh! No,” uttered Grace, quickly. “But I would not tell him so, it might make him vain.”

“Then you will not think me rude, or a blind bat, if I should not wish to change.”

“On the contrary, I shall like you the better, because you have the honesty to tell me the truth. Somehow I feel flattered by it, because you don’t think me fool enough to be deceived by smooth and honied words. And I will tell you, I think the lady at Gamwell fortunate, because you are quite as good looking as Hal – and I do think dear Hal so handsome. And I am told you can do wonders with your bow and arrow, and are very clever and knowing too, quite beyond your years.”

“I have to thank some good friend for this very kind report of me, but you will hear others speak differently. However, whatever my acts, I mean honestly and Grace May, if you should hear my name bespattered with foul words, before you judge of me, hear both sides. With regard to shooting with the bow, I can only say, as Little John says of his quarter staff, I am expert at it by great practice, and nature fit us all to be expert at some one thing. Having replied to your pretty speech in my favor, will you be good enough not to mention to any one that I am here. I wish my visit to be kept entirely secret to all but Hal.”

“Certainly. I wonder Hal does not come. He is always here before this.”

“He will be here, I have no doubt. Lovers are ever impatient when the appointment is not kept.”

“And very natural too, is it not?” asked Grace, with her laughing eyes sparkling like sapphires. Robin gave a very cordial assent, and the conversation was carried on in the same pleasant strain for an hour. At

length there was a hurried rap at the door, an air was rather loudly hummed, and Grace flew to admit the comer. This time it was Hal. The presence of Robin did not restrain the embrace, which was given and received with evident pleasure, and our hero was pleased to see that after the first pouting inquiry as to the cause of Hal's having exceeded his appointed time, Grace did not even affect to be angry with him, or the least disposed to quarrel, but treated him as she would have done, had he been exact to a minute.

"So, Robin, you are here, my bonnie bowman. How's Maude?"

"Not very well, but not ill."

"I am sorry she is not well. I shall come over and see her. I knew you were here, that is, I guessed you were. I'll tell you why. I left the castle early this morning, on an errand to the foot of the town. As I returned, on my way here, I heard a gossip say, as he hurried along, there was a quarter staff match about to be played between Geoffrey Gurthfeld – giant Geoffrey, as we call him – you know Geoffrey, Grace — well between him and a forester, so I thought I'd just see a bit of the fun."

"And I waiting here for you, expecting you, sir" interrupted Grace, with a pretty pout.

"Yes," returned Hal, "but I did not expect to stay a minute, so I ran up to the Flagon, where it was to be played, and sure enough there was a crowd assembled on the green, at the back of the hostel. I edged my way in, and just arrived in time to see the forester throw Geoffrey over his head. Geoffrey, Grace, think of that – threw him clean over his head. They were wrestling then, but there was some dispute, and to it they went again. Who should the forester be, but Little John, actually Little John, so I knew you were somewhere in the town."

I looked for you all over, but could not see you, and I would not speak to Little John, because he was so much engaged. Besides, I could not get near him. Well, I saw him throw Geoffrey on his back, and then they went to quarter staff. Now, I know what Little John can do with that, so I came away. I ran up to the castle to see if you had been there, but they said no."

"You did not inquire for me by name!" cried Robin, with a sudden start that startled Hal, made Grace jump, upset the ale, and produced a loud barking from a dog which, till then, lay extended asleep at the table's foot.

"No," replied Hal, when the confusion subsided, "Trust me for that, your name is still kept in strong remembrance there. Besides, the Baron returned yesterday, and were he to know you were within reach, he would provide for you for life, as he is about to do for some persons who were

brought in prisoners, the other night, by some crusaders who have just arrived from the Holy Land. They were vassals of the Baron's, and on their arrival in England, came direct here."

"They were attacked by outlaws as they came through Sherwood, but they defeated them, and made half a dozen prisoners. No, I merely asked if anyone had inquired for me, for I know you are bold enough to go up there, without the slightest fear of being captured and thrown into a dungeon. When I found you had not been, I guessed you would come here. Here I came, and here I found you."

"Those prisoners are the cause of my visit." said Robin. "There is one among them I must rescue, even Will Scarlet."

"He among them!" said Hal, with surprise. "How came he there?"

"He was of the party who attacked the crusaders. We mistook them for Baron Fitz Alwine and a party of retainers. We understood that he was to land at the coast nearest here, and come through Derbyshire, Mansfield, and so on, to Nottingham."

"You! uttered Hal. "Why, then it was your party who attacked the crusaders?"

"Even so," returned Robin.

"Whew!" replied Hal, in a long whistle. "Then it was you whom they talk about, when they mentioned one who picked them off with his arrows in such style! It turned out a hard affair for you, though."

"It did, indeed. My foster father was killed by an axe," replied Robin, with a sudden burst of grief.

"Poor Gilbert Hood killed – I am sorry for that," said Hal, with a tone of commiseration. And as he perceived how painful the mention of it was to Robin, he turned off the subject, and said, "And bonnie Will Scarlet a prisoner! I wish I had known it before."

"I must relieve him. I came here for that purpose, and I go not until I have tried hard to effect it, Hal. Therefore, I wish you to introduce me into the castle, and see what can be done for him. I know you will aid me in this, Hal! I have calculated upon you, and I am sure that you will not disappoint me."

"All that I can do for his rescue you may be sure I will, for his kindness to Maude. Many's the time she has told me of it, and I have only wished for the chance of returning it. Now I have it, I will do all that can be done for him. We will to the castle. I can easily take you in without question, but must still be cautious, for the Baron has returned, and he has begun his

old roaring, impatient tricks again – here, there, and everywhere, swearing and shouting, making the whole castle too hot to hold us and himself too."

"Is the Lady Christabel with him?" eagerly inquired Robin.

"No," returned Hal, "He has only brought his confessor with him. All the rest who attended him were strangers to us."

"You can learn nothing of Allan Clare?"

"Not a word – there is no one to ask. I have no idea even where my Lady Christabel is, nor has anyone else. I know she went to Normandy, and we only suppose that she entered a convent there. Probably Allan is aware of this, and keeps in the neighborhood."

"It is probable. I hope his love will be rewarded."

"And that of all true lovers, too," chimed in Grace May.

"I hope so most sincerely," exclaimed Robin, who had a personal interest in the wish.

"Well," said Hal, after bestowing a most affectionate look upon his sweetheart for her remark, "Whatever we have to do for Will Scarlet had better be done at once, for they are to be sent to London tonight, to be dealt with according to the King's pleasure."

"Ah! Then we must be stirring. I have to meet Little John at the drawbridge of the castle at three, to decide upon what course to pursue."

"It is near that hour now, so we had better be off. You will not quarrel with me for leaving you, Grace?" asked Hal, deprecatingly.

"Not on such an errand, dear Hal," returned her. "I was thinking that to the many good qualities you have taught me Robin Hood possesses, that of fast friend may be added, and shall I not be glad to see you also earn the title? Go, Hal. Think not of me while this affair is on foot, and Heaven grant you success."

"You are the dearest, best little angel that ever breathed!" cried Hal, in a paroxysm of rapture.

"And I have more reason than ever to believe you to be the luckiest and happiest dog in the world!" exclaimed Robin.

"There! Go away with you," said Grace, laughing, while a rosy blush mantled her fair cheeks and forehead. "You pay females generally a bad compliment by praising so highly a proper feeling in one of them." After a little more of this badinage, Hal gave Grace a quantity of kisses, Robin

bade her farewell, and they departed on their way to the castle.

As they drew near towards it, Hal suddenly exclaimed, “Look there, Robin! There is Little John and Geoffrey Gurthfeld going lovingly up to the castle together.”

“Ha!” cried Robin, “That is Little John! How’s this? What can be the meaning of it?”

“I’d wager my head Geoffrey has conceived a sudden affection for him, and is taking him up for a drinking bout. Geoffrey is a hearty fellow, but not over prudent. He knows little or nothing of the Baron, and if he commences any of his noisy roistering – for he is very uproarious over his cups – he will have the Baron at his collar. Now, if this should take place, and my Lord Fitz Alwine, as usual, get in a passion and strike Geoffrey, if Geoffrey is drunk he’ll throw my lord the Baron out of the window, as sure as my name is Hal.”

“We may trust to Little John to prevent that. He is very prudent when he has anything to do, and he will have need of it all, for the castle is quite strange to him. He will not throw away one grain of caution.”

“Look, Robin, he’s making signals to you – he sees you then?”

“Ah! I am to wait back – he’s going into the castle.” and Geoffrey, having rather increased their pace, arrived at the drawbridge and passed over it. “I have told him that I am going into the castle and will meet him in there,” said Robin.

“At what time?” inquired Hal.

“That we must leave to chance.”

“Very well then. Now you must with me – I can take you into the buttery, and I will ascertain by some means where the prisoners are situated, who has got the care of them, whether we can’t steal the keys, and liberate at least Will Scarlet. If we should succeed, we must again thread the subterranean passages, which I know as well, aye, better than the upper part of the castle, and once in the forest—”

“I’ll give them leave to catch us if they can,” said Robin.

“So I should think,” replied Hal with a laugh, then led the way to the drawbridge – it was lowered at his call. He passed over, followed closely by Robin, and once more our hero found himself within the walls of Nottingham Castle.

Little John had done his best to improve the opportunity Geoffrey’s company afforded him, and had not been in the castle half an hour ere he

found out where some of the prisoners were placed, and he fondly hoped that Will's dungeon might be one of them. Geoffrey was more communicative to him when he was in the castle than he was to his friends in the hostelry, and acknowledged that he had been guarding three that morning. "One of them quite a youth, rather a remarkable looking one," said he.

"Indeed!" said Little John, affecting indifference, "in what way?"

"In three things – his light red hair, his large blue eyes, and his sullen temper. The Baron has been in his cell, which is on the ramparts, this morning, while I was on duty, but I don't fancy he got a word out of him, for he came away raving, spluttering, and swearing, talking about hanging him on a tall gallows."

"That's poor Will safe enough," muttered Little John. "Do you know if he's wounded? Perhaps that may make him sullen."

"Not a bit – he's as sound as you are. No, it's the temper of the young colt."

"So you keep cells on the ramparts, eh? That is unusual."

"No, not in England. But I have seen dungeons in some of the castles in Normandy which almost make me shudder to think upon."

"I suppose there are cells in the ramparts at each wing?"

"Yes, but they are not all fit for use now. That youth I was just telling you of, he's got a comfort-able cell enough on the western wing."

"Is it possible – on the western wing?"

"Yes, you may see it from this loophole. There, that's it — you see a kind of grated loop to let in light, and a small door beneath it?"

"Ah, I see it! And he's put in there, is he?"

"Yes, he's there, as snug as anyone need be."

"And no chance of escape, I'll be bound — a barred door, a grated window, and sentries – ah, a strict watch!"

"St. Thomas à Becket direct you, forester! No, you are mistaken. If he had friends outside, he might get out, though I question if he could get away unperceived. The bolt of the door is on the outside and easily drawn, but unless they kept quite away to the eastern wing, they must be discovered."

"But why the eastern wing?"

“Oh! Because that is rarely frequented – it is not inhabited. It is haunted, and so nobody goes near it, therefore it might be well managed that way.”

“Ah! I see you are clever at these things. But with all that, on looking round at this castle, I am sure: You could not get them out without passing the drawbridge, and so at last you must be discovered.”

“Not I. One unacquainted with the localities like you, for instance, might, but I should not, for there are passages beneath which lead to the forest, though I’ll honestly acknowledge I don’t know my way through them. At the very extreme of the eastern wing, in one of the chambers which are uninhabited, there is a window wide enough for me to creep through. It is a short drop to the water in the moat. Beneath it is a buttress which is worn away by age, you might get down that, and in the water at its foot lies a huge block of wood. This you might straddle across and reach the other side safely and unperceived, for none of the lookouts command that spot. Once on the other side, of course you must trust to your heels. That’s the way an escape might be managed from Nottingham Castle.”

“It seems easy,” said Little John, musingly.

“And is no harder than it seems,” returned Geoffrey, with a smile. “But, good forester, I must leave you for a time. You will not mind being left here alone. I have a few duties to attend to. I shall be back anon. In the meantime, if you have any wish to stroll about the castle, you may amuse yourself, and, should anyone speak to or interrupt you, the password is ‘Freely and fairly’. You may, therefore, if you like it better than sitting here, stroll about, and do just as you like.”

“I am much obliged to you,” said Little John, as Geoffery left him.

“And you shall have something to be much obliged for, thou Saxon hound!” muttered Geoffrey, grinding his teeth, as he quitted the room. “The churl thinks me one of his Saxon serfs, I suppose, but he shall find me a true Norman. He shall not walk away and boast that Geoffrey Gurth — Pshaw! I spit at their Saxon name — that Geoffrey Vanterie was foiled and beaten by a Saxon dog! The fiend’s curse upon my failing limbs – to serve me such a trick!”

“I, that never bent to man before! But I have meshed him as completely as ever fish was. What, my stout forester has come to release his friends, eh? This is one of the knaves, I have no doubt, that attacked the crusaders in the forest. Well, he shall have a voyage in his Majesty’s service, if my knife fails to reach him. How eagerly he swallowed the bait! My life on’t! We shall find him at the western wing. I am glad, too, I directed him to the eastern wing, for it is quiet there, and he can have my

blade in his ribs without much ado. I will let him get a bit of a start, and then I will set the castle dogs on his track. When they have opened and are in full chase, I will stop the game short, and then, Saxon hind, pay you what I owe you. S'death! How sore my limbs are – Satan never spare me if I spare him!"

Mumbling and muttering, he pursued his way, resolving – after a short time had elapsed, and he was quite satisfied that Little John was on his way to the turret on the western wing – to lay the whole of his conversation and his speculations before Baron Fitz Alwine, expecting to be handsomely rewarded, and if not, he should at least have the satisfaction of being revenged.

Little John, when Geoffrey had departed, sat a few minutes and mused. He looked up every now and then to the turret which he understood to contain his cousin Will, and then in the direction Geoffrey had taken.

"I wish," he uttered slowly, "among the other things I have practiced, I had studied to read men's thoughts in their faces, I should never have exerted it more than just now. This Geoffery may be an honest, well-meaning fellow, but I don't think so. People are not so ready to be bosom friends with those who have foiled them in some favorite quality. For my part, if I didn't quarrel with the man who could beat me at quarter staff, I shouldn't be over friendly with him, though I wouldn't seek his harm. I don't think this Geoffrey's professions to me are all real."

"However, I shall see, and if they a'nt, why let him keep free of my arm and staff, for so sure as I am a Saxon, and that is very certain, I'll trounce him in such a way he shall never forget Little John while he lives. I got the situation of Will's prison clearly out of him, and yet I doubt him, he was too eager to describe it to be sincere. Still, I believe poor Will to be up there, and I may as well let him know I am near him. I am in the cage, and I must do the best to get out of it. Let me see – he did not tell me how I was to reach that western wing, but I dare say some of the corridors overhead will take me to it – at least, I will try."

So soliloquizing, off he started to endeavor to thread his way through the galleries and corridors above. After he had traversed several, he began to grow bewildered, and to fear that he had lost his way. "It is strange," he muttered as he proceeded, endeavouring to imagine the plan of the building, "how nature fits us for some things, others for things quite different."

"Now, place me in a forest, even a strange one, and I'll work a path to the point I want, as true as if one was cut for me, for there are signs and marks by which to guide your steps, and those who have passed their days in the green wood know how to use them. But in a place like this,

who's to tell which is the path, or what is to direct you. Passages here, rooms there, galleries and stairs in all parts, and yet I dare say there are many now who could go to any part as easy as I could go through Sherwood. Well, well, I suppose it's ordered so, or else it would not be."

He had rambled about for some time, now along a passage, then through a chamber, sometimes up stairs, sometimes down, and as all the rooms were connected with each other by corridors and stairs, in following one passage and its windings he arrived on one flight, then ascended to descend.

Shortly after this, he began to be weary of this perambulation, when he passed along a corridor which was terminated by a door. Up he walked to the door, it was just ajar. He opened it, walked in, and beheld himself in the sitting apartment of an elderly man, who was seated in a large chair, busily engaged in arranging some bags in a large box. As he made some noise in his occupation and Little John walked very lightly, his presence remained unnoticed for a short time.

Little John perceived that the little old man was not aware that he had a visitor, and he employed the time until the discovery was made, in speculating who this could be, and whether he should address him. He had the password. He could say he was a visitor going to take a stroll upon the ramparts and had lost his way, He had little doubt that he should be directed correctly, and then it rested with him to make such use of the time as to render futile any treachery Geoffery might be guilty of.

He had scarcely arrived at this conclusion, when the old gentleman raised his head to take one of a pile of money bags resting on the table, in order to deposit it in the chest. The form of Little John as he did this just caught his eye, and then he turned his full gaze upon him. The scrutiny was anything but satisfactory. It would have been unpleasant to anyone. He was putting away his money, flattering himself no one was near, had given the strictest orders he should not be disturbed the whole afternoon, when suddenly he observes a tall stout forester – outlaws were a species of forester – armed to the teeth, standing close to him. He started, as might naturally be expected, and opened his eyes as widely as they would go and then in a voice not very forte, being rather tamed by surprise, he demanded –

"Who are you? How come you here? What do you want?" He perhaps asked this mildly, because at the moment it flashed across his mind, that the ghosts of King Harold and William Rufus were reported to wander about the world in the garb of foresters, and this stranger had come before him without making the slightest noise, and in defiance of the orders he had given.

“I am a visitor to Geoffrey Gurthfeld. I have lost my way in the passages, and want to go upon the western wing.”

“Oh!” returned the little man with a groan of relief. “Hark ye, my fine forester, for you are the finest of your breed I ever saw. You’re a visitor to Geoffrey Gurthfeld, you tell me, and I dare be sworn are expert at your weapons?”

“As a forester should be,” returned Little John, wondering at the turn his speech took.

“Most like you have a mind to change a forest coat for a soldier’s accoutrements. I am the Baron Fitz Alwine, and gave orders no soul was to come near me this afternoon, but you have broken in upon me, by accident, it is true, and if you are not a fool it shall be a fortunate accident for you. Will you be a trooper in my service?”

“Oh! You are the Baron Fitz Alwine, are you?” said Little John, suddenly coming to a decision. Walking up to the door, he closed it and shot the bolt. He then drew from his belt a long strip of deer hide, which he held up to the Baron with a quiet laugh and said – “Do you see this?”

The Baron nodded, with something like misgiving in his aspect.

“This is a thong of deer hide; I am never without it, it always comes in useful. Now I have a favor to ask of you, and if you refuse it me, I’ll hang you up by the neck to that piece of furniture, without a moment’s hesitation, until you are dead. I can keep that door against twenty men with these weapons. I don’t mind losing my own life ‘cause you shall perish before me.”

“Insolent hound!” and a variety of other expressions rose to Fitz Alwine’s lips, but when he looked at the huge frame of Little John, they sunk very quickly down again, and in a faint voice he asked.

“What is it?”

“The release –”

At this moment a footstep came hurriedly along the corridor, stopped at the door, and a quick low tap was given. Little John, in an instant seized the Baron by the throat, drew his skean, and raised it ready to strike, at the same time he whispered, rapidly.

“One word of alarm, and it is your last! Answer as I shall dictate, without changing the form of a word, or I bury this in your heart! Ask who is there.”

“*Who is there?*” said the Baron.

“Geoffrey Gurthfeld,” was the reply.

“*What do you want?*” inquired the Baron, by Little John’s dictation.

“I have something important to tell your lordship.”

“*Come again in half an hour.*”

“I have the ringleader of these knaves who attacked your lordship’s vassals a few nights since, safe in my power.”

“Have you?” said Little John.

“*Have you?*” repeated the Baron, in a very doubtful tone.

“Yes, my lord; and I want to tell you the plan I have laid to catch him.”

“Do you?” said Little John.

“*Do you?”* repeated the Baron, with a suspicious glance at the skean, and a very devout wish that the plan could be speedily accomplished.

“Tell him to come in half an hour,” said Little John. The Baron did so.

“It will be too late.”

“*Never mind, knave, be gone, I am busy — in half an hour, I tell thee,*” repeated the Baron after Little John, feeling as if he would have given worlds to have the aid of stout Geoffrey at that moment, but there was such steady determination in the eyes of Little John, that the desire was hopeless, and every step which Geoffery took, as he went grumbling away, seemed to fall heavy on his heart, for he was again alone with the terrible forester. When the sound of the footsteps had died away, Little John said –

“Now, Sir Baron, I wish, and will have, the release of six prisoners taken by your vassals a few nights since in the forest. I take neither refusal nor equivocation. I demand their unconditional discharge and their departure, as well as my own, to be free and unwatched.”

“Why, I would consent, but –”

“But me no buts! Give me at once the means to set them free, or you perish on the spot, without a chance of escape. Consent, or die!”

“The alternative is not to be thought of, and therefore, since I must do so, being in fear of my life, why, I consent. Here’s my signet, which if you give to one of the sentries, and tell him the purport for which it was given you, he will direct you to the fellow who has the charge of them. Show him also this, and he will immediately release them.”

“That sounds plausible and well, my lord Baron. To my simple thinking, it is a marvelous round-about way of managing the affair. I am a plain man, used to forest ways. One rule of ours is never to go round about to gain an object, when it is to be had by going direct at it.”

“So, if you please – or if you don’t it is all the same – you will accompany me to the fellow who has the charge of my friends, order them to be released, and suffer them to depart free and unmolested.”

“You doubt me?”

“Inasmuch as you are a Norman mongrel, I will not trust you. But, to set aside any doubts of the faith of your word I might hold – and, believe me, they are neither slight nor unfounded – I will keep close to your side. The first symptom of treachery I perceive on your part, I will bury my skean in your heart.”

“For, look you, Sir Baron, in order that you may have no doubts of my word, we Saxons hold you Normans of no more account than wolves, or any wild beasts which we may think it a duty and a pleasure to destroy. Therefore, rest assured, should a necessity arise, I shall not have the slightest hesitation in keeping my promise.”

The Baron was in an awkward predicament. He was perfectly aware of the full amount of danger of the position in which he was placed. He was a rank coward, who had blustered and swaggered through life, so as to give himself the appearance of a redoubtable knight.

He had been in many battles, but generally as a commander. In the melée, his voice might be heard shouting and encouraging the men, at the same time he took every precaution for personal safety of which his situation would admit. And, in battles, the nature of which involved so much hand-to-hand fighting, everyone was too much engaged to notice what he was about, they heard his voice, and that was sufficient. He had policy and the fear of contumely strong enough to prevent him refusing to take any post in time of war, and he trusted to a sharp sight, a good suit of mail, and a stalwart war horse to keep him from danger.

Thus he had obtained the reputation of a brave and puissant soldier abroad, and at home his swearing, blustering, tyrannous conduct to his retainers and vassals, had kept up the delusion. All matters of personal conflict he begged leave to eschew, and took every care not to be drawn into them, if they could in any way be avoided.

In consequence of this there was always a party of his men who served him as a body guard, and were usually within call, but on this particular afternoon, when he was looking over his coffers — for in those days bankers did not exist — to see that during his absence no one had made

free with a private store, to prevent any greedy eye being fastened upon his gold, so as to create unlawful intentions, he gave orders of the strictest nature that he should not be disturbed or interrupted.

To provide, as well as he could, for the observance of this command, he had sent his body guard away, so that he was quite aware that if he were to summon assistance, Little John would be well able to prevent its being of the slightest service when it did arrive, by sending him on a visit to his ancestors, a journey he soon had a right to expect, but one which he had no desire of performing.

Being choleric himself, knowing that when he imagined he had achieved an object, if he found something had occurred completely to defeat it, there arose within him such a storm of fury and blind passion, that, whatever the impulse, he acted upon it. Regardless of all consequences, he judged others in the same light, and in consideration of this did not think it politic to tell Little John that the six prisoners, including Will Scarlet, were already out of his keeping, on their way to London, whither they were to be sent to be first punished, and then made to serve in the army, the ranks having been thinned terribly by the wars in Normandy.

Henry II, although at this time enjoying a profound peace, deemed it advisable to recruit his shattered forces with the stoutest men that could be obtained, and intimated as much to the different nobles who sent their vassals to the field, by offering a gratuity for the finest men, and for all additional to the number which each was bound to furnish. It was this object, principally, which brought Fitz Alwine to Nottingham, and which induced him, instead of punishing the prisoners, to send them as well looking as possible to London, and likewise to conciliate Little John upon their first meeting, with the hopes of sending him after them, willingly, if he could, if not, by compulsion. But the tables were turned, and he found himself as completely in our worthy friend's power, as he fondly anticipated to have had him in his. He thought it would, under all circumstances, be the best to temporize, and, if possible, get Little John in a quarter of the castle where speedy and efficacious aid could be obtained, and then he would teach my gentleman, he thought, what it was to offer alternatives to a Baron. It occupied him a very much shorter time to consider this, than we have taken to explain it, or the reader to peruse it.

When he had come to the conclusion, he said "Take your hand from my throat and sheathe your weapon; I will consider of your request!"

"There requires no consideration," uttered Little John, removing his hand as requested: "I am satisfied you have no wish to pay Satan the visit

you owe him, for he has been at your elbow long enough, but if you refuse me, you certainly will, as you will go unshriven. Now, Baron, we will on at once and, remember, one effort to deceive me or play me false, shall be met with instant destruction. I strike home and sure when I do strike. I bid you recollect this for your own sake, because if you do any little thing which I may even deem suspicious, I will act as though I was certain of your treachery – therefore beware! Here we go."

"However, I have another request to make which I expect you will answer truly. I shall ascertain if you do not, and provided you mislead me in that also, I will pay you another visit on the discovery, which shall not take so long a time as the present, inasmuch as there will be no words and one deed. So answer truly, as God hears you!"

"Give me your question."

"Where is your daughter?"

The Baron started, and opened his eyes with a marvelous expression of wonder.

"My daughter!" he faintly echoed.

"Aye, your daughter, the Lady Christabel?"

"Why do you ask it?"

"I do not choose to tell you; besides, I ask you to reply to my question, not question me. I repeat, where is your daughter?"

"It is a very strange question."

"I care not what it seemeth, answer me quickly. Time wears, and I am in no humor to be trifled with. Where is she?"

"In Normandy."

"What part?

"Why are you so particular in your inquiries?"

"In what part? – 'sdeath, answer!"

"I will not, until I know why you ask the question."

In an instant the huge hand of Little John was compressing the Baron's windpipe. First it tickled him, he screwed up his shoulders, and then it nearly choked him. He grew red in the face, his eyes almost protruded from their sockets. He spitted and spluttered. Little John released his hold, and then he gulped and gulped until he recovered his breath.

“In what part of Normandy is your daughter?” repeated Little John.

“In a convent at Rouen.”

“That will do, if it is true. Now, what has become of Allan Clare?”

The Baron’s brows darkened with an expression of suppressed rage; he ground his teeth and clenched his fists, but was rather afraid of making an outbreak. It took him a little while ere he could trust himself with an answer, his lips quivered and trembled so much, but he bit them rather forcibly, and said in a low voice.

“I do not know.”

“Liar!” exclaimed Little John, growing rather excited, “Thou dost know, and shall tell me. He has been away from us nearly six years, in quest of Lady Christabel, and I am satisfied thou knows much more of him than anyone else, therefore I am determined thou shalt give me up what thou dost know, if it be only to quiet the mind of a gentle one, who has day by day for years wept his absence. Thou hast seen him within six years?”

“Yes,” muttered the Baron, reluctantly.

“Under what circumstances?”

“Thou art not my confessor!” cried Fitz Alwine, chafing and straining his sense of hearing with the hope of catching the sound of approaching footsteps, but in vain. “I will no – that is, I cannot tell thee.”

“I’ll beat thee to a jelly if thou dost not tell me. I am thy confessor at present, therefore keep me no longer dallying here, if thou dost not wish sore bones. I am a rude forester, and always keep my word, particularly when I promise a beating.”

“Thou art a rude forester – that is, art unacquainted with gentle society. Thou should understand that Barons –”

“Are men in form like myself, but in bearing, upstart and arrogant, like thee. And being Normans, are tyrannous, treacherous, grasping villains. But that has naught to do with my question; proceed with your answer.”

“I have seen the stubborn, evil-minded –”

“No names but his own – you have seen Allan Clare?”

“Twice!” and the Baron stopped as if he had finished the subject, but if he fancied he had, his questioner did not, and after awaiting a few seconds, exclaimed “Go on! When, and what were the results of your meeting?”

“First, I caught him in my daughter’s chamber, in Normandy, persuading her to disobey me and fly with him, but I stopped that, and he had to thank his nimbleness for an escape. I placed my daughter in a convent with those whom I was satisfied would keep her out of his reach, and then I had a visit from him, which was the second time of my seeing him. He well timed it, as you have done. He caught me alone, and the insolent knave dared to threaten me, if I did not give up my daughter to him to wife. I laughed his proposition to scorn, and after this he entered the service of Louis, King of France. I have seen no more of him.”

“How come he to enter Louis’ service?”

“By an agreement between us.”

“What were the terms of it?

“That if at the expiration of seven years he brought a certain wealth, reinstated himself in his family property, which was confiscated by his father’s adherence to the cause of St. Thomas à Becket, I would consent to his union with my daughter. During the interval he was not to see her, and if he kept not his word, I was to dispose of her as I thought proper.”

“And how long is it since this occurred?”

“About three years.”

“Then there were no underhand means to make him enter the King’s service?”

“None! He entered it because it offered the best means of accomplishing his object. That is all I know of him.”

“Very well, that will do. Now for the release of the prisoners, and let me again warn you not to attempt any foul play — a suspicious movement will cause your instant destruction. Lead on!”

The Baron’s breast was like a pent up volcano, fire raged within, but there was little appearance of it without. He would have given a chest of treasure to have been behind Little John with a battle axe, and he gloated over the idea as it crossed his mind, but as it would have been bad policy to exhibit any such feeling, he led the way merely as if he was the victim of necessity. Before he quitted the room, he had the precaution to return to his money chest, the bags he had taken out, and fasten it. Then he prepared to lead to a part of the castle which he knew to be thickly studded with men-at-arms, and so turn the tables upon Little John.

But the latter was not going to walk so blindly into the trap which the Baron’s cunning had suggested. He knew he had everything to gain and not a chance to spare. He kept therefore his wit about him, and passing a

window, he suddenly stopped, seized the Baron by the shoulder, and exclaimed –

"This is not the way to the western turret!"

"No," said the Baron, who saw that he could not deny it, "but what of that?"

"Everything, since the prisoners, at least, a portion of them are confined there."

"Ha! Who told you that?"

"Even that same Geoffrey who came to tell you some marvelous news while we were in that room together."

"Geoffrey Vanterie?"

"No, Geoffrey Gurthfeld."

"Ah, well, 'tis all the same. He is a Norman who came over a few years since, but from some cause or whim, has taken a Saxon name."

"Out upon him for a graceless hound. It sits ill on the knave. St. Paul, but it is a Norman's nature to deal in deceit and trickery. He has done it for no good, I'll wager my staff. However, he told me that they were confined there, and of the means to escape."

"Oh! He did? I shall remember that, but he told you false – they are not confined there."

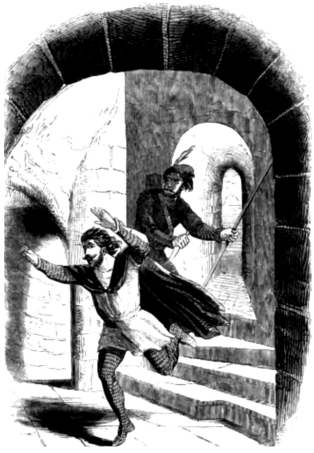
"Indeed! But we'll go and see. I shall be better satisfied if my own eyes tell me that he is not there."

At this precise moment the sound of footsteps met the Baron's ear. At the time Little John was taking a survey of the western turret from the window; the footsteps sounded as though there were several persons moving near the spot. The Baron felt assured. That it was but a short distance from him, that he was separated only by a flight of stairs from succor.

He was just beyond the reach of Little John's hand – what should hinder him darting off at full speed, trusting to fortune and legs, which fright would make nimble enough, to keep the lead until he was safely out of the reach of his clutches. His heart beat violently as he conceived the project.

And just as the forester turned his head, off he started at full speed. He had a small portion of corridor to get over, then came a short flight of stairs. Along he went as swiftly as his old bones would permit him, and, to

do him justice, the agility he displayed at his age, was somewhat surprising, if it had not been that extreme fear accelerated his speed beyond his natural capabilities.


Baron Escaping from Little John

He just reached the edge of the first stair as he felt Little John's hand upon his shoulder. He was preparing to descend the stairs two at a time, but the hand upon his shoulder, though it was but a touch, proved such an impetus, that vigorously ejaculating the word "ha!" he leaped the flight and would have done so, had the stairs numbered sixty instead of six. It was not much, however, and it gave him the start of his pursuer without impeding his flight.

When he reached the bottom he started on, expecting, of course, to meet his preservers, but, alas, he could not see them. He roared for help, and held on at his pace with increased vigor. Much to his amazement, and more to his horror, he could hear the footsteps receding as he advanced, and with no little speed, too. He roared again for assistance. Little John had leaped the stairs as well as himself, he could fancy that his toes trod upon his heels.

He galloped along with frantic haste, but notwithstanding his speed, the fingernails of his pursuer kept scratching his shoulder in efforts to obtain a hold. Every scratch induced a bound. He jerked his head and shoulders forward with convulsive energy. In the midst of his nervous agony he came plump upon a flight of stairs divided into two parts, one part being before him and the other at a right angle. He could not stop to consider how he should go down it, but spank down he flew, and down came Little John, nearly jumping on him.

Down he flew the second flight, in a distracted leap, but could not quite recover his legs so as to save himself from falling to the ground. He sprawled his full length, but was up again in an instant, and off at his most rattling pace. Little John, who met with the same accident, did not recover his equilibrium with an equal facility, therefore my lord the Baron got the start again, but his pursuer was soon in full chase, making more strenuous efforts than ever to overtake the fugitive. The distance gained by the accident was lessening with great quickness, in consequence of Little John's extra exertion.

Dash went the Baron through a chamber, the chase at his heels. He flung the door back but it was stopped, and the two went through the doorway nearly together; every nerve and muscle did Fitz Alwine strain to

keep ahead. Visions of sudden death filled his imagination. He beheld in fancy the skean glittering in the air, and anticipated the agony of its entrance into his heart. He shrieked for help; he tore along. A door, partly open, was before him; he jumped at it, struck it, it flew open; he saw two persons standing there. He leaped into the arms of one of them, roaring —

"Save me! Murder! Save me! Seize him!" and fell breathless, almost insensible, to the ground, shielded by him whose arms he had leaped into, and who now strode across his body, with uplifted arm, to save him from the knife of Little John.

"Away!" roared Little John, confronting him. "Away, or you shall meet the fate I intended him. Look to yourself!" and his broad hand seized the shoulder of the Baron's sudden protector with the intention of hurling him off or if he made a determined resistance, to stab him.

"How, now, Little John! Has rage so blinded you that you know not your friends? Hold your hand!" cried Robin Hood, for it was he whom the forester had so rudely seized. The sound of the voice instantly restored him to comparative coolness, and after a minute's survey, to see that his ears had not deceived him, he replied –

"So, Robin, we are well met, and 'tis lucky for yonder miserable reptile that it was you. No other hand could have saved him."

"Who can it be you thus pursue to the death?" inquired Robin, casting a glance at the unfortunate noble, who lay extended with his face to the ground.

"It is Baron Fitz Alwine," returned Hal, who was with Robin when the Baron rushed into the room.

"Ha! The Baron! I am glad I have saved him. He will answer me a few questions respecting something I have a great desire to know," observed Robin.

"You may spare yourself the trouble of asking; I believe I have gathered all the information from him you can have occasion to seek; I know all about Allan Clare, and where the prisoners are. I was about to compel him to order their release. We were on our way to do it, and I had threatened him with instant death, if he attempted to play me false. He passed his word that he would release them, but, Norman-like, took the first opportunity to break it."

"On our way to the western turret, where they were confined, he suddenly darted from me, shouting for help, intending, I suppose, if he was lucky enough to get it, to make short work of me. He just got to your side in time, for in another minute he would have been in the next world."

The Baron uttered a faint groan.

“He was playing you false all through, for he sent the whole of the prisoners to London this morning, while you were at the hostel.”

“How?” roared Little John, with rage and wonder.

“It is truth. Hal of the Keep here has just ascertained it, and we were on our way here to search for you, in order to get out of this lion’s den. When we heard you approach, not knowing who you were, we retreated, until the Baron’s calls for help determined us to return and see the cause of it, and we encountered you here,”

The Baron pricked up his ears on hearing this, and raised his head just to assure himself that it was Hal of the Keep. The scrutiny satisfied him, and he laid his head down again, determined to remember him if he got safe away. However, it was not done so quietly but Hal noticed the act, and, as he had nothing to learn of the nature of the Baron’s remembrance of those he thought traitors to him, he said –

“The Baron only feigns insensibility. He has recognized me, and will not forget me for being your friend.”

“Not if I can in any way avoid it,” muttered the Baron to himself.

“Well, it appears we can do nothing of any service to ourselves or friends by stopping here, and as you, Hal, seem to doubt the wisdom or safety of your stay, you had better with us, and we will away at once.”

“Oh! But there is one thing,” exclaimed Little John, “that will be both of service to us and our friends – it is, to put an end now directly to this old Norman mongrel who lays here shamming the death I will give him in reality.”

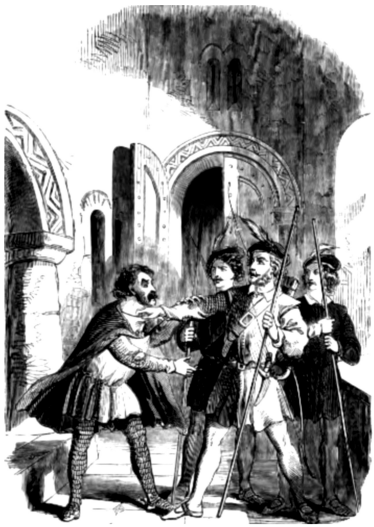
In a second the Baron was upon his legs; both Robin and Hal, immediately they witnessed his movement, sprang to the doors and secured them. The old man’s teeth chattered, and his eyes rolled wildly, as he observed the act, and for a moment he began mumbling an *Ave*, jumbling a *Paternoster* with it, then he broke out in a whining voice to Little John —

“Good forester – honest yeoman! Be not so blood thirsty – so very bloody minded towards me! I have done you no harm that you should take my life. Your friends attacked my men, and slew many of them without provocation. The prisoners whom they took, instead of being hung as they on – that is, as they des – I mean, as they might have expected, were spared, and sent to London today. I did not know you were coming to obtain their release, how should I? You did not let me know you were coming.”

“I have but done as you yourself would have done, had you been situated as I was. Then be just – do not carry your evil intention into effect. Shew me courtesy, and I swear that you and your friends shall depart free and unmolested.”

“Even Hal of the Keep, who has turned traitor to me, and, as an unfaithful servitor, should meet the severest punishment, I will pardon, and still retain in his present post. Therefore, good forester, as thou hast boasted of the simplicity of thy forest ways, and of the justice which guides all thy actions, forget not its stern rules in my case, and become all at once unjust where thou hast the greatest cause to exercise thy justice!”

The three auditors surveyed him while he uttered this whining appeal, with one expression of disgust, and could scarce help laughing as they saw him prick up his ears, even while he was speaking, with the hope of hearing the approach of some of his people, as a hound is seen to do when he is anxiously expecting the arrival of his meat. Little John replied to him.


Recapture of the Baron

“Baron Fitz Alwine, if I act with a strict observance of our forest laws of justice, your life is forfeit.”

“No, no, no!” ejaculated his lordship, quickly.

“Be silent, and hear me to an end. Six years since you caused this youth’s foster father’s cottage to be burned to the ground, and his foster mother was slain by one of your men. The husband, he, and I, swore to be revenged upon the perpetrator of this outrage – you! – and what should prevent my now retaliating upon you, and fulfilling my oath by causing your death? According, therefore, to your own request, that I should not forget the stern rules of justice, prepare at once to die, for die thou shalt.”

“Have mercy!” he cried, in the most abject tones, almost raising his voice to a shriek.

“Peace!” cried Little John, seizing him by the shoulder, “You only hasten your death by outcries. Ere a hand could be raised in your behalf, even were a score of retainers by your side, I would bury this knife in your heart, therefore, be silent, and prepare to die with decency.”

“I cannot – I am not prepared – do not kill me, do not!”

“Hold!” said Robin. “In consideration of the feelings of another, I forego my determination for revenge – that other is thy daughter – of whom thou art utterly unworthy to be the father. Promise me that you will bestow her hand upon Allan Clare, and your life will be spared.”

“Anything! Everything!” ejaculated the Baron, with intense eagerness.

“But will you keep it?”

“As I hope to be saved!”

“Let him live, Little John, his oath is registered in heaven. If he breaks it, he consigns his soul to everlasting damnation.”

“I believe he has done that long ago,” returned Little John. “You may consider yourself absolved from your oath, Robin Hood. I cannot reconcile my conscience to let him escape.”

“Nay, let him live, you have almost frightened him to death.”

“Yes, indeed, you have almost frightened me to death,” ejaculated the Baron.

“Well, Robin, on your account I will not kill him.”

“Kind forester, many thanks,” interrupted the Baron, with a groan of relief.

“No, I’ll not kill thee, but thou shalt remember my visit to Nottingham Castle.”

The Baron looked at him with a sort of distracted air, as if to inquire what new outrage he was about to perpetrate. He was not long left in the dark, for Little John produced his thongs of deer hide, which he had already shown him, and with a speed and dexterity quite surprising, particularly to the Baron, he pinioned his arms, and bound them firmly to his side. The unfortunate noble instantly felt a recurrence of his former fears.

“You are not going to slay, you said you would not – you will not break your word?”

“No. I do not mean to slay thee, unless thou’rt very noisy. Be still, and thou wilt not be hurt.”

At the Baron’s side hung a poniard. Little John drew it from its sheath, and its owner’s countenance, at the same moment, performed a hideous grimace.

Robin interposed — “You will not break your word?” he said.

Little John looked at him sternly for a moment, and then laughed.

“No,” he replied, “You ought to know me better. Cannot you guess, that when folks are given to noise, a poniard’s hilt, for want of a better, makes a good gag?”

“Truly,” Robin replied, laughingly. “I have little doubt but his lordship will esteem it such upon a trial.”

“Save me from this, also, good youth. I will remember thee most gratefully, my daughter shall be at thy disposal; if thou wilt, thou shalt have –”

Further speech was prevented by the forcible application of the hilt of the dagger to his mouth. In another minute he was gagged, and Little John prepared to lead him from the chamber.

“You know this castle well, I suppose?” said he to Hal. “Is there many likely to pass the way we came hither, down that flight of stairs?”

“No, very few. There is a more connected entrance from the northern wing, and it is more frequented.”

“That will do – follow me – I shall need the assistance of both.”

He advanced, leading the Baron, as if he was taking a lamb to the sacrifice. Robin and Hal followed, until they reached the flight of stairs, already spoken of as divided into two parts, and, when there, the leader stopped, detached the sword belt of Fitz Alwine from his shoulder, and affixed it to the back of his waist belt, which was shifted beneath his arms. When this was completed, he lifted the Baron as if he had been a child, and told Robin to take the sword belt and buckle it tightly to the balustrades of the topmost flight. This was done, and then the miserable captive was launched into the air, after the precaution was taken of ascertaining whether the two belts were sufficiently strong to bear his weight. There he dangled, swaying to and fro, comparisonless, much to the amusement of Robin and Hal, and to the satisfaction of Little John, who surveyed his victim with intense scorn.

“So would I serve every Norman hound of them all, had I the chance,” he said bitterly, “and would to Heaven every Saxon thought as I do, there should not be one rapacious wolf of the herd left to tell their fate.”

“I think we had better quit the castle,” said Hal, “ere it is too late – we hazard our safety by remaining, and at the same time, no object is to be gained.”

“I am ready,” said Robin.

“I should like to meet Geoffrey – hang his ugly Norman name I would show him how a Saxon churl can trounce a Norman wolf.” said Little John, grasping his weapon tightly.

“I thought you were friends,” said Hal; “I saw you come together – he introduced you into the castle.”

“He is a lying, deceitful Norman reptile – a huge hump of knavery, to whom I owe a good round sum, only to be paid with my quarter staff.”

“Well, I hope we shan’t meet him. If that is the case, he could effectually prevent our departure; he has the men-at-arms under his command, and would turn them out upon us in a disagreeably quick time. He prides himself upon his dispatch in case of need.”

“He would not be quick enough to avoid my crab tree staff.”

“It will be our most prudent course, however, to avoid his,” said Robin; “You will most likely meet him some other day, when you will have a better chance of paying him for any treachery he may have committed towards you. But surrounded by his fellows, stung by his recent defeat, he would not give you the chance now. Therefore, I am for following Hal’s advice, and depart at once, taking care we do not meet him.”

“I don’t fancy there’s much chance of that, for he believes me to be wandering about by the western turret, and I have no doubt is laying wait for me,” returned Little John.

“I am glad to hear that,” said Hal, “for it increases our chance of escape. Follow me, I know every room, turning, and winding in this building, and we will soon be away from it.”

Bidding the Baron, who was dangling to and fro in the most wretched plight – adieu, they followed Hal through various apartments, until they reached the courtyard in safety and unnoticed. To pass the postern, and by the drawbridge to the town, was the next thing, and the most hazardous to be done, in case Geoffrey should have left word with the warder not to suffer Little John to pass.

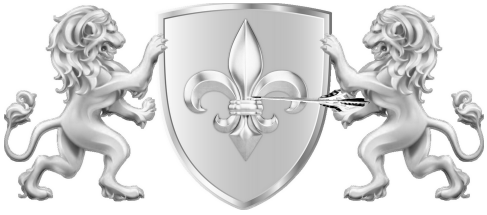
But it seems that, desirous of exhibiting his superior astuteness, and manage the whole affair with no more aid than absolutely necessary, he had not even thought of the precaution of ordering that no one should quit the castle but those connected with it. He had posted men at different stations, expecting to make his capture in fine style, but he reckoned without his host. At the very time he was on his way again to the Baron’s apartments to consult him about Little John, that personage, accompanied by Robin Hood and Hal, were out of the castle, making towards the Mays’ residence at a brisk pace.

Geoffrey reached the Baron's door, he knocked, received no answer, knocked again, with like effect; called in a low voice, heard no response, called louder, only to hear the echo of his own voice. Then he thought fit to try and open the door, it was fastened. He knocked loudly, visions of foul play crossed his imagination. He applied his shoulder to the door and burst it open, no Baron was there – nothing looking in confusion, yet somehow the room appeared to him to bear the evidence of a deed of violence. He searched about, there was nothing particular but a large chest by the side of the table. He quitted the room, and called aloud, "My Lord Baron! My Lord Baron! Where is your lordship?"

But his lordship did not reply. Being assured that he had not quitted his room by the route he had approached, he branched off in the direction his lord had really taken, and following the track, soon had the pleasure of seeing the Baron swinging away, half dead with terror and exhaustion. Being a very strong man, Geoffrey released him with almost as much ease as Little John had raised him. Once only an accident nearly occurred: While unfastening the buckle, the weight of the Baron caused it to slip through.

With great rapidity, and if Geoffrey had not suddenly seized him by the hair, he would have fallen, and a broken limb, if not a neck, must have been the consequence. Although it added to the torture, yet the act saved him; and instead of resenting it when Geoffrey had removed the gag from his mouth, he was glad to seek the support of his arm, and be led gently to his room.

Ere an hour subsequent to this had elapsed, Hal had taken a farewell of his intended little wife, and with Little John and Robin, was threading his way towards Gamwell, through Sherwood Forest.



Chapter 5

SWEET smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
And desolation saddens all thy green.
Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin, all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mould'ring wall;
And, trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away thy children leave the land

----- Goldsmith

Now comes the brunt, the crisis of the day!
They clash – they strive – the Caliph's troops give way
And now they turn – they rally – at their head
A warrior –
Bold, as if gifted with ten thousand lives,
Turns on the fierce pursuers' blades, and drives
At once the multitudinous torrent back,
While hope and courage kindle in his track;
And at each step his bloody falchion makes
Terrible vistas, through which victory breaks!
Right towards Mokanna now he cleaves his path,
Impatient cleaves.

----- T. Moore

This journey had been attended with no more success than its predecessor, six years previous, and if not so disastrous in its effects while occurring, yet in the events subsequent, it proved of equal magnitude in the misfortune it involved.

Baron Fitz Alwine, when recovered from the fright and fatigues of his adventure, made every inquiry respecting Little John and Robin Hood, whom six years had so altered as to prevent his recognizing them. It was soon discovered that Hal had decamped, and upon Geoffrey devolved the task of finding out who the forester was he had introduced, what he was, and whence he came, his life was to be the penalty of his ill success, for bringing a stranger, and such a one into the castle, and thereby causing the unpleasant adventure to his noble lord.

The stalwart retainer, anxious to be restored to favor, used every exertion in the shape of rigid inquiry in the town, especially among those who had witnessed the conflict between himself and Little John. After many rambling stories, conjectures, and suppositions, he made out that

Sir Guy of Gamwell, one of the keepers of Sherwood Forest, had a deputy answering the forester's description to a turn, – that *He was called Little, though his limbs were large*

That he resided at Gamwell Hall, in the village of Gamwell, and that, in all probability, from the description given by the crusaders, he was the ringleader in the attack upon them. The man who had given him this information likewise told him that he had been to many of the rustic fêtes in Gamwell, for he had a cousin living there. And there was a youth named Robin Hood also dwelling with Sir Guy, famed for his extraordinary feats of archery.

With this intelligence, Geoffrey hastened to Fitz Alwine, laid it before him and the account agreeing with the supposition he had formed, particularly as he learned that Hal's foster sister, Maude, the "Jezebel" who had taught his daughter all sorts of mischief – that of disobedience to his will not being the least – also resided there, he was quite satisfied that this same Little John and Robin Hood were the perpetrators of the outrage. Having arrived at this conclusion, he departed to London to lay an exaggerated account of the outrage before Henry II.

It was a period during which, taking advantage of a peace, Henry had diligently attended to bettering the internal condition of the kingdom, listened attentively to all accounts of ravages, outrages, or robberies, and, as far as the state of the times would admit, making the offenders prisoners, and punishing them with the utmost severity. Of this the Baron was fully aware, and likewise, that whatever punishment was awarded, would be inflicted more summarily by Henry than if he had taken the law into his own hands. This was rendered more certain by several recent cases, in which Henry had made terrible examples, where the provocation was of a much slighter nature.

The Baron sought the King's presence, related the whole affair with highly magnified additions, and produced his prisoners, broken weapons, and two or three of his vassals as evidence. The name of Robin Hood struck the King as familiar to his ear, and, upon inquiry, found it was the same youth who had set up a claim to the Earldom of Huntingdon, claiming to be a lineal descendant of Waltheof to whom the Earldom was granted by William the First.

But his claim had been characterized as impudent and insolent, while the Abbot of Ramsay and Baron of Broughton was secured the title and possessions.

When Henry ascertained that the claimant and aggressor was one and the same person, he awarded, on behalf of the Baron, that Robin Hood should be outlawed, that Sir Guy of Gamwell's estates should be

confiscated, himself and family driven forth, Little John, and as many of the inhabitants of Gamwell as might be suspected of having been partakers of the fray, to be hung without benefit of clergy, and their goods and estates to become the property of the King.

It so occurred that an old friend of Sir Guy's happened to learn this, and sent a messenger, post haste, to Gamwell, with the intelligence. It created as much alarm as indignation. The news spread through the village, and the villagers thronged to Sir Guy to make certain that the common rumour was not, as usual, a common liar. The distressing tidings were confirmed, and it only remained for a speedy decision in what way to meet the impending blow. Old Sir Guy, with true heartiness of spirit, determined to defend his little castle to the last, and die rather than surrender, while the villagers, with one voice, declared they would stand by him to the death.

But Sir Guy had also a good estate in Yorkshire, which he held by another title, and it was the advice of Little John and Robin Hood, combined, that he should, with his family, quit Gamwell Hall at once and proceed to his place in Yorkshire. Because, in the event of his holding out Gamwell Hall against the King's troops, not only his own life, but the lives of the female members of the family might be involved in the conflict.

"I care not for the few years, it may be months or days, which may be taken from this withered frame," said the Old Saxon, dashing an intruding tear from his cheek. "I am but like the old forest oak, which bears a few leaves liable to be scattered away by the first storm of wind that blows and what matters if it so happens? It has had the glory of the sunshine of spring and summer, and the last leaf as it falls trembling to the ground amid the howling tempest, is the type of what must soon have come if the storm had not arisen. Let my children go, I would not have them stay."

"But on this spot I was born, and on this spot I will die! Nothing can shake my determination, the hearth of my ancestors shall be my resting place in my death, as it was at my birth. They, staunch and true Saxons, would have died defending it, why should their descendant degenerate from the old spirit? No! Let my girls away. My boys will not give up the old roof that has sheltered them for many years without a struggle and should the worse come to the worst here, they can protect their sisters in their future home. Say no more to me, I am resolved upon it."

All arguments were vain, and when it was found to be useless to attempt to alter his determination, the efforts were given up. As no time was to be lost, attention the most undivided was turned to the departure of the Lady of Sir Guy, her daughters, Marian, and Maude, and the female servants of the establishment. A body of the most resolute and hardiest of the villagers, devoted to the old knight's service, prepared to escort them

with all the moveables of value, which it was thought necessary to remove. When everything was completed, farewells were exchanged of the most affecting nature, just ere they departed.

Robin Hood hoped to say a few words to Marian alone. She had not yet appeared, and he shrewdly guessed that it was caused by a desire to give him the opportunity he so much coveted. He, therefore, hastened towards the spot where he hoped to meet her, but before he had reached it he was arrested by the hand of Maude, who came from a room equipped for her journey, with eyes swollen with recent weeping

"Robin," she cried, in a voice teeming with emotion, "I was about to seek for you. I have a few things to speak ere we part, perhaps never to meet again."

"Nay, Maude, think more cheerfully," returned he. "We shall soon be all together again."

"I much doubt it, Robin. I know too well the danger of this strife, these violent contests, to even hope for the best, albeit, hoping is a comfort in the direst despair, and ere we part, I would tell thee how deeply I have felt all your kindnesses, so constant –"

"Pray, Maude, do not talk of anything of the sort. You forget the contract we made to be brother and sister six years ago. Aye, and have you not been the kindest sister in the world to me during that period, and do I not love you more and more every day for it?"

"Love me?"

"Aye, as a brother should love a sister who makes his happiness hers," said Robin Hood, rather embarrassed by the suddenness with which Maude asked the question. "And have you not at one and all times done this? To be sure you have; and, therefore, should I not love you thus?"

"You have acted always so as to make me believe so, and fondly, truly, I believe you do. It is this belief that encourages me to utter that which I should otherwise be fearful of doing. You know – you must have seen – dear Robin". She hesitated a moment, and then burst into a passion of tears.

"Why, Maude – how's this? You little foolish creature. You have a heart like a timid fawn. Come, courage, courage, Maude! I will listen quietly, and judge nothing harshly, you may be assured."

"I am foolish – very weak," said Maude, looking up, and trying to smile through her tears. "I know not why this is – I used to be strong-minded, thoughtless, and careless; but I am much changed, it is right, and so it

was to be, I suppose, so I will not complain, but proceed to what I have to utter at once. Robin, your kindness to me created in my bosom for you a feeling surpassing a sister's affection, I tested it in all ways, and found that my first conjecture was true. I strove in vain to check it – to stifle it. I knew you loved another, and that other was far more worthy of your love than I am, or could ever hope to be. I knew, too, that you saw I loved you, and I tried to make that the strongest incentive to regard you only in the light of a loved brother. Indeed I struggled hard for this not so much on my account, as upon that of another, whose devoted attentions to me – I might almost say, worship of me – demanded a return, such only as an undivided heart could give – I tried to love him better than you. I suffered my mind to dwell upon his kind and amiable qualities, without reference to his personal ones. It seemed a vain effort, but experience has proved it was not so vain as I had imagined – absence has helped me more than I could have believed to have been true."

"You are speaking now of Will Scarlet?" interrupted Robin, eagerly. "And you find that you love him dearer and better than you did anyone before, or ever will anyone again?"

"Nay, I do not say that."

"No, but you mean it. Hurrah! Now would I give my bow, my sheaf of arrows, and foreswear the merry green wood for a year, even if it were sunny weather the whole twelve-month, that my bonnie old friend Will was here to hear it."

Maude strove to deny that she went so far in her love for Will as Robin tried to persuade her she did, but she confessed that by suffering her thoughts constantly to dwell on him, she had come to love him, and now desired to learn all that Robin knew respecting his fate, for she had not the courage to ask anyone else. He gratified her in a few words as possible, keeping the reality from her, and making his absence appear a matter of little moment, creating a hope that he would soon be at her side, once more to hear his protestations, and acknowledge, if she saw proper, the kindness she herself bore towards him. Robin then kissed her tenderly, and as she hastened away to take her place in the little cavalcade, he proceeded on his way to Marian.

Having entered the room in which he expected to meet her, he beheld her standing by the window, gazing abstractedly upon the landscape before her. At his entrance she turned her head, and advanced to the center of the room.

"Dear Marian," he said, hastily approaching, and taking her hands, I have sought you, ere you depart that I may speak upon some things of much import to me, and of some little to you. It is not likely that we shall

meet again for a time – that in itself may be short – but which, to me, must appear of painful length. I cannot bear that the words I have to say should remain unspoken for such length of time, and, under the circumstances, I know of no time more fitting than the present to speak them, providing you will listen to them."

"I will gladly listen to anything you have to say, Robin," she replied, looking fondly in his face.

"Thanks, many thanks. You know, Marian, I love you with all the devotion and energy of which love is capable, and with which it can be invested."

"Your actions lead me to believe you do."

"Most truly! Be the Holy Mother my witness! Nor would I swerve the breadth of a hair from the line which the possession of that feeling should teach me, to preserve in all my acts to you, or in any way relative to your entire happiness."

"I never doubted it. Why this prelude – to what does your observation tend?"

"I hardly know how to continue, for fear you should impugn my motives. Yet a moment's reflection tells me that you will not"

"Pray continue; you alarm me. Your serious countenance, your grave manner, and this strange commencement, make me fear that I have yet to learn some evil worse than any that has already befallen me."

"Nay, be not alarmed. There is no cause for any such feeling. What I have to say refers only to myself and to you, and if I feel any hesitation in uttering it, it is because I cannot stifle a selfish feeling which, spite of all my efforts, will reign in my heart; nevertheless, it must be spoken, so I will no longer delay it. We are about to part – it may be forever –"

"Oh! No, no, no –"

"I do not say so to increase the sadness which, dear Marian, you must feel, in common with those who have so long inhabited this sweet place, at parting from it, but I know that, while one stone clings to another, it will be defended, and while I have life, I quit not those who stand in its defense. The same Providence which has carried me unscathed through so many dangers, will not desert me in the impending one. But, setting that question aside, I cannot forget the situation in which I am placed."

"I have been the means, unintentionally, it is true, of bringing grief upon my uncle's house. I am, by the King's decree, outlawed. Every man's hand is ordered to be turned against me. I am liable to be hanged on a

branch of the first tree, or upon the gallows of any town by the common hangman. I am out of the pale of the law. I am, henceforth, homeless, an outcast, and a wanderer."

"Marian, you have plighted your troth to me, have sworn to be mine in good or evil, in weal or woe, but deeply as I prize the value of that oath – and no one but myself can fathom half the depth of that feeling – bitterly as I feel my degradation, its anguish becoming a thousand times more keen in thy loss – from that oath I absolve – I release you – fully and entirely. I would not have thee bound to one who is reduced below the condition of a serf, and placed upon a level with the vilest wretch in existence. I have, therefore, sought thee, Marian, to take a last farewell of thee; to renounce all hope of thy becoming mine; to leave thee as free in choice and hand as though we had never met, and to ask only that thou wilt think sometimes kindly of Robin Hood, even though he be an outlaw."

"And hast thou so mean an opinion of her upon whom thou hast placed thy affections that thou should suppose she would take an oath to be true in weal or woe, and upon the first appearance of an evil she would shrink from its burden? I thought that thou hast known me better! I could not have imagined thou wouldst have so much wronged me!" As Marian uttered this, her eyes flashed, her breast heaved, her cheek was flushed, and she looked the impersonation of wounded dignity.

"I never doubted thy willingness, thy ready acquiescence to share any burden my miserable fate might cast upon me," said Robin, again taking the hand which in her momentary anger she had hastily withdrawn. "I know well thy nature would prompt thee to carry out thine oath to the letter, not so much because it is thy oath, as loving me, you would cheerfully bear whatever good or evil were mine. And I feel myself justified in saying this, for well I know, didst thou not love me even as I do thee, thou wouldst have scorned to have given utterance to that oath, or to words which might have inferred an affection which thou did not feel. It was with a full knowledge of this that I would take a farewell forever of thee, or at least until such times as my fortunes may so improve that I may again seek thy hand without endangering thy happiness. You had already determined that you would not wed until the return of your brother Allan to you, unless you had certain intelligence of his death abroad. You will keep this resolve, and 'tis easy to imagine him away, even if he returns, until I may be in a condition to claim you. It will rob our separation of much of its anguish, and will be a fond anticipation I at least will cherish of the future."

"And do the thoughts of separation sit so lightly upon you?"

“Can you think they sit lightly upon me, Marian? Do you think I feel lightly the brand which levels me with the common robber? Or the thoughts of parting with you forever comes not as the bitterest, most acutely painful blow I have ever borne? But that I am satisfied I do not deserve this outlawry, I would at once rid myself of a life, the keeping of which may prove some trouble to me. As I know the decree unjust, I will live and bear it – must bear it. But you, dear Marian, unused to toil, privation, and hardships which I cannot enumerate, would justly think me selfish, to a criminal degree, did I persuade you to share them with me. Believe me, the agony of parting from you, great as it is, would not be so keen as to witness you the sharer of miseries, whose greatest wretchedness would consist in their being partaken by one who would, but for me, have lived in ease and happiness. This feeling alone, dear Marian, has induced a desire in me to part from you. Do not seek to change me – I can bear my situation with cheerfulness, if I know that you are in comfort and safety.”

“Robin, if I loved thee not before, I should do so now, after what thou hast said. Yet I ought not to feel surprised, for at all times thou hast shown me one uniform kindness, utterly regardless how much it might, at any time, compromise thine own personal happiness, and in return I can only offer a heart sincerely and truly thine — devoted to thee now more than ever, because the time has come when thou canst appreciate one heart fervently attached to thee. Thou hast done me the justice to believe my affection is not that which flourishes only in genial circumstances, but one which, like the clinging ivy, will bloom as green and freshly in the gloomiest shade as it may in the brightest sunshine. Believe, Robin that it will remain so while I live, without change, unless a change in thee, in thy worth, should create it – but this I fear not.”

“I am thine now and forever while on this earth, and would be with thee in thy grief and in thy mirth, as in thy sadness and gaiety, nor cast one sigh at any strait, however painful, so thou wert by my side. But I can see the expediency of our separation, and consent to it with a painfulness which you can measure by your own feelings. Yet our parting must only be for short intervals. Whenever you are enabled, without danger to yourself, to see me, do not, I pray thee, let the opportunity pass. My brother may soon return. He may be enabled to get this cruel decree reversed, and we may yet be happy.”

Robin smiled mournfully, and shook his head. “We will hope for the best,” he said. “My resolve is taken. I have determined upon the line of conduct I shall pursue. Circumstances may tend to give me a name foul in the mouths of talking fools and currish Normans, but, Marian, believe them not. As you love me, think not ill of me, whatever you hear, unless you know me to commit a vile act, or I should acknowledge to you that I

had done one — for, by our Holy Mother! I swear that, whatever deed you may challenge me with committing, I will acknowledge to you the truth, if I have done it, truly, without addition or softening."

"What is the course you intend pursuing?"

"Do not question me, dearest Marian. I believe it to be honest in its purpose, however it may appear, or I would not follow it. Will that suffice thee?"

"It will, but bear in mind, Robin that the best and most honest resolves are sometimes, by adventitious circumstances, changed in their effect, becoming actually criminal, where it was originally intended to be no more than strictly just."

"I believe so, but I must be guided by, as I am the victim of circumstances; still, I will use every effort to prevent the effect being opposed to the motive which created it. I know that all my acts will bear the odium of outlaw stamped upon them, and will be viewed through that medium. I do not fear, however, that you will look on my deeds with the prejudiced eye of one who knows me only by that vile epithet, and will live on in the hope that the day will come when I shall have the reward of my privations and trials in the possession of thee, and of days which will pass in calm and quiet."

"I will pray that it may be so, Robin, and will hope that it may come to pass. Matins nor vespers shall come, or go without the most earnest prayers for it."

"Heaven bless thee, Marian! I will no longer detain thee, they await thee at the porch. Farewell! Mayst thou be as happy as I can wish thee."

Marian had thought to part bravely — and he had equally determined to do so — in the hope that, by displaying no weakness, she might bear more cheerfully a separation which he expected would be forever. But when he twined his arms round her, and his voice trembled as he repeated the word 'Farewell!' it was then her spirits gave way, and she burst into a torrent of tears, burying her face on his shoulder, sobbing as though her heart would break. He felt the hot tears throng into his eyes, although he strove hard to keep them down. He would have spoken words to soothe her, but there was an ache in his throat – a convulsive pain – as though he must choke, and he could not force a word out. He bit his quivering lip, he pressed her passionately to his breast – and bowed his head in the bitterest grief, suffering the scalding tears to rain down his cheeks, from sheer inability to check them.

The hour of parting was one of agony to both. The mental anguish they had the whole of their preceding years endured, condensed into one hour, would not have equaled the present in suffering. To each, it was the

separation from the last tie which bound them to the world. Marian, an orphan, her brother away, left among, comparatively, strangers, having be-stowed her first love – a love to which might be added the affection for parents and brother, concentrated into one feeling, upon one who was personally and morally worthy of it, was now to be parted from him, to be among those who, though kind to her, could not feel that sympathy and interest which one who loved her would.

This alone was enough to make her sad, independent of the grief of parting with the dearest object of her affections – perhaps forever – for she was aware of the danger of Robin's situation, although she would not acknowledge it to herself.

The mere parting from those we love, if it is only for a short time, is in itself grievous, and under all the foregoing circumstances com-bined, it is not to be wondered at that these two young beings should have felt heart-broken at their separation. When Robin had so far recovered as to command his voice, he said all the kind words to soothe and console her which he could utter. After many a passionate embrace, he imprinted one long, burning kiss upon her lips, and then led her to the porch, where the little cavalcade had assembled, and waited but for her arrival to depart. She took her place with Sir Guy's wife, daughters, and Maude, who could scarce keep her saddle for grief, the maidservants, most of the villagers' wives, daughters, and children, forming the rear. Amidst tears and sorrowful farewells, they departed on their way to Sir Guy's estate in Yorkshire, under the escort of a small troop of men, who had resolved to protect them, or die to the last man.

A week passed away. Any and every means were employed to fortify and strengthen Gamwell Hall, and such parts of the village as were likely to be subjected to the attack of Henry's soldiers. Such portions of furniture and moveables which were of value were sent with the little troop to Yorkshire, and all the rest, excepting those that were actually necessary for what domestic use they required, were enlisted in the service of defense, in blockading and strengthening the weaker parts of the Hall. The staircase, which was moveable for occasions like the present, and was usually outside the house, was removed, and rendered available to be thrust from the topmost window, if flight was actually necessary, and present a means of escape that way. They had determined to fight from chamber to chamber, and had so contrived their defenses as to hold each chamber for a length of time against vastly unequal numbers, and ultimately, if compelled, to retreat to the forest, and in its intricacies defy all efforts to be routed.

As day succeeded day, they became more on the alert, spies were placed on the lookout, little posts – a description of barrier – were created

in the village, from which to annoy the advancing enemy, and so covered by their position and connection with each other that a retreat could easily be effected from each to each, as they might be carried in turn.

In fact, nothing was left undone which could make the victory by Henry's troops dearly bought. They did not attempt to conceal from themselves that they must eventually be ousted, but they determined that it should not be done without a serious cost.

They had not to learn the tender mercies of the Norman soldiery, particularly when sent on an expedition like the present, and as thoroughbred Saxons, they hated the race upon principle, and there was as much national feeling in their intention of resisting to the death the coming enemy, as there could be at the anticipated slayings, burnings, and other injuries which usually tracked their steps.

A week passed away, and their arrangements – for they had worked hard – were pretty well completed. Robin had spent the greater part of his time in making arrowheads, while he had the opportunity. He made them after the manner of his foster father, and they required a peculiar fashioning. He laid up a good store of them. Spears, swords, and weapons of offence and defense were created and the little village of Gamwell, hitherto so quiet, became now a scene of life and bustle.

All the villagers had rallied round Sir Guy Gamwell to a man, and determined, come what would, to fight his battle out manfully against the Norman wolves. The old folks were sent away, with the little household stock of any value, to those relatives who lived at no very great distance, and who were not likely to be molested, while the younger men, glad of any opportunity of having a brush with Normans, stood up in defense of their own firesides.

The bustle of the week's preparation had subsided, and the village had resumed its quietness, as regarded sound, but not of aspect. It seemed like the calm preceding a storm. The villagers were certain that the foe would come, and they neglected no precaution to meet them as became Saxons, who loathed even the name of Norman. Every hour they still had was occupied in constructing things of use, and converting articles made for a very different purpose into warlike instruments.

Ten days had now elapsed, and no enemy had appeared. They had completed all their arrangements. Not a portion of their vigilance had relaxed; and now that they were unoccupied in producing anything but arrows, they grew impatient for the arrival of the foe. At length, their impatience was set at rest by the arrival of one of the scouts placed in the forest, who reported the approach of a troop of horse soldiers. The tocsin was sounded, the villagers flew to their arms and to the different posts

assigned them with a readiness which displayed the discipline they had undergone. They ensconced themselves behind their barriers. By the time the troops arrived at the village, there was not a man to be seen.

The leader of the soldiers, who noticed that no one was in sight, chuckled to himself that he should be able to carry his orders into effect ere the villagers had a chance of resistance. He knew the Saxons well, knew that they fought fiercely, and made reprisals upon the Normans whenever they could, that they never submitted patiently to any decree of the king's, if they could avoid or evade it. Therefore he made up his mind, from the nature of his commission, that there would be a little hard fighting ere he could carry it into effect. Consequently, he was glad to observe that there was no one in sight to give an alarm. He had fifty men under his command and the villagers, with the help of a few friends from a short distance round, numbered above a hundred — thus they doubled the number of their foe, were individually equal to them in courage and determination, and held without comparison the best position.

The Norman leader, however, little dreamed that such was the case and acting upon his first supposition, gave the word to the men to quicken their speed. They began winding up the hill towards the first barrier at an accelerated pace, breaking their order in the desire to advance as quickly as they could. They had nearly gained the summit of the hill, and were beginning to speculate upon the amount of spoil they were likely to obtain, when they were thrown into check by a sudden and unexpected shower of arrows, bolts, and stones from slings. It was so unlooked for by the soldiers, and such was their astonishment, that it was repeated ere they returned a shaft.

The loss of several of their men, however, awakened them to a sense of their position, and with a tremendous shout they charged furiously the first barrier. They were met manfully, and stoutly resisted, the Saxons from their covers doing great execution without the loss of one man. The Normans soon perceived, from this well-arranged plan of attack, that they had been expected, foresaw there was nothing left for them to do but to fight desperately or retreat, and — the thoughts of retiring before Saxon villagers was not to be entertained for a moment while a chance remained of conquering them. They therefore continued their attack on the first barrier with ardor.

Their numbers soon enabled them to carry it, but they soon found there was another, which they also carried, to be stopped by a third. Their numbers had been considerably reduced, and they could not discover that any of their bolts had taken effect, while the Saxons, most of them expert archers, brought down three or four at every discharge. The men were rather discouraged at this, for their comrades were dropping round

them, and they had no chance of getting fairly at the enemy. The leader also perceived this, and ordered a false retreat, with the hope of drawing the villagers from their covers, and then, suddenly rallying, return to the charge and rout them. He put this *ruse de guerre* into action. The men commenced an orderly retreat, and they retreated some distance without gaining their object, but as they were beginning to believe this also to be a failure, a great shout announced the approach of the villagers, who appeared running towards them, seemingly in great disorder, with their bows bent ready for use.

"Keep on the retreat a little while longer!" roared the leader to his men. "We shall catch them in the trap as beautifully as we can wish. Keep on – keep on!"

They did keep on, and the villagers came on with the same apparently headlong speed as before. But, to the rage and mortification of the leader, they succeeded in obtaining the barrier from which they had previously been dislodged, and, stopping there, discharged a flight of missives, which told fearfully upon his men. Cursing every saint he had ever heard of, he dashed back in a paroxysm of fury to charge the barrier again, followed by his men, who began rather to dislike this sort of warfare.

But he was suddenly stopped in his career by a shower of bolts, one of which pierced his brain, and another killed his steed – horse and rider fell simultaneously dead upon the ground. The men, dispirited by their previous ill success, were entirely discouraged by the loss of their leader. Two of them dismounted, and disengaged him from the horse, and throwing him across the saddle of a riderless steed, mounted, and with the remainder of the troop retreated in good earnest.

The villagers sent a shower of arrows and a shout of success after their discomfited foes, and then, advancing from their cover, proceeded to bury those whom they had slain, and make prisoners of those who were wounded. Two only of their party were wounded, while on the opposite side, although the fight had not, from the first attack to the last retreat, averaged more than twenty minutes, the killed and wounded were eighteen. The villagers were in high glee at their success, and in the height of their exhilaration would have sent for their families back again.

But Little John, who had arranged everything, had obtained and exercised a command over them, restrained them, and explained clearly to them that this was only a prelude of what was to come, that ere another week, perhaps a couple of days, were over their head, they might expect the return of the troopers, with the addition of probably a hundred or a hundred and fifty to their number. And that, so far from relaxing their vigilance, they ought to redouble it, and prepare to meet the attack of treble the number of those they had recently defeated.

His arguments carried conviction with them, and the villagers resolved to follow his advice. The wounds of those who had suffered in the conflict were attended to, and a few of those villagers, who had friends and relatives, staunch Saxons, dwelling within a few miles of the place, who would be glad to join in the fray, were dispatched to fetch them. The barriers were added to and strengthened in those parts where they had proved deficient in the recent attack. More weapons were made, a store of provisions laid in.

In short, nothing was left undone either to enable them to hold out some time, gain another victory, or insure a well-regulated retreat. The arrival of thirty volunteers from neighboring parts added to the sanguine hopes of success which the villagers entertained. Meetings were held every evening in the Hall, in which every possible mode of attack which the Normans could make, and the means of preventing its success, were discussed. Every casualty, accident, or ruse, they might, could, or would make, was thought of, and plans proposed to counteract them in all their forms. And, in case of eventual ill success, the means of retreat and general rendezvous.

The mornings were employed in practicing, disciplining, weapon making, and in exercising retreats and sallies. Sentries were posted and scouts were placed as before in the forest, to note the approach of the enemy, and so arranged that although the troop might, when first discovered, be six miles from Gamwell, yet in less than a quarter of an hour the besiegers would be aware of their approach by a series of primitive telegraphing. A new and more extensive barrier was built, and placed nearer the brow of the hill, as after the last affray all disguise was useless.

They exercised at the target, and it was at these exercises that Robin Hood astonished them by the extraordinary ability he displayed — to pierce the centre of the bull's eye without swerving the breadth of a hair, was a matter of the greatest ease to him. Little John, an accurate as well as a powerful archer, several times hit the centre of the bull's eye. Robin following each time, asserted he would split Little John's arrow as it stood there, and each time he kept his word. However, Little John several times did the same thing, and then ensued a trial of skill between them, Robin Hood choosing the object to be fired at. He obtained a willow wand, and stripping off every leaf but one, which grew at the end, he stuck it in the ground upright, so as to let the leaf wave in the wind. He then bade Little John stand at one hundred and fifty yards and hit the leaf. Little John said it could not be done.

"Will you try and do it?" asked Robin.

“I will try it, but shall not succeed, nor you, nor anyone else, either,” returned Little John.

“We shall see,” said Robin, laughing.

“It can’t be done,” said Little John; “I know what can be done with a bow, and what can’t, and that can’t.”

“With a quarter staff you may know what can be done” replied Robin “that I don’t dispute. But with a bow you do not know, as I will show you, if you miss that leaf.”

“You are a better archer if you hit that leaf, Robin, than I take you for, aye, or the world owns,” remarked Little John, preparing to take aim at it.

“Pshaw!” exclaimed Robin contemptuously, “’tis nothing.”

Little John took a steady aim – a long cautious aim – he let his arrow fly, and it went far beyond the wand, but so near, that many cried he had hit it.

“Not quite,” said Robin, laughing, pointing to the leaf, which was still fluttering in the wind. “Now, Little John, I’ll show what can be done with a bow – one, two, three.” Away went the arrow as he uttered the word three, and tore the leaf from the wand. A shout announced his success.

“Bravely done,” said Little John, “’tis the finest aim I ever saw.”

“I can do better, Little John. Any archer may do that, but I will show you something which not any nor every archer can do.”

“I should be glad to see anything surpass that.”

“You shall, then.”

A similar wand to the last was firmly placed in the earth, by Robin’s direction, a leaf pendant about a foot from the top. A thin slip of fine cloth was affixed to the top of the wand and to that a small pigeon. Two hundred yards he stood from these objects, and while Little John could count ten, he cut the leaf, then the strip of cloth, liberating the bird, and shot the latter ere it had flown five yards. Little John, accustomed as he was to good archery, was surprised at Robin’s skill, and the surrounding villagers were perfectly astonished.

But their admiration was raised to an extraordinary height when they saw him, from the same spot, split the wand, and do with similar ease several feats of archery apparently incredible. The villagers congratulated them-selves upon having such an ally, for the importance of a sure aim, at particular moments, was evident to all.

When Little John explained to them, as many had a previous opportunity of judging, that he was almost as expert at all other manly feats, their respect for him was raised in a proportionable degree.

Time wore on, and as yet they were unmolested, nearly a fortnight elapsing. The hot month of July was near its close, and again they were ready, in every point of view, for their enemy. Mounds of earth were thrown up, stratagems and plans conceived, and every precaution employed to ensure their success. They expected their foe to arrive in the morning, concluding they would stay a night to refresh in Nottingham. Each morning, as it came, beheld them in readiness for attack.

One night, two of the villagers returning from Mansfield, whither they had been to purchase articles for their friends, brought intelligence of the arrival of a body of about two hundred men from Nottingham and it was immediately seen that they had come the fourteen miles that afternoon, with the intention of resting the night at Mansfield, and proceeding the short five miles to Gamwell the ensuing morning, in order to commence the attack fresh and unfatigued by the journey. The villagers had staid long enough to ascertain that the troop would remain all night, and then hastened to their friends to communicate their news.

It caused some little stir; but the feeling soon subsided. The most vigilant betook themselves to watch during the night, being relieved occasionally, and every one took as much rest as they could obtain, in order that their energies might be devoted to the morning's work, unfettered by fatigue.

The sun had scarce shown his face in the east before every man had assembled to hear a mass said by Friar Tuck, who was still among them, and who looked forward to the attack with all the eagerness of a boy expecting some favorite pleasure. Then a hasty meal was taken, which, when dispatched, Little John called the villagers into a circle, and addressed them.

"Friends," be commenced, "I have a few words to say before we seek our different posts. I am one of few words – talking comes not in my way. Different men have different powers — mine consists in the use of the quarter staff, and perhaps hitting a mark with an arrow. Perhaps others who can't do that, may have the gift of speech. I confess I am not expert at it. However, perhaps, what I have to say may do as well as though it was fashioned with better words."

"The enemy are coming. Now don't, on any occasion, suffer yourselves to be drawn out of your covers, and don't give up one, until you can't hold it any longer. When that is the case, remember what you intended to do in the event of its occurring, and do it quietly, without hurry or scurry — If you do, you will forget something of importance, which will render your plans useless. Nothing can be well done which is attempted in a hurry."

“Contest every inch of ground – remember you are fighting against

NORMANS – the dogs!

Give them bolts, shafts, stones, and staffs for every inch of ground they take. Be cool, strike home. When you strike, make no miss, or your own life will pay the forfeit of your error. Show them that every foot of our land is worth a Norman life. Keep cool and firm, and they will pay dearly for any advantage they may obtain. Hurrah for Gamwell and Saxon hearts!”

“**Hurrah!**” shouted the villagers with one burst, each grasping his weapon more firmly, their gleaming eyes and determined countenances expressing their stern resolution of fighting to the last. The shout had scarcely subsided, when Robin Hood, with a burst of enthusiasm which he could not control, bounded into the place Little John had a moment previous occupied, and, in a voice teeming with excitement, exclaimed –

“Friends, if ye need more than what Little John has said to keep you in front of the foe while a hope of success remains, remember that ye are fighting for your hearths – for the roof which was built to shelter your wives, children,

and all most dear to you. Remember that ye are opposed to the Normans, who have bowed ye to the earth and trod upon your necks – who have tyrannized over the weak and defenseless, who never extend their hand but to burn, slay, and destroy! You cannot forget that ye are Saxons. You cannot forget what Hereward le Wake did for his Saxon brethren – how he hunted, defeated, and foiled the vile Normans, though opposed by thrice his numbers. You will remember that this is the home of your childhood – the dwelling place of those who preceded you – of those whom you love, honor, and respect, and if you lose it through weakness or irresolution, you make yourselves, your relatives, homeless. And who will be the cause? **Normans!** You will fight to the last?”

“**We will!**” burst from the surrounding throng, with one accord.

“Now then, let them come and do their worst. We are brothers, who will fight for home, for each other, side by side and back to back, nor murmur that, in opposing a Norman foe, our back may find a resting place on the green turf, and our death glance may light on the broad blue sky above! Be Saxons, in the remembrance of the wrongs done by these tyrants to our once smiling land. Be fathers, when you think of your homes, your beloved wives and children and sons – when you remember those whom age has made sacred, and look to you for the support and love which they gave you in your childhood, and which their age denies them obtaining for themselves. Think of these things. You are fighting for your birthplace; and, as Little John has said, make these Norman curs learn

that every foot of our native soil is worth a Norman life. Now, brother Saxons, a prayer for our success, a cheer for our birthplace and for Saxon hearts!"

A tremendous cheer followed the conclusion of Robin's speech, and in an instant the men knelt down and repeated a prayer, after Tuck, for their success; then, with one accord, sprung to their feet, and made the air resound with the cheer which they gave for their homes and their nation. Then they separated, and each party took the portion allotted to them, while they rehearsed their plans and means of counteracting those of the Normans. The spies had been withdrawn from the forest, and placed in the direction of Mansfield. About three hours after sunrise, the blast of a horn announced the approach of the enemy. The scouts retired and entered the barriers, and soon, as when attacked before, no living soul was to be seen.

The enemy approached. It was easily seen from the continued line, as they poured round the wind of the road, that the villagers had not exaggerated their number. They continued arriving until about three hundred horsemen were assembled at the foot of the hill which was, from the direction facing Mansfield, necessary to be surmounted ere Gamwell, which lay in a vale, could be entered. After a short consultation, a party of troops commenced galloping up the hill. A second party dismounted, and followed under cover of the horsemen. A third party made a detour to the right, and a fourth to the left.

This manœuvre had been anticipated, and was counteracted accordingly. At the right and left wings, defenses had been constructed behind the quantity of trees which grew straggling on the brow of the hill. The interstices had been filled with shrubs and brushwood, with such a natural effect, that the men who were advancing on the left of these points – not expecting they would be anticipated – congratulated themselves upon having so good a cover to form behind as they reached the top, and from which to advance to the attack in regular order. They were rather staggered at receiving, when they approached near enough, a well-directed discharge of bolts, which did not come whistling about their ears for nothing. Several men, as well as horses, fell. The bolts were immediately followed by a flight of arrows, also so well directed as to take considerable effect upon them. Many of the horses, with arrows sticking in them, grew unmanageable, and, in spite of all their riders efforts, plunged, reared, kicked, and ultimately dashed back from whence they came, tending to throw the party into confusion, which was added to by a third discharge of missives, before they were able to return it. The disorder from the restiveness of the horses became so great, that they retreated down the hill amid a flight of arrows and a shout of derision.

When they arrived from whence they had been dispatched, they found the men who had advanced on the right had met with similar ill success. It was then determined that these points must be carried on foot, as indeed every part, for the centre was so ably defended, that the double party attacking it could not gain an inch of ground, while the same means were resorted to of wounding the horses and rendering them unmanageable.

In their riders' efforts to prevent their turning and riding down those who were following, they were utterly unable to return the heavy fire to which they were exposed. They grew confused, and shafts were still pouring on the horses. The creatures, smarting with pain and fright, resisting all efforts to control them, turned, plunged among those who were unwounded, producing disorder, and goaded by the arrows, plunged madly among those on foot, carrying confusion among them, and eventually compelling a retreat of the whole party to the foot of the hill.

It was now seen the horses were at present useless, and the men, dismounted, were divided into three parties, and, shielded by their bucklers, advanced steadily again on the three points, while a party remained at the foot, ready to advance when the barrier was carried.

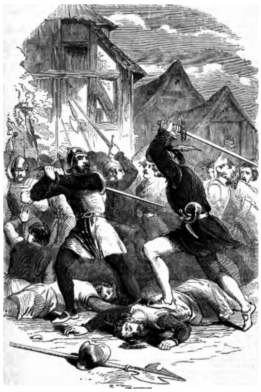
Although exposed to a tremendous shower of missiles, the Normans kept on, undaunted, their bucklers protecting them considerably from the shafts and bolts directed at them. They bore their bills in their hand, ready for instant charge as soon as they gained the barrier, the party taking the centre and soon gained the barrier, which was about seven feet high, and pierced in all parts with loopholes, from which to send their missiles. When the Normans had reached it, they gave a shout, spread themselves, and commenced scaling, so close to each other, that all efforts to prevent them were useless – and indeed it was not their intention – for so soon as they scaled the barrier, the Saxons retired in a body, in as regular order as can be conceived, keeping up a shower of arrows and bolts on the Normans, and not allowing them to come near enough to use their bills.

They fell back on their second barrier, those on the right and left wings doing the same by a pre-concerted signal. The Normans pushed on, but many of them fell into deep pits, dug for their reception by the villagers, who, when they had gained their second barrier, observed the remainder of the Normans scaling their first barrier, and pushing on vigorously for the second. Here the Saxons made a more determined stand.

But the Normans, accustomed to hard fighting, dashed on, regardless of the weapons of death flying round them, and, attacking the barrier with desperate fury, scaled it, and were soon hand-to-hand with the Saxons.

The conflict was fierce and deadly while it lasted, but soon the signal

was again heard, and again the Saxons retreated in regular order, keeping their foes at bay by the terrible execution their arrows and bolts committed. The point on which they were falling was the last barrier – it was the most extensive – it was almost a natural one – it was formed by a sinking, or deep slope in the hill before it. Where this slope rose again, there was a long ridge, or natural mound, behind which the hill descended suddenly and precipitously. This point had been assisted by all the artificial auxiliaries which invention could furnish, and it was resolved to make here a determined stand, ere they fell back on Gamwell Hall, which was the '*dernier ressort.*'



The Saxons came in full retreat to this barrier – they gained it without losing a man – and the Normans followed at the top of their speed, shouting their war cry. Occasionally, as a shower of bolts came to intercept them, they threw themselves on their faces, were up again, continuing the next instant with the same speed. But they had now a greater difficulty to encounter than they had hitherto experienced. The barrier was only practicable from the two ends, as a deep trench had been cut beneath it, completely preventing them, without ladders, scaling it; At each of the ends a slight barrier of woodwork had been run up, and behind these were stationed a strong body of the best archers.

To have run rashly and attacked this would have been the height of madness, as it must have involved a great many lives, without any positive good being gained.

They stopped, therefore, and the whole party of the Normans assembled to learn what plan of attack would be the most feasible. The captain of the troops took a survey. There lay Gamwell beneath him – for he stood high on the hill, and each side of this hill was thickly studded with trees, presenting an impassable barrier for horses, and by no means a safe pathway for the men. Calling one of the men, he enquired if any of them knew the locality, and was answered by the presence of one, who said he had a relative in Gamwell, whom he constantly visited, and therefore he was well acquainted with every part of it.

"Art thou a Saxon, knave?" demanded the leader with knitted brows.

"No," returned the man, "I am a Norman."

"Is thy relative with these rebellious churls?"

"Yes, he is a Saxon, who married a half-sister of mine."

“And you know this place well?”

“I do, every part.”

“Can you guide my men to yon village by any other path than this?”

“Yes, there is one at the foot of the hill. It winds into part of the forest, and branches out suddenly near Gamwell Hall.”

“Which is Gamwell Hall?”

“That building to the left, on the rising ground, nearly surrounded by trees. That is where old Sir Guy Gamwell lives.”

“The old rebellious Saxon churl! “I’faith, Henry might have given me an easier task than dislodging these dogs from their kennel. Now, knave, thou’rt sure thou speakest truth?”

“You will find it so.”

“Probably, but I have no great inclination to fall into an ambush, I can tell thee, and if I thought thou didst intend falsely, thou should have worse than a dog’s death.”

“I guided you here truly.”

“Truly thou didst, but why not show us this same path you speak of at first?”

“Because the Saxons would have seen the movement and prevented it accordingly. A handful of men can command that pass against a thousand.”

“Is it at the foot of the hill?”

“Yes, to the left.” The man described its situation and bearing accurately. The captain of the troop appeared satisfied, and gave orders to a party of men to hold themselves in readiness to take the path, under the guidance of this man, while he held the Saxons in play in the position they still held, in order that they might not fathom the manœuvre he intended to make.

But in this hope he was mistaken, for the guide’s relative happened to perceive his brother-in-law among the Normans, and afterwards in close converse with the Norman chief. He communicated to Little John his suspicions of foul play, and the path was immediately thought of. It had been left unguarded, and thirty of the men, under the command of two of the Gamwells, departed at once to hold it in possession; while Little John, calling Robin to his side, for they were both in this cover, said to him – “Could you hit any object with certainty on the summit of this hill?

"Yes," he replied.

"Well, then, you see that Norman just to the left of him with the tall plume – he is a traitorous rascal, who, I fully believe, is about to lead some of those fellows who are going over the brow of the hill by the forest path to Gamwell – bring him down for me." An arrow was in an instant fitted to his bow, discharged, and they saw the man leap high into the air, fall, and heard his death shriek. A shout was raised by the Saxons, which so enraged the leader, that, dividing his men into two parties – first recalling those who had been dispatched to follow the forest path – he placed one of them under the command of a trooper, and taking the other, determined to carry each end of the barrier by assault.

When his directions and arrangements were complete, he gave the word, and they dashed off from the summit of the hill to each end. They battered at it with their bills; some clambered up only to be thrust back dead; but the earth being fresh, the stakes, although driven firmly in, gave way beneath the united attack of the men, and fell with a tremendous crash, burying several of the Saxons beneath it. The Normans came leaping over it shouting, but were met by a forest of spears and a tremendous discharge of bolts from the cross bows. Twice they were repulsed with a serious loss, but they renewed the charge, each time with redoubled vigor, and the Saxons, whose numbers were vastly inferior, were compelled to give way.

But they did so gradually and in good order. They fought with stern desperation — they knew it was life or death with them, and fully they carried out Little John's command, that they should make a Norman life pay for every foot they gave. Both ends of the barrier were now carried, and the Normans poured into the breach, shouting and fighting madly, while the Saxons uttered no sound, but contracting their line gradually, soon presented a front which the Normans could not, after repeated efforts, break. The Saxons still kept falling back upon the village and in the direction of the Hall, whose doors, under the guardianship of four men, stood ready to receive them, and close as the last Saxon entered.

They were now nearly up to the cottages, and they were compelled either to make a last effort there, or near Gamwell Hall. There was little time for decision. The Normans were pressing on, and the trooper, who had the command of half the troop, had, by personal strength, forced his way through a part of the Saxon's front, the gap he had made being closely filled by his men, fighting with desperation in order to secure the advantage they had obtained.

The Saxons gave ground, grew disordered – a panic appeared to seize those opposed to this trooper. They retreated rapidly, oppressing the others. The Normans saw their opportunity, followed it, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing many of them in open flight. They gave a shout of triumph, when suddenly a voice exclaimed, in a tone which was clearly

heard above the din of war — “Hold, Saxons! Will you shrink like beaten hounds before these base Norman reptiles? He who is a true Saxon, and a man, follow me!”

The voice was Little John’s. He strode among his enemies, hewing down all who opposed him, followed by a body of his friends, whom death could not daunt. So resistless was their attack upon the Normans, and so unexpected, that, in their turn, they gave way. When those who were flying saw this, they returned with shame on their visages, and determined to retrieve their cowardice by advancing or falling where they stood. Little John had only eyes for one man – the trooper who had nearly caused the rout of the Saxons.

Little John knew him at a glance — it was the same trooper who had played him the trick at Nottingham – Geoffrey Gurthfeld, or Vanterie, which was his proper name. Towards him did he strive to get. Short was the conflict with each Norman who stood in his path. He cut them down like reeds. At length they met. Geoffrey’s eyes glistened with savage pleasure as they lighted on his former conqueror, and with a huge battle axe in his hand, he advanced quickly towards him, shouting –

“Base Saxon churl! I have met thee again, even as I could have wished, as deadly foes. This to thy brain, hind!”

But Little John had no intention to stand to be slaughtered by the battle axe of Geoffrey, and when the latter had flourished it round, and it was in the act of descending, he sprung within its circle, seized it as it fell, and placing his foot with a sudden dash against his opponent’s breast, wrenched the weapon from his grasp, and twirling it round, flung it far from him.

“Thou’rt a Norman,” he cried, “and would be guilty of any base act, but I will not follow your example. To thy blade as I to mine. Now we are evenly matched,” he concluded, as Geoffrey drew his sword – a long two-handed weapon, which he carried at his back.

Little John was similarly armed, and to their combat they went in terrible earnest. They both played the quarter staff well, and were consequently the more expert in wielding these huge swords; but the extraordinary superiority which Little John possessed in the use of one weapon befriended him in the use of the other. Both knew the other’s life hung on their success, and they fought accordingly.

The clashing and din they made caused many to suspend their fighting and look on these two. Dire was the strife. For some time they fought without either appearing to have the advantage, although they had hacked and hewed at each other with the greatest perseverance. Little

John had no intention of playing with his foe – no thoughts of lookers-on affected him. He knew his presence was needed elsewhere as well as here, and the sooner he got rid of his opponent the better. Every advantage that could offer he took as soon as it exhibited itself, and had succeeded in giving Geoffrey two tremendous gashes in the arm, which bled profusely.

Geoffrey knew they would render him weak and powerless, therefore he fought harder than ever, grew desperate, then struck wildly. Little John made a feint of giving an opportunity for a slash, and when Geoffrey caught eagerly at it, only to miss it, he whirled his sword round his head, and struck with all his force. The sword descended like lightning upon Geoffrey's shoulder, entered, and clove him to the chine.

He fell dead without a groan, while both Norman and Saxon, who were looking on, stood aghast, lost in wonder at the tremendous blow and its terrible effect. Little John stayed not to look on the evidence of his success, but, waving his bloody sword over his head, he strode through the ranks like the God of War, devastation and death marking his path. He gained a small eminence, and, looking round, perceived that his friends were being encompassed by the Normans, and that a continued opposition would be a fruitless waste of life. There was little time to be lost, but he could not help delaying a minute to look with pride on the gallant manner his little band of Saxons stood in opposition to twice their number.

He looked to see if he could distinguish Robin Hood, and soon observed him fighting at the head of the little party which had just returned from the forest path, whither they had been sent by Little John to prevent the Normans entering Gamwell by that route, and he saw him attempt and accomplish a feat necessary to be done which was, to turn the wing of the Normans, and prevent its getting between them and their path to Gamwell Hall. He had seen enough to tell him how the fight was going, and what must be the result, unless they effected a retreat to the Hall speedily.

The Saxons had fought nobly, but it was a hopeless task to resist hand to hand double their number; so Little John blew the blast of his horn, which was to tell them to gather together and retreat to the Hall. He then plunged again into the fight, making terrible havoc in the enemy with his two-handed weapon. His call was obeyed. The Saxons fell back, united. Before the Normans were prepared for any such act, the whole body of them were retreating on the Hall.

The manœuvre was beautifully executed, and the surprise of their foes gained them the advantage of a short distance. However, they were followed very quickly, but not quick enough. The foremost Norman, as the

Saxons gained the Hall, was shot down by an arrow, the second stumbled over him, and then the gates were closed and barricaded, enclosing the Saxons safely in the walls of Gamwell Hall.

Here the Normans found themselves baffled, but they cut at the doors, which were of stout oak, with their axes and bills, making the place echo with their blows. But this had been expected, and was met accordingly by the rolling of several huge stones from a window above, which crushed several of the Normans beneath them. They then thought fit to depart from the door, and wander round the grounds to endeavor to ascertain a practicable point, but, in doing this, they were exposed to the fire of the Saxons from the loopholes; and, as they already numbered near a hundred killed and wounded, it was thought proper not to expose any more life than was absolutely needful.

The men were recalled, and a band of a hundred men were established all-round the Hall, and so placed as to be beyond the reach of the Saxons aim. The captain then, with the remainder, entered the village, but found every place empty. All was silent and deserted, cottage after cottage they entered and ransacked in search of spoil, but there was nothing left for them to take. Their rage and mortification on discovering this may be better conceived than described. They had relied upon finding provisions, but not a morsel could they obtain. A few were sent into the forest to find a buck or two, while the others made arrangements to cook them when they did come. They spent that day in the village, and towards night the band who had surrounded Gamwell Hall were relieved, and took their share of what provision there was for them.

The commander, on finding that all the villagers were in Gamwell Hall, determined upon attacking it in the night. Some rude engines were constructed to force the doors, and they now only waited for night to set in to commence the attack.

The scanty meal which the Normans were compelled to take was vastly different to the refreshments of which the Saxons partook. They fed heartily, and washed down their food with draughts of good old ale. They threw themselves on the floor to rest after the fatigues of the day, and prepare for the next attack, which Little John had prognosticated would take place in the night, as being the most feasible time for it. After they had taken several hours' rest, and it drew near the time for the exercise of their vigilance, they went over their numbers to ascertain their loss, and found it less than they expected.

All their wounded they had brought with them, for as fast as any of their friends fell, they were passed to the rear, and carried up to the Hall. It had been arranged that such should be done, and it was put into execution when the time arrived for its application. There were twelve killed, and twenty-three wounded.

The wounded were placed where they might be carried off safely in the event of the necessity of a retreat. Arrangements were then made, and every precaution taken to enable them to hold out this place to the last. As night drew on, they each took themselves to the posts assigned them, and waited in silence and patience the attack.

“They have begun their savage work,” said Robin; Hood to Little John, pointing through a loophole to a red glare illuminating the surrounding objects. “They have kindled the torch, and the cottages blaze readily.”

“Aye, it is so, they have found a way to level to the earth in a few minutes that which has employed many weary hours to erect. The only fear I have of not keeping this hall against treble the number of yon reptiles is they will put the torch to it. And there’s too much wood about the old house to let them do it quietly, without our having roasted joints.”

“But you have provided against such an attempt?”

“As well as our means will allow, but I fear, if the fiends persist, they will succeed in their attempt. Our only chance is to keep them well employed in warding off our shafts.”

“Look there! There is another cottage in flames. Ha! Another. Dogs! Fiends! What devilish spirit incites them to this hellish work?”

“It is their nature. When they have burnt and destroyed all they can there, they will be here to slay and slaughter. What glare! The whole village must be in a blaze!”

It was in truth a glare. Everything in its vicinity was rendered plainly distinguishable by its light. The dark shadows of the Normans, as they passed to and fro doing their evil work, were noted by the Saxons, who gazed on the destruction of their homes, beneath whose roof they were born, with feelings of intense excitement. Had they not been restrained by Little John, they would have sallied forth and attacked them.

“Wait until daylight,” he said. “If we can only hold this shelter till the morning, I will wager my life we will yet defeat, drive them off, make them return to him who sent them, dishonored and beaten.”

“Why not attempt it now?” asked one still writhing under the sight of his cottage in flames.

“Because at present their number is too great to cope with. They would triumph in carrying the point we must prevent them obtaining. By the morning I fully hope their number will be considerably lessened. They will be worn out with fatigue, and will offer an easy conquest to us, who will be comparatively fresh, and who have the aid of the excitement which the

desire of revenging so many wrongs must create. Reserve your best energies for that effort, and I have little doubt we shall meet with the success we so much covet. Were we to attempt it now, certain failure must be the result, for ere we could be amongst them, we should meet them coming here for the purpose they have just completed there."

"You are right," said Robin Hood; "Here they come." Shouts were now heard advancing in the direction of the Hall, while a hasty glance from the loopholes showed them the Normans running along bearing lighted brands.

"To your posts! To your posts!" cried Little John; "Let every man single a Norman with his bolt and take a sure aim ere he shoots — throw not a shaft or bolt away. Robin, I know your aim; keep by my side, and fetch me down those I point out."

Robin did as he was requested, and in silence they awaited the near approach of the Normans. They were not so headlong in their speed that they came up close to the gates of the Hall to meet with the same reception they had received in the morning, but they came sufficiently near to throw their lighted torches against the door. They would have soon kindled it into a flame, but this had been foreseen, and water was poured from buckets through a loophole just over the doorway, and extinguished the torches. Fresh ones were thrown to meet the same reception. Still they persisted.

One fellow was particularly active and expert at throwing them. Little John raised a cross bow to his shoulder, and taking a deliberate aim, killed him on the spot. A general discharge followed this from all the available portions of the Hall, and a few of the Normans who had too heedlessly exposed their persons met their death. Strips of pine wood were then lighted and discharged at every inlet, but a very few of them took effect. Another discharge was made by the Saxons with good effect, and proved a lesson to their foe to keep as much as possible their bodies from being seen.

A silence for a short time reigned, then a shout announced the arrival of the Norman chief with the greatest body of men bringing the engine to force the door – the men who had already attempted to effect an entrance having acted without orders, only under the influence of a feeling created by the pleasure they experienced in having fired the little cottages.

The first engine they brought consisted of a long beam of wood, the top end of which was rudely capped with some iron agricultural machine, and made a tolerable substitute for a battering ram. They now advanced to put its powers into execution. Little John saw that it was necessary, if possible, to prevent this, and a thought suddenly striking him of a means, he said to Robin —

“Can you depend on your aim in such a light as this?”

“If I can see my object.”

“That’s enough. Do you see that Norman to the left of those four who are hauling that beam along?”

“I do. It is their leader.”

“Send an arrow through his Norman trunk.”

“He is encased in mail; I tried him several times today. He is armed to the chin. If I can see his face long enough to take an aim, I’ll bring him down.”

“See – there is a chance now, the torch is flashing in his face.”

“Let me stand where you are, I am afraid the edge of the loophole will catch the end of my arrow and alter my aim. Ha! He has turned his head away.”

”‘Sdeath! Do not let him escape – our safety mainly depends on his death. He is too shrewd for our welfare.”

“Stay, he is walking to a point more opposite me – so, ‘tis well; now, Norman, whisper your prayers.”

Robin raised his bow, extended it – Little John watched him with nervous excitement. He saw the hand holding the bow move backwards and forwards slowly, as if following some object, presently it became stationary, he held his breath. Twang went the bow string, the arrow was gone; he gazed on Robin’s face as he followed the course of the arrow with his eager eyes, a smile broke over his features, and Little John knew he had hit his mark.

“The Norman is down,” said Robin.

“Then you have saved us,” said Little John. He sprang to the loophole, and saw that it was as Robin had said. The Norman was down – his body of troopers were surrounding him – the engine was abandoned and all seemed confusion among them.

“Now, my Saxon hearts!” roared Little John, in a voice which was heard in every chamber in the house; “Now, give them a shower of bolts and shafts.

Down with the Norman dogs!”

The Saxons, who had looked with eyes of anxious, eager interest, upon the proceedings of the Normans, and were prepared for the word of

command to counteract their effects, raised a shout as the deep tones of Little John's voice fell upon their ears, and each singling out a Norman for an aim, they discharged together the missives with which their separate weapons were provided. The effect was terrible – curses and shrieks mingled in the air, and in another minute the unscathed and slightly wounded Normans retreated behind the trees and various coverts which the locality afforded, leaving the dying and the dead upon the spot where they had fallen.

Disastrous as had been the late discharge upon them, they still determined to leave no means untried of ousting the Saxons from their stronghold. A council was held among the trees, and various methods proposed to obtain their objects. Many of them adopted were put into execution, only to prove entire failures, accompanied by a sacrifice of life. At length a plan was proposed, and the Normans set about in good earnest to put it into execution.

The Hall had been surrounded by bands of troops, stationed in every spot likely to afford them a safe shelter from the arrows of their foes, and in the choice of these covers they had been compelled to be scrupulously cautious — for did a Norman show a portion of his garment, a feather even, to the besieged, his life was sure to pay the forfeit of his temerity. They, therefore, paid sufficient deference to the powers of the Saxons as archers, to keep closely hidden, only watching every inlet and outlet with the strictest scrutiny, in order, if possible, to repay the favors they were continually receiving.

One of these bands was stationed in a thicket of trees behind the Hall — they were principally pine trees. It was proposed to fire them, and – as they grew sufficiently near to sever the trunks so that the burning mass might fall upon the building. The idea was eagerly caught at as soon as communicated, and the men being prepared with means to kindle the trees, bills and axes to sever them, proceeded amidst acclamations of delight and anticipations of revenge to carry out the proposal.

This was a manœuvre entirely unexpected by Little John and the Saxons. Their foes had been seen to guide to the back of the Hall, and their movements were followed with celerity, in order to counteract whatever stratagems might be exercised by them. Little John and his friends were not long left in the dark respecting their intention, for several torches were kindled, and the bearers of them proceeded to climb the trees, with the purpose of lighting the branches, while those below commenced hacking and hewing the stems, even while their companions were upon them, in order that not an instant's time should be wasted in putting their manœuvre into execution. No sooner was their intention detected, when Little John cried–

“By the Mass, we shall be unkennelled! The hell hounds have found a way to draw us out. The trees will fall upon the roof, and in a few minutes the whole building will be in flames. Robin Hood, bring down some of those fellows with their torches! At ‘em, friends! Crossbow-men, clear those dogs from the root of the trees! Spare nor bolt nor shaft! Our safety depends on clearing them away! Down with Norman wolves!”

Little John set the example by keeping up an incessant discharge of bolts from a crossbow, not always with the effect intended, while Robin Hood’s shafts never left the bow without carrying death with them. Every loophole, window, or opening, available for the discharge of their weapons, was manned by the Saxons, and the slaughter of their foes was comparatively terrific. But the Normans, urged on by rage and the hope of revenge, unheeded the deadly discharges, the loss of their companions, or the almost certain destruction which exposure entailed upon them, persevered in their efforts.

The place of the killed and wounded were supplied as fast as they fell, and as all the unfortunate wretches who had clambered with the torches amid the branches of the trees were killed, they abandoned that method of accomplishing their object, and threw lighted brands up in the branches. From much dry weather they quickly kindled, and vast volumes of smoke rolled over the ill-fated building.

Immediately the Normans ascertained their success thus far, they redoubled their efforts to complete their purpose, and very soon a tree fell with a tremendous crash across the roof of the Hall, accompanied by a shout of triumph from the Normans. A second followed its predecessor, and speedily a third. As yet, huge volumes of smoke only had proceeded from the ignited trees, but directly they burst into flames, the Normans divided, and returning to their former hiding places, with bent bows, awaited the coming forth of the Saxons.

The shock of the falling trees upon the roof was excessively great, but the old Hall stood it bravely, and with the exception of a few displaced timbers, gave no further evidence of the sudden and enormously extra weight imposed upon it. There was but one line of conduct for the Saxons to pursue, and that was to make a sortie upon the foe, whose numbers did not greatly exceed their own, and in the event of that proving unsuccessful, to retreat to the forest. Little John gathered the whole of his friends together in the hall of the building, and thus addressed them — “Friends – We are brought to our last resort by the Normans. In a short time, the old house above us will be reduced to ashes and we, to find a home among the caves and fastnesses of the forest. Ye have not to learn whom ye have to thank for being rendered houseless, and will not forget when you meet them in a few minutes, hand to hand, how much ye owe

them. If you men who will revenge the deep wrongs ye have endured — if ye are Saxons who will remember that ye are opposed to foreign oppressors, who have made your brethren slaves, who have torn your birthright from you, made themselves masters of your country, and of everything which could make a man happy in his own land – if ye have the hearts of true Saxons beating in your breasts — you will not forget to repay the obligation these mercenary, blood-thirsty fiends have laid you under. The remembrance of its nature will nerve your arms, make you strike strongly and surely, and while one hope remains, turn not a back upon your foes."

"**Never, never!**"

burst forth from many earnest voices.

"We have yet some time to arrange what little plans we may find necessary to make ere we quit this building, for the fire will take some time to burn downwards. When these arrangements are made, let each man strive to fulfill them to the letter."

"I have great hopes we shall yet drive these hounds before us like fleeting deer. They must be weak and fagged by their long-continued exertions, as well as dispirited by their losses and ill-success. They have no leader, and each man will act for himself, flying, when hard pressed, without anyone to rally them. Their numbers may exceed ours, but we have the advantage of them in being comparatively rested – that we are fighting for life and liberty, and ye have at least a leader to direct your movements, in my unworthy self. Of this be assured, whether ye stand by me or no, either the Normans fly this village, or I lie with my face to the sky, breathless, lifeless."

"I'll stand by you, and fall with you, if you fall. The whole race of Normans shall not make me quit this place, while there's breath in this old body," said old Lincoln, taking a step towards Little John. "Those I loved, and who loved me, lie here and it isn't in the power of any murderous hounds like the Normans (with their king to boot), to drive me, while life remains, from this spot. Therefore, Master John, I stand or fall by you, be the others who they may."

"We will all stand or fall by Little John!" cried the Saxons with one voice, making the walls ring with their shout.

When the arrangements were completed, they were divided into three parties, Little John taking lead of one, accompanied by Robin Hood, Friar Tuck the second, and old Lincoln the third. They were to quit the Hall by three different places — Little John by the principal entrance, old Lincoln by the entrance at the back, and Friar Tuck by the staircase, which was to

be run out from an enlarged window, or rather door, made expressly for it at the end of the building. They were all to depart at once, and cutting their way through the Normans, join near the middle of the village, and then make every effort to drive their foes from their neighborhood. As they were about to start, there was a sudden and unlooked for opposition on the part of old Sir Guy, who stoutly declared he would not quit the burning mansion.

“Beneath its roof I was born,” reiterated the old man, in reply to all the arguments used to induce him to quit it. “Here I will die. I received my breath here – here will I render it up.” Everything was done to conquer his obstinate determination, but without avail. Time was pressing, the flames were roaring, and the burning wood crackling. Smoke began to roll down to the hall in sheets.

Robin Hood, who had ascended to ascertain what ravages the fire was making, descended with great speed. As he reached the hall, he cried “Away, away, quick! Save yourselves! In another minute, the roof will fall!”

“Let it come!” roared the old man, waving his sword above his head, “I am prepared.”

Little John shouted in a stentorian voice for the men to advance to the charge, the doors were thrown open, and out they sallied. He waited to see them all quit, and then snatching up Sir Guy in his arms, in spite of all opposition, he carried him out.

Directly the draft from the opened doors ran up the house, the flames roared louder than ever. A report was heard like thunder – there was a sudden sheet of flame, accompanied by myriads of sparks – a complete coruscation of light – shot up and they knew the roof of the Hall had fallen in. The delay of a minute would have caused them to have been buried in the ruins.

A moment only they paused to gaze on the burning mansion, and then, with desperate determination, they attacked the Normans who had greeted them on their appearance with a shower of bolts, which, being badly directed, had no effect. Little John placed Sir Guy in the care of the villagers, with orders to retreat with him into the forest. Then, drawing his terrible two-handed sword, he flourished it over his head, and shouting death or victory, dashed into the midst of the Normans, dealing death with every blow of his tremendous weapon.

He seemed to bear a charmed life. Bolts, shafts, weapons of all descriptions were turned upon him, but he seemed to defy them all, continuing his career of death, cutting down all who opposed him, and every step he made in advance was filled as he quitted it by his followers.

He and his party soon obtained the centre of the village, where they had determined to make a final stand. They had forced their way through the ranks of their opponents, but they were closely followed. Every inch of ground was desperately contested, and when they had gained the spot they had tried for, it was only to continue fighting harder than ever. Daylight was now fast approaching, and the combatants began better to see with whom they had to contend.

Lincoln's party, under his direction, had ensconced themselves in the ruins of several cottages. He had some of the best marksmen with him, and was an excellent shot himself. He directed the discharges of the bolts, and, as they were done with great judgment, they committed much execution.

Friar Tuck fought his way, followed by his companions, up to Little John, and succeeded in joining him. When this union was effected, they, instead of acting so much on the defensive as they had hitherto done, now attacked the Normans with all their strength, with a fury which nothing could withstand.

The enemy gave ground. It was soon perceived by the Saxons, and Friar Tuck, who was one of the first to notice it, roared out a hurrah so lustily as to direct the attention of the Normans particularly to him, and the sight of a friar, in the habit of his order, fighting furiously against them, had a most extraordinary effect upon them. He was a sturdy, lusty fellow, with brawny limbs, and flourished his weapon to some purpose. Whoever opposed him did not relish fighting a friar, and the result of their hesitation was their being cut down. The Saxons pressed on, pursuing their advantage to the utmost. The voice of Little John was frequently heard cheering them on, while he was doing much for the victory in the havoc he made with his huge weapon.

Robin Hood kept by his side, fighting with all the desperation, yet cool determination, of the most stalwart warrior there. Not an advantage did Little John obtain, but what he followed up to the utmost; calling many an admiring remark from his colossal friend. Together they advanced, backed by a staunch body of Saxons, who, taking example and spirit by them, continued their career with a success they wondered at themselves, when they considered they were opposed to men whose trade was fighting, who were accustomed to it in its severest forms, were disciplined to endure unflinchingly the attacks of troops, frequently in greater force than themselves, and equally inured to its toils and severity. Yet this little band of villagers, all unused to a warfare where success depended upon personal courage and ability to stand and surmount, as well as stand the efforts of a body of men in every way equal to its opposer, were on the high road to gain a victory over men accustomed to it, and constituted by habit, when fighting hand to hand with such as them, to overcome them with comparative ease.

But in the present instance, it was not so ordained. The Normans had been beaten back step by step, nor suffered to regain a foot of ground they had lost. The sun had begun to peep above the horizon, and it was now sufficiently light to enable the Saxons to perceive the advantage they had gained. This was a great boon to them. Little John could see from the haggard countenances of the enemy that they were worn out with fatigue, and by the actual defensive position which they had assumed, that they were being beaten. It was almost a crisis, and he resolved to make it a successful one for his party.

Raising his voice he shouted with all his strength

"**Victory! Victory!**

They retreat! Surrender, dogs! Beg your lives!"

The Saxons shouted, echoing his words. Lincoln gathered his men from their lurking place, and they rushed, uttering their war cry, upon the Normans, who believed them to be a reinforcement of Saxons, fresh and unfatigued. A panic seized them, they retreated rapidly. The Saxons followed impetuously, cutting down those they overtook. The fugitives, in panic-stricken flight, made for the spot where they had put their horses, mounted, and fled at a desperate pace. A quantity of the villagers mounted horses which had lost their riders, and followed in hot pursuit, in order to chase them effectually from the village. As there was the hill to climb, and the barriers to pass through, before they could gain the main road, many of those who fled were overtaken and slain. Out of three hundred who came the previous morning to destroy the village and most of its inhabitants, scarce seventy returned to relate their disastrous failure.

It was a proud moment for the Saxons when the absence of every Norman, but those who lay dead or badly wounded, clearly established the victory they had obtained over a number double their own, and who should likewise have been, as soldiers of an army constantly embroiled in war, doubly their superior. But they had no time to waste in idle talking or joy at their success. There were warm and earnest congratulations among them, it is true, that they should have conquered the Normans, even at the expense of the loss of their village, and the forfeiting of their personal security.

But they did not consume hours in doing that for which a few minutes sufficed. The first thing to be done was to erect a temporary shelter for the wounded, then to bury the dead. A deep pit was dug, the bodies of the Normans gathered together, and then thrown into it, but each Saxon who had fallen in the conflict had a separate grave dug for him in the burial place, and prayers were offered up for the repose of their souls. When this task – a most laborious one – was completed, the hurts and wants of

the wounded attended to, Little John summoned all his friends to meet him on the following day at the spot where they had obtained the victory, to discuss their future prospects.

His summons was obeyed and, when they had all assembled the ensuing morning, they formed a circle, and stood quietly awaiting what he had to say. He stepped into the centre of the ring, and, looking round with a glance of proud triumph, which quickly faded into a saddened expression, he began in a clear deep voice —

“Saxons,” he said, “for nobly ye have proved yourselves worthy of the name – ye have gained a victory over a band of tyrants – of Normans – I know no word more loathsome to know them by. Ye have driven them from the village in disgrace, in shameful defeat. But though ye have done this though few of the number who came have returned to tell how ye treated them, yet have they left their sting behind them – they have gained their object. They came to make this sweet place a desolate waste, and they have. They came hither to drive you from your homes, to make you houseless outcasts, and they have. They have robbed you of your paternal inheritances. They have taken from you the roof which sheltered you, those ye love and would have cherished, but for their ruthless conduct. They have deprived ye of the hearth by whose side your fathers sat in peace and honor. These and more have they destroyed, but will they rest here? No.”

“Ye have committed a crime never to be forgiven or forgotten by them. Ye, a handful of Saxon villagers, have defeated and driven before ye – nay, destroyed – a band of Norman warriors, who came to bend ye down as the blast does the yielding reed. Ye have resisted them, have scattered them, and ye still remain. Think ye they will suffer you to do so in peace and quietness as though ye had bowed your necks tamely to their yoke, and said meekly, we will do even as thou will it we should do? Think ye they will not seek a deep and bitter revenge for what ye have done?”

“Be assured they will, and that they will do their utmost to sweep away every Saxon who took part in the glorious fray. Your village is already in ruins. Were ye to raise another from its ashes, how speedily would they lay it low again, and hunt you from your homes like they do the wolves they themselves so much resemble, from their lairs. What then have we to do? Must we scatter ourselves over the land away from our birthplace from all relatives and friends? Or must we seek in other lands, the home, the happiness denied to us in this? Is not each an evil in itself?”

“You cannot remain here. There will be treble the number of Normans here anon, with whom it would be worse than madness to attempt to compete, unless you desire to be cut down like grass before the knife of

the mower, without gaining one fraction of revenge. It would be a folly, a reckless waste of the life which we received from Him who created us, to preserve and to make the most of. There then remains but one path, one alternative for us — it is to find a home in the forest, in the old wood which has seen us as boys, as men, and whose green trees may wave over our graves when our spirit leaves this world."

"To the forest, to the forest?" cried many voices interrogatively.

"Aye, to the forest! Is there one among ye who has not passed many a night in merrie Sherwood, with the soft turf for his pillow and a roof of green leaves above him?"

"No, no," was replied.

"I knew it. Then what should prevent our making it our home? There are caves and hollow places which are large and dry, and what is better, secret. Known to but very few, we can sleep lightly beneath their shelter. Even though it may be somewhat rough, it has the charm of freedom, for we will own the yoke of no king but a Saxon one. We shall find plenty of fat bucks to keep us from starving and if a Norman keeper should interfere, we must remove him."

"We shall not fear the interruption of a Saxon. What say ye, hearts, shall the green wood be our home? We shall live right daintily. We shall be upon the ground which we first trod – the scene of our childhood, the same old wood our forefathers made merrie and fought hard in. We shall be near those we love, nor fear a Norman's visit, come he when or how he may. Let me hear your tongues; if my proposition like ye not, fear not to express as much. What say ye?"

"**The forest! Old Sherwood! A forest life!**
Hurrah for Little John!"

with many other like expressions, shouted the assembled Saxons with one accord.

"That is settled. Now, there is something more important for the good of all. We shall all live, act, and work together for the good of each other. We must do this, or the safety of our forest life is no greater than if we were again to rear dwelling places upon these ruins in Gamwell, and wait the arrival of the Normans to slaughter us."

"But to live thus with satisfaction and comfort to all, we must have a leader, whom we must obey, who will act for the general good, and whose decision shall be a law which it shall be death to disobey. Do you agree to this?"

There was some hesitation in the general body, although a few gave a ready assent. “You cannot,” continued Little John, growing quite eloquent in the earnestness with which he urged the point, “do otherwise, if you consent to have a leader. He is no leader if he is not obeyed, if his command is not law; and if there is not some heavy punishment attached to its infringement, the individual and selfish interest of the members of the community will be perpetually rising up in opposition to his orders, and render his power equal to nothing. You need not fear giving him this power, for it will only be exercised in positive cases of disobedience of a command which will be issued for the good of all. As every order issued by your leader will be guided by that intent, being the purpose for which he is placed above you. I ask you again, do you consent?”

The men, who now viewed it in its proper light, and who saw the necessity of a leader, and that of obeying his command, gave at once a ready acquiescence to the proposition, and it now only remained to decide who should be leader.

Immediately this was understood, a voice from the throng exclaimed –

“Little John shall be our leader.
Hurrah for Little John!”

“Hurrah for Little John!” cried the whole body of villagers, with a shout like a roar of artillery, their caps flying in the air to express the heartiness with which they met the proposition. As soon as silence was obtained, and Little John could make himself heard, he again addressed the Saxons, saying –

“Friends, I thank you for the honor you have conferred on me; but I wish you to elect as leader one I shall point out as the most proper among us to take that post of honor.”

“Who is it? Who! Name! No! No! Little John forever!” cried a dozen voices.

Little John waved his hand for silence, and when that was obtained, he retreated a few steps, and placing his hand upon the shoulder of Robin Hood, he drew him to the centre of the ring, and said in a loud voice —

“This is he – Robin Hood!” Many voices were about to make exclamations, but he again waved his hand, and said, “Hear all I have to offer, and then reply. I propose this youth because he is a true Saxon, has a heart as free from fear as the boldest here – but that ye have seen. An archer equal to him never stepped on green turf. The certainty of his aim saved us last night from defeat. It was he who, under disadvantages of which few of you are aware, slew the Norman leader. He can give a fall to

the best among you, and handle a quarter staff with a dexterity few can excel, and fewer equal. His discretion and judgment are equal to his other qualities, and the last reason is as great as any —"

"In him you behold the Earl of Huntingdon, descendant of Waltheof, England's darling, but the grasping, thieving Normans have robbed him of his estate and title, and King Henry has outlawed him for prosecuting his claim by law, and for helping to give the Norman Crusaders a taste of a Saxon's prowess. Some of ye here saw on that night that a man's duty was undertaken and ably supported by him. I am well satisfied that if we make him our leader, we shall never see in him a lack of spirit and courage in the greatest danger, nor in other times a desire to encroach upon or misuse the power with which you have invested him."

"Did I think otherwise, I would not wrong you by proposing him, but I have known him from his earliest days – have seen him in all circumstances, and will, with my life, become answerable for his truth and honor, laying it down cheerfully if he evinces a breach of faith, or does aught to destroy the confidence reposed in him. I have, however, but spoken of his capabilities, to show you I would not propose one who was ignorant of forest ways, or the forest itself, for he is well acquainted with every foot of it fourteen miles round – glade, brake, thicket, covert, dell, cave, or any intricacies – aye, one and all – still this is not the only reason, nor the principal reason, why I particularly wish him to be our leader."

"I don't profess to know much of the cunning ways of cunning men; it is not in my nature to study them, and even if I was to try, I don't think I should do much at it; my qualities are those which best become a simple and a good forester, whose knowledge of cunning is confined to the ways of wolves and the timid deer; but I have been among soldiers, among vassals, and I have always found a leader more respected if he is better born than any of those he commands, that there is more obedience on their side, and less tyranny on his. I have always noticed it – I have reflected on it – and I believe it will always be so, because I think it is in men's nature to pay homage to those of higher birth than themselves! Besides, from children they are taught to do it, and they never forget it. I have, therefore, concluded that Robin Hood, who is Sir Guy Gamwell's own nephew, and the rightful heir to the Earldom of Huntingdon, which Sir Guy will vouch, is the best one we can choose for our leader."

"And if you think his youth against him filling the post, I can only say that I will be ever at his side in cases of danger, and where a lack of years may prove a drawback, I will do my best to supply the deficiency; but it is a fault which each day will mend. I have now said all I have to utter, and those who think with me, up caps and cry, 'Robin Hood forever!' "

"**Robin Hood forever**"

cried the men with one burst, quite carried away by the reasoning of Little John, and no small share of their acquiescence to his views being obtained by the idea that, outcasts as they were, they had an Earl at their head. Robin Hood's heart beat loud and fast when he found himself placed in this new situation, for Little John had not mentioned to him his intended proposition; but there was a proud feeling accompanying it, his spirit was one which ever was leading him to soar above his fellows. Whatever he undertook, there was a great ambition spurring on his efforts to excel everyone in its accomplishment. The idea of not being able to do as well, if not better, any art or even handicraft than those famed for its practice, would have been death to him. He would have persevered until he overcame it, but his natural quickness – genius would be a better word – enabled him to effect a mastery over any acquirement he attempted to gain, however difficult; and it was always a proud moment for him when he had successfully accomplished his task.

Now, when he suddenly and unexpectedly found himself a leader over a hundred men or more, his eyes glistened and his bosom swelled with almost a painful sensation of pleasure – paradoxical as it may appear. That he might be unequal to the post was a thought he did not for a moment entertain – it was a thought which, under any circumstance, would never have entered his mind. He had learned to adapt himself to any strait, whatever its danger; to grapple with and surmount it while chance or hope of doing so remained, nor during his essay ever felt within himself that he could not succeed. He also did not possess that false modesty which would have induced him to decline the post of honor at the time he most wished to possess it, and felt himself well capable of filling it.

There were many thoughts and sensations that came thronging through his brain and breast, but those which would have counseled renouncing the leadership were not of the number; so, when the hubbub had subsided, he removed his cap from his head, and looking round on the countenances and eager eyes fixed upon him, he said – "Friends and brother Saxons – This is a proud and joyous moment for me, that you should so unanimously and cheerfully, at the instigation of Little John, elect me as the head of your community, warmly and earnestly I thank you for it. I will not speak of the motive which has induced Little John to single me out for your leader, or the conviction his reasoning has forced upon your minds that, from the circumstance of my birth, I am best fitted to preside over you. All I have to speak upon is the fact of my being your leader, of the duties which will be imposed on me by my post, and of the constant endeavors I will make to perform them to your entire satisfaction. I look youthful, and so far as years are concerned, am so; but my thoughts, and feelings, and actions of which ye shall judge yourselves –

remove me far beyond the limit which my age might seem to prescribe. Ye shall find me a man where manhood is needed, a friend when friendliness becomes a virtue, and a leader where such a one is essential."

"There lies the old forest, our future home; there is not an inch of it within fourteen miles I have not and cannot thread; my first footsteps were taken there, years have I passed in it, and can tell ye, for your satisfaction, that we can dwell there right merrily – that we shall have ourselves only to blame if we do not. There must, however, be certain rules to which we must all subscribe for the safety of all, the infringement of which I would wish should be only banishment from our community, but that, as our abode must be secret, none must quit us with that secret in his possession under the ban of punishment, or what security shall we have for his not betraying us? Although I do not fear that we shall ever have to proceed so far as to put that extremity into execution, yet it is quite necessary that we should make such law, in order that if at any future time such an event should occur the culprit should not tell us we made the law only for him. What I have to say more, I will communicate when the laws for our forest life are submitted for your approval. I will now conclude, by saying, that what further ye have to do in the village, do at once, and let us depart without delay; the news of our recent affray will get wind, and we want no prying friends from Mansfield or Nottingham to tell the Normans whither we have gone. Therefore separate, and meet again three hours hence."

"Then, if you will follow me, bearing with you whatever articles are still left, and which may be useful to us, I will show ye a spot where we can dwell and house as daintily as the happiest in the land. Friends, once again I thank you heartily and honestly for your kindness, and take the Holy Mother to witness that I will prove true to you in weal and woe, not wronging your confidence in word or deed, while life animates me. Hurrah for Sherwood, and those who are to dwell beneath the spreading branches and broad green leaves of its bonnie trees!"

"Hurrah" shouted the villagers, and then separated, in order to complete any little arrangement they might deem necessary for their new mode of life. This, however, took them but little time, the Normans had succeeded in destroying almost everything which was or might be useful, still they gathered whatever they could, and were soon ready to take their leave of the little village of Gamwell, as their dwelling place, forever.

Old Sir Guy, who had been borne away during the conflict, and brought back on its successful termination, but whose head was bowed with grief for the loss of the home he had been so happy in and had so fondly loved, was placed under the care of three of his sons, and by them

carried to his estate in Yorkshire, while Little John, Robin Hood, and the three remaining Gamwells, aided by Friar Tuck, endeavored to get from the ruins of the Hall anything the fire had spared which might be available for use in their new abode. It may be imagined that there was but little rescued from the terrible ravages the fire had made, but there was one thing, which was a chest of gold pieces, and had been kept there by Sir Guy to supply any immediate wants, while the rest he possessed was sent with his valuables and family to his Yorkshire home. Early in the afternoon everything was ready, and the little band, taking a farewell of their once happy village, now one scene of desolation, slowly wended their way, under the guidance of Robin Hood, through the mazes of the forest, to their future dwelling place.

When they had plunged into the depths of Sherwood, and had left Gamwell some five miles behind them, Robin suddenly halted at the mouth of a dense thicket. “This is our home;” he said, “and judge you whether a better accommodation will be met with in any forest in Christendom.”

He led the way through the thicket, which was so dense as to completely exclude the light, and then, after reaching nearly to its extremity, he bade them descend. As it was quite dark they did so with some caution, and after they had continued for a short distance, they suddenly entered upon a most capacious cave, capable of comfortably lodging five times their number.

It was perfectly dry and warm, perforated at angles to let in light and air. It was an excavation of considerable extent, and had evidently been made with great attention to the comfort and safety of its inhabitants. The roof in various places was supported by massive beans placed horizontally, and they by others perpendicularly. Its peculiar fitness to the purposes of the Saxons was so apparent, that they gave birth to a shout of pleasure.

“I am quite surprised, Robin,” said Little John; “I had no idea Sherwood possessed so comfortable an abode; I knew you were acquainted with most of the caves and recesses, but not of such a one as this. Why, how come you to discover it!”

“Why, about seven years since, hardly so much, I was just sixteen at the time, there was a maiden I knew who wished for a young fawn–”

“Marian!”

“No, you are wrong; it was just before I met her for the first time. There was a little maiden living in Gamwell, who had very nice blue eyes, and lips, if possible, nicer still. Well, as I tell you, she wished for a young fawn.

I came into the wood to catch one, and chased it into the thicket at the entrance of this cave, from thence down the steps, and so into here. I caught the fawn and gave it to the maiden. To my father I communicated what I had discovered, and he came with me to inspect it. After we had searched every nook and corner of it, he commanded me never to disclose it to mortal until he should desire me, or that I should see an immediate necessity for it in some case of great emergency. I have not done so until now, and I believe none but ourselves know of its existence."

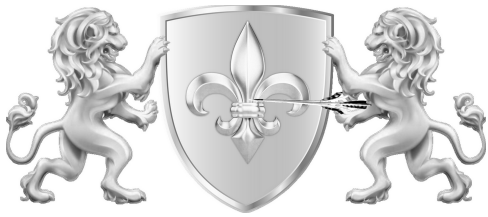
"Gilbert Hood suspected it had been made by a body of Saxons, in the time of the first William, and when quitted by them its locality never disclosed. It is in a very good state, and, with a little labour, may be made a pleasant place enough."

And pleasant enough they determined to make it. There was not a man among them but what could be of use in remedying any defects the place might possess, or adding things to make it more comfortable. The first night they slept rudely enough, but the second they had remedied that inconvenience. Robin and Little John went abroad in the forest and brought home provisions. Domestic utensils were fashioned by the handiest workmen; and a party of four, who were least likely to be known, went to Mansfield to purchase such things as might be indispensable and also to learn what was being noised about the defeat of the Normans. They returned in safety with the articles they were commissioned to buy, and related that there was much talk of their beating the Normans, whose number was greatly exaggerated, while their own was lessened, and that it was confidently predicted a numerous band would return, make every effort to capture all concerned in the action, and destroy every vestige of the village. This was a prediction for which the Saxons had little heed, and the first week was spent by them much happier than they could have anticipated.

A code of laws was drawn up for their strict observance, in order that the comfort and good fellowship they had already enjoyed might continue. They agreed to consider themselves as brothers in all things, to share and share alike in the goods and the evils it would be their fate to endure, making a reservation as regarded their wives, none of whom, however, were to dwell in the cave. To obey their leader in all things, to lay all Normans under contribution — the spoils to be appropriated for the good of the general body. No unnecessary blood was to be shed, no females to be molested, Norman or Saxon. Their right to the green wood, and what it contained, to be maintained at all times. That none but Saxons should be admitted to their band, and those only who would find a member responsible for him when first introduced, and he must be a victim of Norman oppression without being a native rascal.

All such who gained admission to the band and proved themselves knaves, breaking the existing rules, to be immediately shot; and those who introduced them to be suspended for a time from such immunities and privileges the band might possess. There were many other clauses, all tending to give them as much security and comfort as such a body of men could be supposed to enjoy under the circumstances. The ensuing week had passed as pleasantly as the first, for the weather was delightful. The month of August is the next beautiful month to May in the year, and ‘the band of merry men,’ as they called themselves, took every means to make the most of it.

One evening two of the band who had strolled in the direction of Gamwell, brought word that a troop of five hundred men, under the command of an experienced officer, had arrived there, and had demolished everything still standing, leaving only a few bare and blackened walls to tell who had been there.



Chapter 6

An hundred valiant men had this brave Robin Hood,
Still ready at his call, that bowmen were right good,
All clad in Lincoln green, with caps of red and blue,
His fellow's winded horn – not one of them but knew.
And of these archers brave there was not any one,
But he could kill a deer his swiftest speed upon,
Which they did boil and roast in many a mighty wood,
Sharp hunger the fine sauce to their more kingly food.
Then taking them to rest, his merry men and he
Slept many a summer's night under the greenwood tree.
From wealthy abbot's chest, and churl's abundant store,
What oftentimes he took he shared amongst the poor
No lordly bishop came in lusty Robin's way,
To him before he went, but for his pass must pay;
The widow in distress he graciously relieved,
And remedied the wrongs of many a virgin grieved;
He from the husband's bed no married woman won,
But to his mistress dear, his loved Marian,
Was ever constant known.

----- Drayton, 1610

PROTEUS *Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving words*
Can no way change you to a milder form,
I'll woo you like a soldier, at arms' end,
And love you 'gainst the nature of love, – force you.
SILVIA *Oh, heavens!*
PROTEUS *I'll force thee to yield to my desire.*
VALENTINE *Ruffian, let go that rude uncivil touch –*
Thou friend of an ill fashion!

----- Two Gentlemen of Verona

Five years elapsed. There were few incidents of any interest occurred during the interval, but what a few lines will tell. The band had become fully established in their forest home, had lived happily and merrily in strict unison. The fact of their existence was well known, for many a wealthy Norman was made to contribute to their store. Robin Hood had hit upon a method of detaching the odium of robbery from these exactions by inviting anyone who bore evidence of wealth about him to dine with him, the invitation was given through such members of the band as encountered them. When he had feasted on venison, fowls, or venison *pasty* ['*meat pie*'], he was made to pay for his dinner with a heavy sum, if

he bore it about him, if not, he was detained as a hostage until the amount was sent. If the latter was the case, the prisoner was well treated, well feasted, and, when the money was forthcoming, was sent away, save a little fright, perfectly unharmed. In this way they contrived to gather a good round sum, which supplied all the wants of the band, and the whole matter was managed in so pleasant a manner that many a Norman spoke of it as a trip which, if expensive, was still, in some degree, agreeable. Three or four times a troop had been sent out from Nottingham to extirpate them, but it always met with defeat, and the survivors were sent back, some with their faces tied to their horses' tails, some dressed as old women, others more grotesque still, but none injured except during the action which was to decide who should conquer.

Many pranks did they play with travelers, but only with those who could well afford to pay; the poor were unmolested, and, if Saxons, their wants relieved — many poor Normans meeting the like kindness. Monks were staid if they were Normans – and there were few, if any, Saxons who partook of the good things of the convent – made to disgorge some of their wealth, and occasionally to say a mass to them when Friar Tuck was absent.

For, be it known, their mode of life was of too pleasant a nature for him to quit it, and having built a small hermitage near, he resided there, living on the best the forest produced, drinking of the best wine. When he could not get wine he quaffed strong ale; and when fortune denied him that, he swallowed water – but the latter was seldom the case; he always made a wry mouth at it, and vowed it to be deadly insipid and weakening to his constitution. Drinking bout or fighting bout, it was just the same; they held out equal pleasures to him. He was the same roaring, roistering, swaggering Christian as ever. He occasionally went on excursions with the band; and whoever fell in with them found them laughing and joyous, full of life and glee.

Peasants, peers, or princes, it would have been all one to them; they levied their contribution in such a gleesome manner, all their acts were so mirthful, and their mischief ludicrous, and withal so harmless, that far and near they obtained the name of the

'*MERRIE MEN OF SHERWOOD FOREST*.'

Of Allan Clare, the Lady Cristobel, or Baron Fitz Alwine, nothing had transpired, nor could any tidings be gained of them. War had been raging in Normandy, and the Baron had followed King Henry thither. He had not returned, nor was, as yet, likely to return. Will Scarlet, they had ascertained, had been carried to London with his five fellow prisoners, been drafted into the army, and, as well as they could gather, had been fighting in the war between Henry and his sons. Hal of the Keep, after residing with the band one year, and taking an oath never to divulge the secret of their abode, was, by the permission of Robin Hood and his

influence, suffered to quit the band, and take bonnie Grace May unto himself to wife, and he was now blessed with a pretty little girl of three years old, who had just the blue eyes and long fair hair her youthful mother possessed, who still looked the charming sweet-tempered creature she appeared when Robin first saw her; and many visits did he, disguised, pay them in their happy home in Nottingham.

Maude still lived with the Gamwells in Yorkshire: the old knight had got over the loss of Gamwell Hall, and was as hearty and as hale as ever. His sons preferring the mode of life the band followed, joined them and dwelt with them, albeit there was less occasion for them to do it, as Sir Guy's present residence would have offered a safe asylum for them, or even for Robin Hood as well, but he would not quit those who had fought his battle, and so he made his abode in the forest with his merry men.

Five years had produced a considerable change in his person; ever in advance of his years, he appeared thirty, though but just five and twenty; he had increased in height, and his limbs had become more set. His features, too, had changed, the beauty of the boy had settled into the handsome countenance of the man, his dark hazel eyes shone with brilliancy, his brown hair fell in curls upon his shoulders, his mustachios and beard of the same color, gave a manliness and nobility to his countenance, begetting great admiration, especially from the fair sex.

The great flow of spirits he possessed as a boy still were his. There was the same clear laugh that rang so musically in the air in his younger days, the same caroling of ballads. His excelling power with the bow had increased with his strength, not one of his other capabilities retrograding. The judgment he had exercised in the affairs of the band, the way he had acted to them individually and collectively, had endeared him to them, and they who had elected him because of his superior birth, and of the strong recommendation of Little John, would not have believed, if they had been challenged with it, that they had not elected him for his extraordinary merits and noble qualities.

They were devoted to him heart and hand, and would have followed as cheerfully through every danger to certain death, as though they had been going to join a merry dance upon a village green. Their devotion here paid by considering their interests before any other, by ministering in every way to their wants and comforts, by never allowing any selfish wish or personal desire to interfere with the general inclination, by treating them as brothers, excepting where that feeling would clash with his duty as leader, and, in fact, by every act which could endear their commander to a body of men. He still remained unchanged to Marian, loving her with the same devotion he had ever borne her.

Frequently he quitted Sherwood, and visited her at Sir Guy's estate at Barnsdale, in Yorkshire, where she yet resided, with the family. Circumstances had not permitted them hitherto to wed. Indeed, had they,

she would not have consented until her brother's return, or she had received certain intelligence of his death. Their love was no secret to the band; and, from this determination on her part, whenever her name was coupled with their leader's, in drinking their health, it was always given as *Maid* Marian.

It was not likely that she would change – that the affection she bore Robin should fade – from the situation in which she was placed, living secluded, and nothing for her mind to dwell on but his form and his repeated kindnesses, the magic of his voice, and the low earnest words he breathed in her ear when by her side. It was not natural that she should, when she remembered his fond looks, his devoted conduct to her, the warm pressure of his hand, and his sacrifice of self in all his acts to her.

They never met but this was renewed. They were never apart, but her memory, if such were needed, was refreshed by sweet and delicate acts – little nameless kindnesses not to be described – but yet so tender and flattering in their nature, that they are ever appreciated and dearly remembered; and so she loved him as deeply and truly as ever, nor thought a time could ever come when it would be otherwise.

But there was one who strove hard to bring that change about, who racked his brain from morn till night to seek a way to make her love him. It was a knight, whose estate joined Sir Guy's at Barnsdale; he had returned recently from the Holy Land, where he had joined the Crusade, was a Knight Templar, named Sir Hubert de Boissy. He had accidently seen Marian while riding near the mansion, and being much struck with her beauty, followed her, and ascertaining where she lived, visited Sir Guy, proffered his friendship, and endeavored to render himself very agreeable to the old knight.

But this was a matter of much difficulty, for the old man possessed a most violent and unconquerable antipathy to the Normans, 'the pestilent dogs,' as he termed them, and although he thought it prudent not actually to reject the proffered friendliness, still it was received with a coolness which, albeit, the Norman noticed with gnashing teeth, he would not appear to do so. He affected a frankness and an unrestrained air, which he did not feel. But as it might help him to gain his ends, he thought there was a good reason to assume it.

Day after day he visited Barnsdale Hall, and by degrees conquered some of the constraint and distrust which the old knight felt towards him. de Boissy told him marvelous tales of the East, which was then but very little known; made himself a pleasing companion to the old man, until he began to look forward to his daily visits as a matter of pleasing anticipation.

The Norman knight's attentions to Marian were slight, and expressed no more pointedly than those he paid to Maude, or Sir Guy's two daughters, Winifred and Barbara. He worked cautiously and silently. Robin Hood knew not of his visits. Marian fearing that he would be endangered by the Norman's knowledge; and she well knew Robin's hatred and scorn of the whole race was so great, and his recklessness equally so, that he might be led into some indiscretion, were he acquainted with de Boissy's constant attendance. She made Maude, Barbara, and Winifred aware of it, and gave a tolerable hint of it to Sir Guy, as Robin Hood was shortly expected.

The old man felt a blush of shame mantle his cheek as he received the hint, that he should entertain a Norman, and his doing so be kept secret from a noble-minded Saxon. However, the deed was done, and as he had now no reasonable pretext of closing his doors against the Crusader, he was obliged to make the best of what he termed, by the most indulgent epithet, his heedlessness.

This Norman, de Boissy, was a man who, without possessing the natural qualifications necessary to recommend him to the good graces of the fair sex, without the charms of a handsome person, a grace of manner or of mind, had yet contrived to gain considerable success in intrigues with females whose personal advantages would have led an observer to believe them far above any attack such a man might have attempted upon their hearts.

The rules of his order forbade him marrying, indeed enjoined a life of the strictest chastity — a rule which every Templar, saving those of an extremely ascetic turn of mind, took every opportunity of breaking, de Boissy being one of the most active in its infringement. Born of a wealthy family, cradled in the lap of every luxury, naturally of a sensual temperament, and passing his early years in a circle where the gratification of his desires became a matter of comparative ease, he learned to judge all females by the same standard. The frequency of his success in his gallantries had unfortunately given a color to the conception he had formed of them, and chance never threw him into the society of a female whose personal charms were of a high order sufficient to excite his cupidity, that he did not set his mind to work with the endeavor of accomplishing her fall as speedily as circumstances would permit.

The first sight he obtained of Marian roused his curiosity, the gratification of that raised a passion which he resolved to satisfy if it were possible to be done — a point on which he did not possess a doubt.

He had been too fortunate hitherto to fear it. He had shrewdness, and, indeed, experience enough to teach him that it required much artifice to obtain a firm footing in the good graces of the family, ere he could develop or bring to bear his foul intentions. His previous gallantries had been

chiefly carried on in families of his own nation, but in the present instance he was to accomplish his aim in one opposed in thought and deed to his; In a family who hated upon principle, and viewed with mistrust, suspicion, and disgust, every member of his country, and who unequivocally declared their sentiments upon the subject. He had, therefore, much to combat in getting over this prejudice, much command of temper to put in requisition, to bear quietly or meet patiently the epithets of insult and opprobrium he was constantly hearing applied to them.

But he schooled himself to check his rising passion as he heard his countrymen designated by some vile term, and while he endeavored, with seeming frankness, to justify them, he took especial care not to urge his arguments further than to excite a favorable opinion of himself, without bringing the choleric temper of Sir Guy into excited action, by advancing the claims of his nation with more earnestness than prudence.

He had studied men's natures, he had in a degree been compelled to do it, and possessed a description of intuitive knowledge when to bring his experience to bear. With a single-minded being, like Sir Guy, his labors were easy; having once thrown down the high wall of prejudice, the road to his heart was smooth and simple; but with Marian it was more difficult: she had, although partly of Norman descent, taken the tone of her opinion of Normans from Robin Hood's aversion to them; viewed them through the same medium; believed them to be bloodthirsty oppressors, base, deceitful, treacherous — possessing individually and collectively the attributes of all that was base and infamous in human nature. Added to this, her heart was preoccupied by one who was a Saxon, who was preeminently superior to de Boissy in personal and mental charms.

One who had, by his continued kindness, made the love she possessed a cherished idol, the household god whose home was in her heart; whom she worshipped with the tenderest, devoutest affection, which she glorified with her constant thoughts; whose brightness might not fade, but remain unchanged, undimmed, while she found a dwelling place on earth.

de Boissy wormed all this out by bits and parcels, until he had obtained a full knowledge of all. He had much to do to make her even regard him without a stony reserve, which would have effectually chilled a less ardent mind than his own. And yet it was not so much ardor as cool calculation which made him persevere, where even perseverance might expect to fail.

He had experienced what opportunity would do for him, and he trusted to it to gain his purposes. His chief object was to remain unsuspected, and to trust to chance when the declaration of his love would be made, at a time when the surprise it would create would prove an assistance to him. And should he find that persuasion was of no avail, he resolved to try what personal strength would do. Having come to this decision, he could

wait patiently until the time should arrive when he could put it into action; and in the meanwhile, being fully conscious that Marian had bestowed her affections, he thought it quite as well to try and discover who the object was, with the kind intention of devising a means of ridding himself of one who was an obstacle in his path, not easily to be surmounted. He inquired, as far as he dared, without exciting suspicion, but was unsuccessful. He set his people to work, but as they were Normans, and all Sir Guy's vassals were thoroughbred Saxons, and consequently no cater cousins, he was equally without success in this channel.

He ascertained that there was much mystery attached to this lover, but the why and wherefore he could not learn, and therefore became the more anxious to know who and what he was; he had no difficulty in learning that he was a Saxon, and, inasmuch, that they were incipient enemies and should they ever meet it should go hard, he thought, but they should become more decidedly so, or their enmity should cease by the death of one of them – de Boissy not intending or even calculating that he might be that one.

He congratulated himself upon the opportunity which his successful rival's absence afforded him, of ingratiating himself with Marian, and left no advantage unseized which might advance his object. His behavior, attention, and manner generally towards her, had been guided and tinctured with an appearance of the highest respect, paying her a notice of a higher order than he did the other females at the Hall; but this was unnoticed, for it was a deference the family accorded to her, and it was not likely they would remark an attention which they paid constantly and intuitively themselves.

This he saw and rejoiced at, but resolved that although the others noticed it not, Marian should, and therefore took care to make the attention marked when she could see that it was so, without its being observed by those present.

But it had the reverse effect upon her of that which he intended it should have. She had a clear mind, unfettered and untramelled by the pride and prejudices which too much, it is to be lamented, clog and deform that of the present race of females. She detected the distinction instantly, as quickly as he could have wished it. But she deemed it invidious, and therefore despised it, at the same time it lowered him three degrees in her estimation. She perceived, also, that his manner towards her was growing something beyond friendship; but as he had never breathed a word which might be construed into a declaration of love, there was no possibility of conveying to him that if he loved, his love would be hopeless, but by withdrawing herself as much as possible from his society, and by increasing the reserve she had originally shown him.

This determination, so soon as she arrived at it, she put into execution, and he was an exceeding short time ere he discovered it. He cursed his precipitation a thousand times, in beginning to look and act with an air of

passionate admiration before the fitting time. He knew it was of little use now to affect a sudden change of demeanor, because he was satisfied he would gain nothing by it, for if he pretended an indifference, with the hope of a return of her freedom from restraint in his presence, he was well assured she would detect in it an artifice to throw her off her guard, to lull her suspicions, until she had compromised herself by some act of confidence, which he would take advantage of. He was aware that she placed his cunning conduct in its proper light, and he now only hoped for an opportunity when his villainy might, from a scornful beauty, bring her to his feet a wretched suppliant.

This hope he cherished and fostered, with a resolve to carry it out to its fullest extent, if it was only in revenge for being unmasked before his time, and by her, too, whom of all persons he most wished to have a high opinion of him.

Robin Hood was now hourly looked for by Marian with much anxiety. de Boissy was right in his calculation – she estimated him at his full value – and his presence was not only irksome, but occasioned her considerable apprehension. She saw that he regarded her with passionate looks – she knew the rule of his order – she knew how little it was respected, and how remorseless the soldiers of the Holy Temple were in in the gratification of aught which gave them pleasure, no matter what evils or horrors were the consequence and she dreaded de Boissy, as one who was as villainous as the worst of the Order.

There was no one to communicate her fears to, with any prospect of her disclosure being regarded in any other light than a weak fear, for de Boissy had been artful enough not to compromise himself with Sir Guy or any of the members of the family, whatever he might have done with Marian, and thus made it out of her power to give utterance to aught but a few conjectures which would be laughed at as groundless. To Robin Hood only could she speak her fears, and she dreaded even his knowledge of the Norman's visits; his fearless nature would at once lead him to seek an interview, which would probably end in a desperate combat between them. This she had feared from the first, and it had led her to persuade Sir Guy not to speak of de Boissy's visits to him. As she had done this, too, before she had discovered de Boissy's passion, it rendered her situation still more painfully awkward; all she could do was to make the best of the circumstances, keep watchful, and seclude herself as much as possible from de Boissy's notice. To this determination she kept; and the Norman, as he came each day, chafed with suppressed rage as he noticed her frequent absence or her immediate departure after his entrance, without a glance, or more than a cold greeting.

A festival of a saint took place about this time, and it was to be celebrated with much rejoicing in a village but a very short distance from the Hall, and upon Sir Guy's estate; His presence, and that of his family was indispensable, and the Norman begged to attend them. Marian, who

expected Robin's arrival each hour, prayed that he might come during their absence, and, in the anticipation of such an event, excused herself from accompanying them; her motives were seldom questioned, and they departed without her, all the vassals but just two or three accompanying them. When they had quitted, she sought a sitting apartment overlooking Barnsdale wood, the way Robin Hood would come. She advanced to the window, and there she stood watching for miles the route he would take, occasionally fancying she saw him upon his good steed, galloping towards her, but a more intent look would prove her error, producing a painful sensation of disappointment. It was a warm summer day, with scarce a cloud, save thin fleecy strips floating lazily along. No sound met the ear, but the hum of distant song birds, warbling their little melodies in the cool, shady recesses of the green wood. The scene was beautiful to a degree, and the influence it bore threw a languor over the spirits of Marian, which, added to the loneliness and the sickness of hope deferred, caused them gradually to sink, until the depression produced tears. She wept, she hardly knew why; she felt inexpressibly wretched, she hardly knew wherefore; she looked upon the sweet scenery until everything grew dim with the thronging tears. And so, quitting the window, she placed her upon a seat, and gave vent to the grief that oppressed her in a passion of tears.

There are few things which sooner create a kindly sympathy in man for woman than in beholding a young spirit, broken by adverse circumstances, plunged into deep grief. The sight of a young female dissolved in tears is the most touching sight a man can witness, and there are none but those possessing patent granite hearts can stand it. If a man would withstand the blandishments of a woman, he may accomplish it pretty well by exercising all his strength of mind to counteract her smiles, and glances, and other winning ways. But if she once begins to weep, unless he gets out of the way instantly, it is all over with him, he is done for, he may consider himself sold, packed up, but not delivered. To alter the poet's words —

The man that hesitates is lost

It is of no use striving against it. A man may be proof against a thousand ills, but not woman's tears. Let him who doubts it try it, and if he should be foolish enough he will regret that he did not take our word as gospel – but to our story. Marian sat with her face buried in her hands, indulging in unrestrained tears; she was so absorbed in grief she heard not the door unclose, nor he who opened it enter and close it behind him – it was de Boissy. He had quitted Sir Guy on a frivolous pretence and returned to the Hall. He knew that Marian was alone and unprotected, two or three old people only being about the place, and they not within hearing; he ascertained this before he quitted Sir Guy, he was made acquainted with Marian's resolve to remain at home, and he hailed it as the most favourable opportunity which could occur to put his infamous project into execution.

Accordingly, having from the company cleared himself of Sir Guy, he hastened back to the Hall; he traversed the different chambers to find Marian, and opened the door of the apartment she was in, just as a low sob met his ear. To his surprise, he saw her weeping, and that sight gave his resolution a hard shock, in spite of his stern, cold, unrelenting determination with regard to her. He felt pained to see her thus, and on the impulse of the moment he advanced with kind words in his mouth to inquire the cause of her distress.

His footsteps smote her ear. She raised her head upon seeing him. She gained her feet like lightning, and uttering a scream of fright, retreated to the end of the room. This sudden act of hers checked his approach, and he waited a moment for her to recover herself, from the sudden alarm which she exhibited, ere he said to her –

“Marian, why this alarm? Is my presence so frightful to you that you shrink from me as though I were the Evil One himself who stood before thee? By Our Lady! but I gave my person credit for being a trifle less hideous.”

“I knew not of your approach,” stammered Marian, who scarcely knew what to say, her strength of mind much weakened by her depressed spirits. “I believed you to be at the fête; I heard you not; I had hoped – I thought I was alone.”

“Alone! You seem to entertain a marvelous passion for loneliness, my gentle Marian, and are as much scared when anyone breaks in upon thee, as if thou hadst been disturbed in a moment of fond dalliance with a lover.”

Marian made no reply; but recovering something of her old spirit from the insolent rudeness of his speech, threw up her head proudly, and advanced towards the door. de Boissy, however, perceiving the movement, and the intention which directed it, checked it by crossing before her.

“Stay, fair damsel,” he exclaimed, “We part not yet. I came not from the sport of yon churls for so short an interview with you as this. I believed my presence would have claimed a longer contin-uance and a kindlier greeting.”

“It is as unlooked for, as it is unwelcome.”

“I regret to hear it, for I shall intrude upon your patience by not leaving you for some time to come.”

“I would be alone. If you are of gentle blood, Sir Norman, and know the usages of gentle society, you will instantly take that wish of mine as a request for your instant departure.”

“I am of gentle blood, sweet damsel, and all accustomed to gentle society, as thou shalt find when thou knowest me better; and beshrew me, I like gentle society so well, that it will take something more than a hint, distinctly expressed, to make me quit it when it is my humour to stay.”

“It is ignoble in thee, to acknowledge thy want of courtesy. If thou dost not understand that thou trespassest upon hospitality in remaining when thy absence is demanded, do not add to thy rudeness by compelling my presence. Let me pass.”

“Nay. Were I to do that, I might better show my good breeding by quitting the Hall without putting you to the inconvenience of quitting me. But as I think it well to forget it in one case, it is unlikely I should remember it in another. No. Think not of it. I have much to say, with the chance of no second opportunity equal to this again occurring.”

“I therefore take the present without trusting for another. I repeat, I have much to say – much that you will in all probability anticipate, and therefore prepare to hear. You must have conjectured the state of my heart toward you, Marian, by the passionate glances I have from time to time bestowed upon you.”

“I wish to hear nothing upon such a subject. It is unmanly to detain me thus against my free inclining. Were Sir Guy Gamwell here, you would not dare thus rudely to act.”

“I have provided against all such contingencies. Listen to me, Marian: you have strong sense, and I will not waste time by using the petty artifices of foolish flattery, which might cajole a weaker mind, but which would not influence yours. Understand fully your situation — you are here with me alone, without the possibility of being rescued or assisted. I have more of my people here than would conquer twice the number left in this Hall — who might attempt to render you aid? You are completely in my power, and shall be mine whatever the consequences; I will not quit this place until I make you so –”

“Monster!” half shrieked Marian, clasping her hands convulsively.

“Stay; hear me out; you will perhaps change your opinion. I have shown you that nothing can or shall prevent your being mine; but I would it should be of your own free will. Say but that you consent to be mine, and as the wife of de Boissy you shall rank with the richest and proudest lady Normandy can boast–”

“It is basely false; thou knowest thou art sworn to celibacy, thou false, ruthless man, unworthy the name of knight.”

“While a Templar, I am, but I have influence enough to be absolved from my oath, and live with thee in peace and happiness. Hear me, Marian: by my immortal soul, I love you to distraction – never loved I woman like unto thee! If thou dost consent to be mine, thou shalt find that none can be more tender or worship thee so much as I will. The whole study of my life shall be to produce the happiness of a nature so rare, so removed from all the pains, the cares, the ills of this life, that few, if any, ever can or will equal it. Say, wilt thou be mine?

"**Never!**"

"Marian, Marian, judge not rashly. Decide not hastily; I have fair domains in Normandy, vassals whose only object shall be to minister to thy will – proudly shalt thou be honoured by them. There is nought the world produces which thou shalt not have; nor think I offer this in the mad enthusiasm of a frantic passion. I swear that, if thou dost bestow thy hand upon me, that all these things shall be thine!"

"And thou wilt keep thine oath as thou hast kept the oath of thine order!"

"Nay, I will swear an oath of the most binding form which can be breathed. You shall yourself propose it, and I will swear to obey it faithfully and truly. If thou wilt not do this, my confessor shall himself form it, and I will subscribe to its conditions, or may the gates of Paradise forever be closed against me!"

"It is a vain hope, de Boissy. Even if I thought better, aye far kindlier of thee than I do, I could not consent – my heart is not at my disposal."

"Say not so, you will change your determination. Come, let us away, let us fly at once; think of me, and speak to me but kindly, and I will never ask ye to whom it was given."

"Do not urge me thus – it is useless; my heart is irrevocably fixed. I shall not – cannot – would not change. There is nothing under the face of Heaven that you could offer me; your costliest scenes, your pleasures, aye, one undivided scene of happiness, which would make me quit him, even in thought, unto whom my love is given. One, whose every act to me was noble, who has never infringed upon power he knew himself to possess over me; who even sacrificed his own chance of happiness with me, rather than give me the shadow of a cause for regret. To him will I be true, unchanged in act or sentiment, and rather than do aught that should give him pain, I would perish even on this spot and at this moment."

"Hear me, Marian; do not drive me to desperation; I would wish to be calm. I would wish to treat you with all honour, but say not that you will not consent to fly with me. This lover – he to whom you say your heart is given – he does not, he cannot love you more devotedly, more madly than I do. He cannot worship you with the adoration I will. Fly with me, you shall not have cause to regret it. You shall not have time to think of aught but delight. In a home far from this, where there are green woods, blue hills, broad lands, and sunny skies, excelling all you have seen or heard of, where there is everything to make you joyous and calm-hearted, and nought to produce a pang – there shall you pass your days. The luxuries of the East shall not equal your delights. I swear this by every tie sacred to human nature. Tell me not that you cannot change. Marian, come – we will away now. I have fleet horses here at hand. A few hours will leave this place far behind. Come, you consent?"

“I tell you once for all, such a thing can never occur while life exists. Did you offer me an earthly paradise, where the name even of sorrow is unknown, I would not change. I am betrothed by my own free will, by my own earnest desire, to him I love in good and evil, in happiness and misery, in prosperity and wretchedness. All the riches you can offer only makes my heart cling more fondly, more devotedly to him. I am his, unalterably, unchangeably, in weal or woe, in life and death.”

“You despise my offer then, proud girl.”

“I do not despise it; I thank you for your good intentions, for your great promises –”

“There is not one I will not carry out to its furthest limits.”

“I doubt it not, and thank you equally as though I had experienced it, but it can have no further influence over me than causing me to reiterate what I have already said. I cannot change; think no more of me; quit this place, and forget that I ever lived!”

“Were I one of those fools who stickle at punctilios, I might obey your injunction, but I am not. I have warned you, girl, of what you may expect if you still persist in refusing my proffered kindness. Nor think, foolish maiden, that any consideration shall prevent me fulfilling my determination. I repeat, you shall be mine – I have sworn it; and if you will not by your own consent to the proposition I have made, and which I still promise to fulfill, I will use means to make you, that shall not be so gentle in act or purpose.”

“You bear the form of a man, you will not so disgrace humanity. You are a knight with Christ’s holy cross upon your shoulder and breast; you have sworn to dedicate your life in the furtherance of His word and works. You will not so impiously violate that holy oath – you cannot be so vile. Let me depart”

“Not until you are mine, either by your will or mine. I am a man, with perhaps the failing of man's nature strongly grafted in me; as for my oath, that is between me and my conscience, and no affair of thine. Thou wilt not be consigned to perdition for my perjuries, therefore they concern thee not. I ask thee, once again, wilt thou be mine?”

“I have already answered thee I cannot.”

“’Tis false! thou canst, if thou wilt. Remember there is none near thee to aid thee; thy cries will be unheard, or if heard, unheeded. I can hold thee in my arms as powerless as if thou wert an infant, and as I press thee to my burning breast, and imprint my passionate kisses on thy dainty lips, taunt thee with thy niggard kindness. And when I have feasted on thy

charms, who then will be the suppliant, the wretched minion, crouching like an abject slave at the other's feet? Why thou, girl, thou! Urge me not on to do this deed – I confess I would not have its weight upon my soul, but I am desperate. Be mine, Marian – consent at once, or thy hesitation will be thy ruin."

"Hear me, de Boissy. I am a suppliant now. If you have one spark of human feeling, spare me. If you have pity, one grain of compassion in your nature, let me depart unmolested."

"I have sworn you shall be mine."

"Nay, 'twas a rash oath – have mercy! If you ever loved another tenderly and devotedly in bygone years, think of her agony had she been placed in my situation – think of your madness when you had learned how she had been shamed and bitterly wronged. Think of the mother who bore you – whose spirit may be looking down upon you in sorrow and in anger at your ruthless intent; think of these things, and spare me. Were I your sister, an only and beloved sister, and thus placed, what would be your anguish, your bitterness of spirit, had the destroyer blighted her, bowed her down in shame and abject humility to the depths of despair and wretchedness. I have one who loves me intensely – a brother, whose heart would break were I so wronged. Hear me de Boissy; you cannot mean so foully. Let me depart."

"Marian, I hear nothing, I will think of nothing but thy consent. You know the alternative. I am perhaps mad, but you have made me so. Consent at once, or I will give you no time for reflection, if you still refuse. You shall not at the last moment have the alternative of escaping by consenting."

"Then Heaven have mercy upon my soul! Base, remorseless monster, I despise thy threats; a Saxon maiden would rather perish by her own hand than submit to the defilement of a Norman touch."

As Marian uttered this with a convulsive energy, she drew a dagger, which hung at de Boissy's girdle, with a sudden snatch. He saw it gleam in the air – he uttered a cry of horror, and darting forward, seized her wrist as it descended and whirled it from her grasp. She disengaged herself from his hold, flew to the window to shriek, but suddenly she stopped, as if entranced as also did de Boissy, who was following – for a soft tone of a horn suddenly broke the stillness of the quiet air.

The sound appeared at first to be some distance off, but as its tones swelled by degrees into full round notes, it was at once easy to perceive that it was in the immediate vicinity, and, from the peculiarity with which the music was breathed, that it was a signal. Sweet, harmonious, and tenderly it fell on the ear, instinct with melody, rising loud, full, and clear, and then dying away until it ceased into perfect stillness again.

But before there was time for the utterance of an exclamation, a full manly voice rose on the air, singing in a fervent voice the following words

Ah, hear me, I implore thee! ***Mariana!***
I love, oh! I adore thee ***Mariana!***
For thee my spirit's faint to death,
As that flower which pants beneath
The passion teeming in its breath ***Mariana!***
No star in the deep blue sky ***Mariana!***
No gem in the earth doth lie – ***Mariana!***
Which boasts such gleams as thy proud eye,
For whose bright beam now I sigh,
Wanting its fond gaze, must die – ***Mariana!***
Without thee I've no gladness, ***Mariana!***
I love thee unto madness, ***Mariana!***
The enthusiast devotee,
Whose heart bursts for his Deity,
Loves not his god, as I love thee ***Mariana!***

The voice ceased. Marian and de Boissy both stood immoveable while the song lasted; the suddenness with which it broke upon their ears rooted them to the spot – it came so unexpectedly but the cessation broke the spell. Marian recognized the voice, and uttered a convulsive hysterical shriek, so piercing, so shrill, that it passed like a sword through the brain of de Boissy – thrilling every nerve in his body.

"Help" she shrieked franticly. "Help! It is he! Save me, Robin! Help, ha! ha! ha! He is near me – I am saved! O God I thank thee I thank thee!" She sunk upon her knees in thanksgiving to her Maker.

de Boissy, who had stood paralysed by the whole occurrence, now partially recovered himself; he seized her by the wrist and waist, endeavouring to raise her, but she uttered shriek after shriek – dragged herself with all the strength and energy she could bring into action along the floor, in vain endeavours to tear herself from his grasp. Upon Robin she called for help and aid.

Suddenly there arose without, the noise of men in fierce contention; swords clashed with rapidity and loudness, human voices mingled in the din, then there was a sudden cessation, and a voice, in a tone which awoke every echo in the building, cried, "Marian! Marian!"

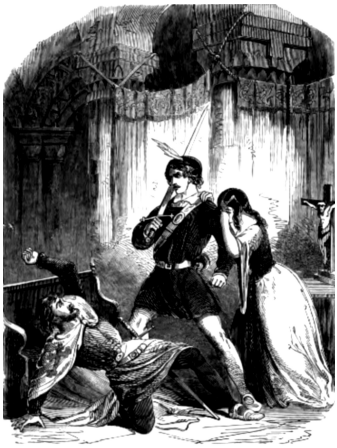
"I am here, Robin!

Save me!"

shrieked the terrified girl, struggling hard to escape the firm hold of de Boissy, There were hurried footsteps along the corridor – the chamber door burst open with a sudden crash. In an instant de Boissy felt a powerful grasp upon his shoulder, and in the following moment was hurled to the ground, with a dash that shook every joint in his body.

He was, however, on his feet in a second, sword in hand, to punish this unlooked-for antagonist; but, whether intense rage had rendered him unskillful, or his opponent was innately his superior, there were but two or three passes made when he found himself disarmed, and his opposer's foot placed upon his weapon. Uttering a cry of joy, Marian threw herself upon her preserver's neck, and, in an agony of tears, exclaimed –

"Bless thee, dear, dear Robin! You have rescued me from shame and misery, to which death would be a blessing!"



Robin Rescues Marian

"My own Marian, may I ever be as near thee in all danger," was Robin's reply as he pressed her to his heart; then turning to de Boissy with a look in which scorn and contempt were so strongly expressed that the Norman felt abject as the glance lighted on him, he said —

"Thou graceless wretch, thou worse than dog! Whom thou art I know not – that thou art a Norman I can see, and hadst thou not that name I would call thee a loathsome reptile, but in that name is centered all that is base and infamous. Begone, thou crawling caitiff, or I will cut thine ears from thine head, slit thy nose, and turn thee out for the dogs to worry. Begone, wretch, nor pollute this place with thy presence. I would have cut thee down as I would a noxious leprous weed, but that I would not insult this maiden by letting out thy churlish blood before her. Begone out of my sight; It sickens at thee so much, that if thou dost not clear it from thy ungainly carcase, I will waive the pollution, and send thee at once unshriven to the Evil One. Away!"

It would be impossible to describe the fury of de Boissy deprived of his weapon, taunted and stung to madness, he had no means of helping himself, but darting a look of malignant passion at our hero, he dashed out of the apartment, to pass at several places three of his people wounded to death. Swearing an oath to have a bitter revenge, he retired to his mansion to brood over his defeat, and devise means of terrible retaliation.

“Marian, dear Marian! cease your tears,” said Robin to the maiden, as she still leaned her head upon his shoulder, sobbing violently; “You have no more cause for fear. I am with you now. I will remain near you, no danger shall approach you while I am by your side. Come, look up and smile upon me; all is well now.”

It was some time ere Marian could articulate a word, but when she did, with what enthusiasm did she thank him for this timely interference. She shuddered as she remembered what her fate might have been had she not have been so opportunely rescued, and she fondly and gratefully pressed his hands as she reiterated her thanks.

“And who is this Norman who dared to lay violent hands upon thee, Marian?”

“A knight who has an estate joining this. He suddenly came here and forced his friendship upon Sir Guy. He sought the opportunity of the absence of Sir Guy, Winifred, Barbara, Maude, and nearly all the vassals, today, at the fête, a short distance from this, to break in upon my privacy and declare a violent love for me –”

“He? a base Norman hound! Dare he offer his love to thee?”

“He did, with a horrible alternative if I refused. He told me I was far from all human aid, no one was near me to hear my cries. I knew he spoke the truth. He said, too, his vassals guarded the entrance–”

“By the Mass he spoke truth! There were three,” muttered Robin, “who know the taste of a Saxon’s steel.”

“He proffered wealth and other dazzling offers, which I could not refuse, but death even were to be preferred to the acceptance of his hand. Oh, Robin you know not the agony of that moment. I persisted in my refusal, he threatened horrors.”

“His dagger hung at his girdle; I was mad at the moment; I saw no way of escape from that terrible man but death. I snatched the weapon from its sheath, and but that he seized my arm as it descended, I should now have been a breathless corpse. At the moment he obtained the dagger from me I heard your voice. I know no more until I found myself upon your neck, dear Robin, my deliverer, my more than preserver.”

There was a flush upon Robin’s brow like a red band, as he listened with clenched teeth to her narrative.

“This – this Norman lives on an adjoining estate?” he asked, trying to speak calmly. “He does. You may see the top of his mansion among the trees from this window” and leading the way to it, she pointed out de Boissy’s residence.

“It is enough. Let us talk no more of him, dear Marian, but of things more cheerful and gratifying. I have good news for you – news which will make your heart beat as high with joy and pleasure, as it has recently with fear and alarm.”

“Joy and pleasure have long been strangers to me, Robin; what can your news be that it should create such sensations?”

“Can you not guess?”

“My heart begins to beat strangely. You have had the brand of outlawry removed from you, dear Robin, and are again free to appear among men?”

“No, Marian, I would it were so. It is not of myself I would speak, but of one near to –”

“Of Allan – you have heard he is alive! Where is – is he returned? He will come here? I shall again see him? Speak, Robin. For mercy's sake tell me all!”

“He is alive and well; I have certain intelligence of his return. A man has lately joined my band who some five or six years ago was taken prisoner in the affray in which my poor foster father, Gilbert Hood, lost his life. He was made to serve in the army in Normandy. He got into the service of Baron Fitz Alwine, who has returned to Nottingham with his daughter, the Lady Christabel. This man, being a Saxon, was sought by your brother, who has hovered like a spirit round the Lady Christabel's abiding place, and he has been of service to him. He tells me that Allan holds a high rank in Louis’ army, that he was trying to quit it when Fitz Alwine returned to England, that he had little doubt he would accomplish it, and he might therefore be shortly expected.”

“This is, indeed, good news. You have come among us, as you ever do, Robin, like our good angel. I know of no time that you have come when you have not shed a cheering influence over us all, and now more than ever. How Allan will honour and respect you when I shall tell him all the kind acts you have done me; and yet I cannot tell him all, they are too many to enumerate.”

“If you will tell him that I have tried to be a kind brother to thee, you will tell him all.”

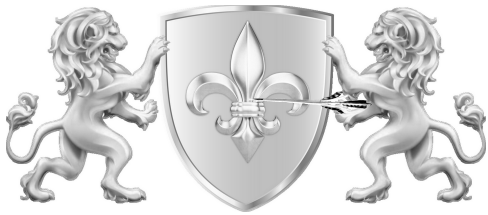
“Something more than a brother, Robin.”

“Dear Marian,” muttered he, pressing his lips to hers, with the fervour of one who loved intensely, and with the purity of one who honoured her he loved.

Robin had, without the knowledge of any of the inhabitants of the Hall of Barnsdale, stationed a few of his band near it, in order to know, while far from it, that those he loved were not unprotected, and that in case of danger he might speedily be acquainted with it. He learned, the day before he arrived, of this Norman's visits, and, ordering fifty of his band to meet him in Barnsdale Wood, he repaired on the back of a good steed, without delay, to the Hall – How very opportunely he arrived the reader already knows and after waiting the arrival of Sir Guy and his family, he repaired to the wood, where he met his men, headed by Little John.

He knew the Norman would not rest quietly under his defeat – that he would take a sudden and terrible revenge – he therefore resolved to be prepared for him, and turn his schemes into weapons against himself. The conclusion he came to was a correct one. de Boissy gathered all the vassals the estate would produce, between thirty and forty, the majority being Saxon serfs, who had no relish for the service on which they were about to be employed, and with their aid, determined to make a descent upon the Hall, consign that to the flames, its male inhabitants to the sword, the women to his Norman followers, and Marian he resolved to degrade by every means chance might place in his power.

Upon the second night, subsequent to his attempted outrage on her, he led forth his men upon this enterprise, but they had not quitted the mansion many hundred yards, before they were set upon by Robin Hood, Little John, and his merrie men. The conflict was a short one. Robin sought out the Norman, and, after a fierce combat, slew him. Upon his death, his men threw down their arms and cried for quarter; it was granted them, but they were dispersed in different parts. de Boissy's mansion was burned to the ground, while the body of the Norman was hung upon the branch of an oak tree, as a memento of Robin Hood's reward of the villainy of a Norman.



Chapter 7

A herd of deer was in the bend, feeding before his face,
Now the best of you I'll have to my dinner, And that in a little space.
Now the stranger made no mickle ado, And bent a right good bow,
And the best of all the herd he slew, Full forty yards him fro'.
Well shot, well shot, said Robin Hood then, That shot it was in time,
And if thou wilt accept of the place, Thou shalt be a yeoman of mine.
Tell me, good fellow, who thou art? Tell me where dost thou won?
The stranger then answered, bold Robin Hood, My name is young Gamwell.
But, Lord! what greeting and friendship were there, When these two cousins did meet;
They went all about that long summer's day –

----- Robin Hood and Will Scarlet

So speaking, and by fervent love endowed
With faith, the suppliant heavenward lifts her hands;
While, like the sun emerging from a cloud,
countenance brightens and her eye expands,
Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows,
And she expects the issue in repose.
— What hath she perceived? — O joy!
What doth she look on? – Whom doth she behold?

----- Wordsworth

Upon the morning of a day in August, the sun poured out his beams from the heavens with a brilliancy undimmed by the presence of a cloud, and the cool air, loaded with fragrance of fruit and flowers, had chased away the white vapours which the earth had sent forth some hours earlier, and the sky looked, notwithstanding the flood of sunbeams, exquisitely blue, the trees, deliciously green, save here and there a golden tinge just to show autumn was coming, and the forest things all appeared in their richest dress, waving and bowing, and bending gracefully, as the soft fresh wind passed lovingly over them. It was just the morning to make London people regret they have not gone on that identical day 'a-gipsying,' and those who really have been fortunate enough to do so to utter, in a whirl of ecstacy, accompanied by an energetic rubbing of the palms together –

"I say, Jones, here's a day, my boy – here's a day – eh? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh! Glorious, glorious, Smith; splendid! Ho! ho! Ho!"

It was such a morning as to make an old black-bird, who had been secluded in an apology for a cage some years, open his eyes, fancy he had grown young again, and whistle a few notes, under the impression that he was warbling, much to his own surprise as to the astonishment of those who owned him, they not having known him do such a thing for years. It was the sort of morning on which mothers' pets going to a day school do not hesitate to play the truant; when merchants who have spent their prime in the stifling atmosphere of a counting-house will look up at the blue sky – that is, as blue as the dusty windows will let it appear – and have a recollection pass through their mind of a time when they were happy thoughtless boys, who gathered buttercups in the fields, or scoured the woods for birds' nests, sloes, woodnuts, or whatever the season might produce, and then turn away their eyes with a feeling somewhat approaching sadness to continue their employment. It was a morning when cabmen and others of their genus wonder who invented cabs or any vehicles, and why they were invented; when watermen make a bustle, and clean out their wherries; when coaches out of London and steamers load well and omnibuses don't; when schoolboys wonder if their master is half brother to Charity, and would indulge them with a half holiday; and they hear the dreamy sound of bees, and think of butterflies and blackberries, of wading knee deep in cool shallow streams, making plunges at trout which they never catch, and being verily content with "tittlebats" which they do, and which they cram into that unhealthy dungeon, a ginger beer bottle; when young girls who have got sweethearts fully expect Charles will come and – but why proceed — in short, it was a most lovely morning when Robin Hood, after giving some directions to his band, strolled through Sherwood, in the direction of Nottingham. The morning shed its gladdening influence over him, as it had done over all things animate, and from a slight hum he began a few snatches, at last he burst forth in full voice –

Young Herbert knelt, and fondly swore
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
To love a maid for evermore,
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
He swore none had so bright an eye,
No lips e'er form'd so sweet a smile,
No soul e'er breathed so soft a sigh,
No heart was e'er more free from guile,
Heigho, heigho, my heart, heigho
Ah! then he ask'd her would she wed,
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
The maiden blush'd and hung her head,
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!

His words were breathed with accents mild,
He pray'd his future hopes she'd bless;
The youth he sigh'd, the maiden smiled,
And falt'ring faintly answer'd 'Yes!'

Heigho, heigho, my heart, heigho!

He had scarcely finished his ditty, ere he was aware of some one else similarly occupied. The wood was echoing yet the words of the stranger's song when he had ceased, and he listened with some surprise to hear a clear, manly voice shout forth in a tone more distinguished for its strength than for its musical properties –

There's no cloud o'er the moon, there's no sound in the dell;
Sing Lily, oh hey! oh hey, sing Lily!
There's no sound in the air from the convent's soft bell;
Sing Lily, oh hey! oh hey, sing Lily!
Wilt thou wander with me in the merrie Shire wood,
To the green trysting tree 'neath whose deep shade we stood
When you stole my fond heart, my own love, Robin Hood?
Sing Lily, oh hey! oh hey, sing Lily!

"By'r Lady!" muttered Robin, as the echo of the last word died on his ear, "but this is strange. Who can this be who sings songs known almost only to myself, and coupled with my name? We must reconnoitre the new comer." And upon the instant he retired behind a tree, and awaited the stranger's arrival.

The boisterous gladness in which the comer was indulging when Robin first heard him seemed in no degree lessened as he approached, which he did at somewhat of a lazy pace. He arrived within a few feet of the spot where our hero was hidden, and stopping short, he took survey of the wood around him; a herd of deer came slowly in sight, passing through a grove of trees at some short distance.

"Aha!" said the stranger, "This looks like old times. I wonder whether I have still any expertness at woodcraft. The old feeling springs up in my heart as I see these bonny deer bounding along. By St. Paul, but I'll try a shaft at yonder fat fellow, whether he be King Harry's or King Satan's!" So saying, he drew a shaft from a quiver which hung at his back, and fitting it to his bow, took an aim, and a quick one too, for the buck, suddenly alarmed, bounded off, only to leap high in the air, and fall with the stranger's arrow sticking his side.

“That was well shot,” said Robin, advancing from his covert and clapping him upon the shoulder. He turned and scanned Robin from head to foot, and merely replied, with something like a sneer curling his lip –

“Indeed!”

“Aye, for one unused to shooting deer in the green wood.”

“How know you that I am not used to the green wood?”

“I can see by the way you handle your bow that you have been more used to bring a man down in a field of battle, than a buck in the green wood.”

“Oh! and who may you be, friend Sharp-sight, that can tell a soldier’s handling of a bow from a forester’s?”

“A keeper of this forest, who has spent all his life in it, and does not intend to let the finest deer of a herd be singled out by any fellow who chooses to draw bow at it.”

“Were you fifty times the keeper of this forest, you should not prevent me drawing bow at whatever I pleased, here or anywhere, at deer, buck, or fawn.”

“You are a good shot. I have many men under my command, and there is not one who cannot bring down a buck at full speed. I would add to their number any one who draws a good bow, or has an honest heart without an over thick head. If you choose to join them, you shall have full liberty to shoot what you please in this old forest; if not, you shall not sojourn in it another hour.”

“God-a-mercy, Mr. Forester, but you talk largely A word in thine ear — If thou dost not leave my way clear, I’ll treat thee to such a buffeting as shall make thee skip higher than the buck I just brought down.”

“Buffet me!” cried Robin, contemptuously. “I tell thee, fellow, unless thou goest at once, you shall be soundly trounced, and then try how swinging from yonder tree by the neck agrees with thy constitution. Begone at once, while thou art well off!”

“Thou canst not trounce me; thou art not able!”

“I do not trouble myself to cudgel every swaggerer who crosses my path. There are those within my call who save me that labour;” and, so saying, Robin put his bugle to his lips to blow a blast, but ere the sound was given to the horn, the stranger had an arrow to his bow, and, aiming it at Robin, called out–

“Hold, forester, if thou wouldst not quit life at once! Before one could come to thy assistance, thou should lie dead at my feet.”

Robin dropped his bugle, and, with a speed which astonished the stranger, had his bow extended towards him.“Art thou mad! Why, fool,” he cried, “ere an arrow could quit thy bow, mine should pierce thy heart; but this would be bloody work,” he concluded, dropping his bow. “We might slay each other, and no purpose gained. I have a quarter staff, you have also one; if you know its use, try a bout with me. I like your spirit. Come, is it agreed?”

“With all my heart,” said the stranger, throwing down his bow, and appealing to his quarter staff, a crab one, of substantial make. “Let him who cracks. the other’s crown, have his defeated opponent at his will.”

“It shall be so. If I conquer thee, thou wilt be one of my band?”

“I will.”

“Then come on, and may the best player prove the winner.

“Amen.”

To it they went. Blows were liberally bestowed, but the principal recipient in this case was the stranger. He had no chance with Robin – he was hit in all without the ability to return – so, suddenly throwing down his weapon, he cried–

“Hold!”

“You acknowledge yourself beaten?” said Robin.

“No; but you are so much more expert at that weapon, so much more accustomed to its use than I, that I have not a chance with thee. Dost thou know the use of the broadsword?”

“I do, pretty well.”

“And will you appeal to it, to see which is the best player – thou hast courage enough for that?”

“Pshaw; no words; to your sword.”

The stranger and Robin then set to work with their broadswords; both were excellent swordsmen. For near a quarter of an hour did they cut, slash, thrust, parry, and pass without effect. Neither received a wound. At length Robin, in his turn, cried–

“Hold!”

“Are you tired?” asked the stranger, with a triumphant smile.

“In good troth, I am,” returned Robin. “This cutting with swords at each other in cool blood is not such pleasant work as quarter staff play; besides, since I have been at play with thee I have a strong presentiment upon me that I know thee. There is look in thine eye, a tone in thy voice,

which comes over me, bringing the memory of an old and dear friend to me; and my heart, which leaps at the thought, would do in right merrie gladness wert thou he. Wilt thou give me to know thy name?"

"You speak honestly, but I am not exactly free in my situation to tell every one who stands before me when I front them."

"You need not fear me. I am what men term an outlaw. Besides, I scorn the paltry meanness of which he who learns a man's secret, and basely betrays it, is guilty of. That look again! – Do I see–"

"Will Gamwell."

"Bonnie Will Scarlet?"

"The same."

"And I am Robin Hood."

"Robin! ha! ha! ha! my old friend, how I have sought thee!"

"My bonnie Will! This is a happy hour."

And the two young men embraced with all the enthusiasm with which dear friends meet, aye, and should meet, after a long absence. Each looked into the other's eyes with glowing visage. The green wood did not hold two such gladsome hearts as theirs.

"And Maude?" muttered Will, huskily, happy tears streaming from his eyes.

"She is well."

"And she – is –"

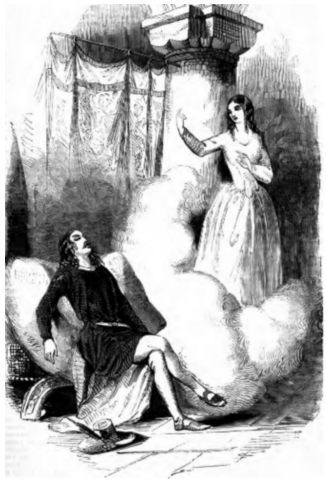
"Aye Will, she still loves thee. She has kept her heart and hand for thee, and thee only, and has wept many bitter tears for thy loss."

"Bless her, bless her! I have not forgotten her, never for a moment, whether in a toilsome march, in the midst of the roar of battle, or in the wretched loneliness of a dungeon, for I have shared them all. She has ever been present to my heart, ever the angel who, in my dreams and my waking thoughts has smiled upon me, cheered, and consoled me –made me hope on under all the privations and toils I have encountered. I bore all my trials cheerfully, for I was sure the day would come when I should again see her, perhaps to call her mine, and never to part again."

"And so you will."

"I believe so. You must know, Robin, that while in Normandy I had a strange dream about her. I thought I saw her, bleeding and faint,

stretching out her hands, and imploring me to come to her. I was chained to the floor; I could not move; I struggled dreadfully; I saw her grow fainter and fainter, until scarce a breath of life remained; I grew frantic. I struggled desperately."



"Suddenly at once my bonds snapped asunder – I was free, flew to her side, I raised her in my arms, and then I saw the colour gradually return to her pale cheeks, until they assumed the rosy hue of health; her lips, which were ashy before, now resumed their native colour, and, opening her eyelids, she fixed her clear dark eyes upon me, as though she had but just awakened from a refreshing slumber, and smiled upon me. The ecstasy of that moment was more than I could bear – I burst into tears and awoke, the hot drops still coursing down my cheeks."

"I resolved to return to England. I sought my commander, who was originally my father's steward. He was sent away for bad conduct, and entered the army."

"Being naturally crafty and designing, by bowing and cringing, he had worked his way to his post as commander of a body of troops. While in the army I had most faithfully fulfilled my duties: he had promised me my discharge. I now asked him for it at once – he refused. I begged, entreated him – he still refused; I threw myself upon my knees before him – I, who have never knelt to man before, Robin – and he spurned me from him with his foot. My sword was by my side – I drew it madly and cut him down as though he had been a blade of grass in my path. I fled. I was hotly pursued; I arrived in England, and came direct here – that will explain my hesitation in revealing my name to you."

"The sight of the green wood raised old thoughts in me, and, perhaps imprudently, I chaunted one of the ballads I learned of you. But it has turned out for the best, for had I not done so I might not have met you. Is Maude at Gamwell?"

"At Gamwell! No. Have you not heard?"

"Heard! Heard what? I have heard nothing of home since I was borne away prisoner on that ill-fated night which deprived me of everything which could make me value life. Ah! Robin, I have had a bitter time of it. Suspense is worse than death – I have found it so; therefore, whatever you have to tell me, if it be ill news, out with it at once, that I may know the worst."

“There is no very great evil to tell you which may destroy your peace of mind effectually. But you will not be pleased to hear that Gamwell Hall, aye, the village itself, is swept away.”

“Swept away – how? away! Holy Virgin! What has become of my mother, my sisters, my father? Speak, Robin!”

“It is a long story, which I will tell you anon. Let it suffice that your relatives are all well and happy, and are at Barnsdale; the Normans having, in retaliation for our attack upon them, destroyed the Hall at Gamwell, and every hut as well. However, those who got away from us after they had made the attack will not forget it while they live.”

“Then they did not destroy it without some little trouble?”

“Not without a great deal of it. Their reception and departure will be remembered by the survivors with rather unpleasant reflections.”

“And you are a keeper of this forest now – in King Harry’s pay, of course?”

“Not quite. The Normans pay me – that is, those who are rich enough to afford it; and I am keeper of the forest for no King Harry, but for myself and my merrie men. I am king of Sherwood, Will Scarlet, lord of this forest, and all it contains, and maintain my claim by the aid of my band, and the strength of my arm against all claimants and all comers, excepting no one.”

“I do not understand.”

“You shall see my meaning.” With that Robin took his bugle, and blew three shrill blasts. He was answered by one at a short distance and, before Will had time to speculate upon what would be the result of this, there crowded into the open space, from all parts, a troop of men, amounting to near an hundred, all clad in green, and armed with bows, bucklers, and short swords. Will was quite taken aback by surprise. Robin enjoyed his embarrassed air with great delight, and, beckoning to one who was the first to show himself in answer to the bugle’s call, he exclaimed, slapping Will on the shoulder –

“See! here is one who, in a bout with a broad blade, made me cry hold!”

“He?”

“Aye, even he, and glad enough was I to cry it.”

“I will try if he can make me do it. My weapon is the quarter staff. Nature made me expert at that more than any other, but I’ll not mind that but try this stranger’s mettle at his own weapon. I’ll speak of him as a bonnie player if he makes me cry hold!”

“He will do it, Little John, be thou assured. I’ll wager thee a quiver of arrows to a cypress bow!”

“Agreed, master. Now, stranger, draw thy weapon; and if thou beatest me, thou wilt do what man never did yet.”

When Will heard Robin Hood mention Little John by name, it satisfied a conjecture that he made as to his identity. A life in the green wood had browned Little John’s features without much altering them; and his make, his brawny limbs, and great stature, prevented the existence of much doubt in Will’s mind as to who stood before him, when his huge cousin confronted him.

Answering a significant wink from Robin, by a smile, he pulled his bonnet over his brow, and drawing his sword, threw himself into an attitude of defence – an act which was immediately replied to by Little John crossing his sword with his own. Will immediately affected to make himself up for desperate play; and when he had led Little John to believe he was proceeding to action, he suddenly exclaimed – “What! Little John, have you forgotten your cousin Will – bonnie Will Scarlet, as you used to call him?”

“Hold!” cried Little John, staggering back at the sound of his voice, exhibiting an attitude of the greatest wonder and astonishment.

“Do you not recollect me, Little John?” cried Will, laughing at his cousin’s surprise, tossing his cap in the air, and shaking his bright auburn locks back from his face.

“It is Will, by the Holy Mother! It is Will himself!” ejaculated Little John, eagerly, and then sprang forward, caught him in his arms, and clasped him. with warmth to his heart.

“Welcome back, welcome back to merrie England, my bonnie Will!” he cried. “Welcome home! There will be glad hearts now in Barnsdale, right glad! Beshrew me, but there will be drinking, feasting, dancing, and rejoicing, for the lost one found, the strayed one has come home to the fold, It is a merry, a glad, a happy hour to me. A - a - boy, you must not think me weak and childish because this water will run down my cheek. A - I - in good troth am right glad to see thee once again that I am right glad, very - very –”

Little John squeezed Will’s hand almost convulsively, and in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, tears of joy would run down his cheeks. Will was equally affected. Robin Hood and his men were scarcely less so, and it was some little time ere they recovered sufficiently to converse freely. When, however, this was the case, Will was made acquainted, in as few words as possible, with every thing that had transpired during his

absence; and all that day did he, in the society of ***Robin Hood and Little John***, roam about the green wood, visiting all the haunts and secret places which the band used on various occasions.

He was also, at his own express desire, enrolled as a member, subscribing to all the forms necessary to be observed, and when it was understood how he was related to ***Robin Hood and Little John***, he was elected as a lieutenant, the same degree of rank held by Little John. When the day was over, and the next morning rose as clear and sunny as the day preceding, Will expressed some little impatience to start off to Barnsdale Hall, a wish which was natural enough and to be expected. Robin, therefore, prepared to gratify it, and before the sun had reached his altitude in the heavens, they had made the necessary arrangements. Little John being very desirous of accompanying Will home, made one of the party, and the three started merrily on their way to Yorkshire.

Will's brothers were at Barnsdale at this time, for their father's natal day was near at hand, and they had quitted their forest home for a short period, in order to make preparations for keeping it bonnily. Will's return would indeed make it a festival, and as both Robin and Little John had intended to join in the festivity, their arrangements for quitting the band now were easily made, as they were in a train to do when he arrived. Thus, everything seemed to fall pleasantly, each incident chiming with the other, making an agreeable harmony, and producing a great exhilaration of spirits. As they pursued their way to Mansfield, where they intended to take horse, they indulged in the greatest merriment.

Even Little John, albeit unaccustomed to chant, mingled his voice with his cousin's as they shouted some ballad, known to each other years agone, and now poured forth for the sake of the sweet recollections they produced. They laughed and hallooed, they recalled pleasant occurrences to each other's minds, and entered into the detail of them as though each was telling the other some fanciful affair which he knew not of, and as any one of the incidents might happen to contain some ludicrous association, they would laugh over it with the same glee and convulsive enjoyment which they had done when it took place. To have seen them passing among the old trees along the glades and path ways, a stranger would have deemed that they had been kissing the wine cup too freely — it was but the excitement of delight which produced an intoxication almost similar to one produced from the fumes of wine.

On they went, not abating one jot of their glee, hallooing their remarks and reminiscences as though each was afflicted with deafness.

They had reached some distance from their starting place and were not a very long distance from Mansfield, when one of their paroxysms of mirth

was suddenly interrupted by the unexpected appearance of three men, habited in forest garb, who sprung from a covert into the glade along which they were advancing, and exhibited a decided intention of opposing their progress. Robin Hood and his companions stopped mechanically at this interruption, and for a moment not a word transpired. At length Robin began eyeing the strangers from top to toe, advanced a step or two towards them and said –

"Who are ye? and what want ye here?"

"We were about to ask that question of you!" claimed the tallest of the three, a sturdy fellow, armed with a forest bill and a long falchion.

"Were you?" replied Robin. "You might have spared yourselves that trouble, for had you done so, your question would only have been answered in such hard terms that you would repent having asked it the longest day you have to breathe."

"You talk largely, fellow!" uttered the forester, rather chafed.

"Nay! Not more so than I should have acted, had you been foolish enough to question me, but though I would not answer thee, thou shalt me. I ask again, but mark me, not a third time, who are ye? And what do ye walking here, as boldly as though the forest were thine?"

"Gramercy! Thy tongue runs glibly. Thou didst me the favour to promise me a cudgeling if I asked thee the question thou askest me. Now, my jolly fellow, for the love I bear bold spirits, I will show thee courtesy sufficient to answer thy question. But when I have done that, thou shalt see how I punish impertinence."

"Agreed!" cried Robin, with glee. "Tell me who and what thou art, and then thou shalt trounce me soundly – if thou canst with all my heart."

"I am keeper of this division of Sherwood, beginning at Mansfield, and extending seven miles either way; these two companions of mine are assistants, and we hold our commission from King Henry, to preserve his deer from the ungainly hands of all such unlawful rogues as thee. Now you understand we are keepers –"

"The devil, you are?" interrupted Robin, suddenly, with a laugh. "That cannot be. We three are the keepers of this forest, and hold our commission from a far higher power than thine. We will show you this speedily if ye doubt my word, for with us, might makes right."

"Thou and thy comrades keepers!" uttered scornfully he who styled himself keeper.

"Thou liest, fellow. Thou hast no right or claim to it."

“The lie to thy teeth, varlet!” said Robin, quickly. “I know thee to lie most gracelessly, for I am well aware who is keeper, by King Henry’s commission, of this division of Sherwood, and it is not thee.”

“Who then?”

“Why, Sir John Cockle, the burly miller of Mansfield.”

“Thou wouldst have spoken truly hadst thou said this some ten days since, but he has turned his keepership over to me, whom men call, ‘Much, the miller’s son.’”

“Thou Much, the miller’s son?”

“Aye, even so.”

“Um! there’s not enough of thee to be called Much – why thou shouldst have been some six inches taller, and thy girth of proportionable increase, to have well-deserved thy name. I never saw thee before, and doubt if thou art he whom you name.”

“It is Much,” said Little John, “I know him by sight. He is reported to be the best quarter staff player in Mansfield, but I have never had a chance of a bout with him.”

“God-a-mercy! Yeoman,” cried Much, scanning Little John, “Thou mightest well be called More, if I am named Much for my size. It seemeth odd to me that if thou shouldst have seen me, that I have not seen thee, for, beshrew me, I should not easily have forgotten thee, had I once have clapped eyne on thee. Still I can make a shrewd guess at thee and those who are with thee.”

“If thou wert to call me Robin Hood,” exclaimed our hero, “and he Little John, thou wouldst not have been far wrong.”

“I should have named ye thus, hadst thou questioned me; and I am right glad that we have met, for there is a large reward upon thy head, Robin, which I would fain have in my possession. And now I have the chance, it shall go hard but I try for it, and get it, too.”

“And if thou canst earn it by conquering me, thou shalt be most welcome to it, nor shall one of my followers take revenge on thee for thy good fortune. So, good Much, let us not waste more words, but doff your coat, as I will mine, and to thy sword and buckler.”

“Stay,” cried Little John, “Much hath the credit of being more expert at the quarter staff than at the falchion; I know that I also am so. Let I and Much make a match of it, and thou and Will oppose Much’s comrades.”

“So be it,” replied Much. “We are three to three; and it shall never be said that Much, the miller of Mansfield’s son, and his friends, were afraid, or fled before Robin Hood or any of his merrie men.”

“Boldly said,” cried Robin. “Here is Much for thee, Little John, but not more than thou canst well manage. Here is one for thee, Will, and this stout fellow for me. Art thou content, man?” he asked of the fellow he had picked out to fight.

“Well content, thou bold outlaw,” answered he; “Thou shalt find we have as much courage to fight, and scorn to flee before aught, as thee and thy gang.”

“Come, this at best is but prating,” exclaimed Much; “Let us to our play, and the Holy Mother give victory to the right.”

“Amen,” said Robin; “The Holy Mother

never deserts me in my hour of need.”

“Nor any one,” said Much.

“Nor any one,” repeated Robin, taking off his cap, and devoutly crossing himself.

Each one threw off his doublet, girded his loins tightly with his belt, and prepared for action. It was remarkable to see with what an alacrity and appearance of anticipated pleasure they set about their preparations. If they had been making ready for a joyous dance, their eyes could not have sparkled more brightly, or a gayer smile played upon their lips. There was a mixture of pride, too, in the cheerfulness with which both Robin and Will prepared to exhibit their skill, for each wished to show his old friend that, in the long interval during which they had been separated, they had improved in the exercise of their weapons, although before they were parted they had both arrived at the possession of great skill. When all was prepared, Much said – “I have no quarter staff with me.”

“Here is mine,” said Robin, handing it to Much; “A better or a truer crabtree staff never played a bout. It grew in Sherwood, but the forest holds not such another. It is as tough as a priest’s conscience, and will take as hard a knock without showing as much effect.”

“That is great praise, by the Mass!” exclaimed Much, with a laugh; “And to say truth, it is the prettiest staff I ever handled. Gramercy! But I feel as though the staff said, ‘Thou must win.’ ”

“If the staff could speak and say as much, then would it lie; but it is a true staff, and holds its peace on that score, as it will any, until thou make it speak with thy exertions,” quietly observed Little John.

“By the holy Paul! if blows are its words, thou wilt hate its converse,” remarked Much, with a confident nod.

“I am not expert at witty words,” replied Little John; “but if thou dost make thy quarter staff wag as freely as thy tongue, then will I tell thee thou makest nimble play. But I think thy tongue and thy ability, Much, much of a muchness, and if thou dost wish to prove my words false, come on at once without more ado. Play!”

“**Play!**” echoed Much.

“**Play!**” cried Robin, Will Scarlet, and their antagonists.

So they fell to it hard and sore,
It was on a midsummer day;
From eight of the clock till two and past
They all showed gallant play.
There Robin, Will. and Little John,
They fought most manfully,
Till all their wind was spent and gone.

So says the old ballad, and well might it say it, for desperately they fought, giving no chance to their opponents to wound them. The passes and thrusts made with by the keepers at Robin and Will were parried with exceeding skill by both sword and buckler, and they had frequently to praise, and the justice to do so, the skill of their antagonists. Occasionally they rested by mutual consent, to recover their breath. But when that was done, to it they went again with determined vigour, making the old wood resound with their repeated and heavy blows. At length Robin Hood, making a desperate effort, suddenly disarmed his opponent, sending his sword high in the air.

“**Surrender!**”

he cried to his defeated opponent.

“Not with life,” replied the man, holding his buckler so as to defend his person in case of attack.

“Why, fool, thou art beaten,” said Robin, sternly.

“I have lost my weapon, but I am not yet beaten,” he returned.

“Dost thou think thy buckler can prevent my taking thy life if I was moved to do so.”

“I would try it,” replied he, confidently. At the same moment Will Scarlet succeeded in disarming his antagonist, and cried in a loud voice to him, as Robin had to his foe –

“**Surrender!**”

“Never!” was the reply. The utterer, as he spoke, shifting his buckler as his comrade had done, with the purpose of shielding himself from his opponent’s sword in the event of his continuing the fight.

“You will not!” cried Will, rather inflamed.

“Not while I have breath to say no.”

“**Then take the reward of thy temerity**,”

roared Will, attacking him furiously. The fellow defended himself from Will’s rapid and heavy blows with admirable skill, but it was evident that Will must conquer him.

And as there had as yet been no blood spilt, of any import, Robin Hood was desirous of preventing an effusion, now it was in his power to prevent it; he therefore called in a loud voice–

“**Hold!** hold thy hand, Will, you have him at unfair odds – **Hold off!**”

As soon as Will could recover his equanimity enough to pay attention to Robin’s voice, he held his hand, and, as soon as he could get his breath, said – “Thou mayst thank Robin Hood, thou obstinate bull, that I have not watered the plain with thy blood. Art sick of life, that thou would throw it away thus wantonly?”

“I seek no quarter while I have a chance of defending myself. Nor would cry spare, while I was able to save my life. I do not consider that I am beaten by thee.”

“No,” said the other, quickly, “Disarmed, not defeated.”

“I like your spirit well,” exclaimed Robin Hood; “Ye are bold yeomen both, and I give ye all credit for your stout play. I am not the one to throw man’s defeat in his teeth; ‘tis enough for us to know that ye are disarmed; and for you, that your antagonists testify you have behaved gallantly; still, if Much, thy leader is defeated, thou must acknowledge us to be the better players.”

“But not better men.”

“As you will, on that score. We will wait and see what Little John and Much do.”

During the whole of this conversation Little John and Much had been hammering and battering away at each other with a dexterity and perseverance perfectly surprising to one of the uninitiated. They were both stripped to their waist, and the violent excise, coupled with the heat of the day, had increased the circulation of their blood to such an extent, that they looked more like two Red Indians than a pair of fair northerns.

As soon as they became aware that the four late combatants were spectators, they each exerted themselves to obtain a mastery over the other, to decide the conflict. Long as they had fought, they exhibited very little signs of fatigue or fear of their success; there were several severe weals upon the arms and body of Much, but there were none upon Little John's – indeed, it was evident he was the best player, but that his opponent was not vastly inferior, and that he had his best work to do to conquer him. The agility which both exhibited said much for their acquirement, and Robin Hood could not but utter loud praise to Much for the masterly manner in which he opposed his staff to Little John's, as it came in all directions.

For some time longer they fought, with little more apparent success on either side, save that Much appeared the weaker of the two; and when this evidenced itself by the want of force in some of his blows, where it was required to make them tell, it was then that Robin exclaimed —

"Come, Little John, finish your work, we are only waiting for thee!"

Little John nodded his head, and then commenced a style of play which completely astounded Much, who, being fatigued, was unprepared for a discharge of blows, delivered in the most extraordinarily rapid succession, and delivered at all points.

His exertions to meet them were tremendous; he shifted his staff and his position with all the nimbleness and agility he could yet command, but his celerity could not equal the quickness with which Little John administered his hits. He persevered resolutely, but they continued longer than he had strength to bear them: their rapidity confused him; he grew bewildered, and no sooner had that effect occurred than he lost his quarter staff – Little John having by a sudden jerk twisted it from his grasp, as Much, growing desperate, made a blow with all his remaining strength. As the staff flew from him, Little John flourished his own over his opponent's head, and ere the blow could descend on Much, to give him the broken crown which was to decide the conflict, he leaped on one side with a sudden bound, and cried loudly–

"**Quarter!**"

"It is granted," was all Little John replied, and after wiping the perspiration from his head and body, he proceeded at once to don his clothes as quietly as if nothing had happened. Much walked up to him, and said –

"Little John, thy renown at quarter staff has long been known to me, and I have often longed to play a bout with thee, but opportunity never served until now. I have had one, and I am satisfied; give me thy hand. I thought myself a good player."

"And so thou art, Much. Mansfield has not given thee thy reputation for nothing. Thou art as good a player as ever handled a crabtree staff."

“Thou art better – the best. Never knew I until this day what might be done with the weapon. It is a lesson I shall not forget; and if I have hitherto prided myself upon my quarter staff play, I hope I shall be able to do so henceforth with more justice, for I will put into practice much I have just learned from thee; and, believe me, I feel it no degradation to cry quarter to thee.”

“Gallantly spoken, my bold miller’s son!” cried Robin, merrily. “It shows a manly, a true Saxon feeling, to meet thy defeat thus generously, we must be no longer enemies, but friends. Thou needst not feel ashamed that Little John has defeated thee, for there never was, nor ever will be, such another player as he.”

“It may be so,” said Little John, “But it is according to the law of nature; she gifts each one with some power in the exercise of which he may surpass his fellow men; and if mine is the staff, yours is the bow, Robin, for there never was, nor ever will be again, such another archer as thee!”

“Truly we should be much obliged to each other for these rare compliments,” observed Robin, laughingly. “But I think it would be far better if we adjourned to Mansfield and did all this with a flagon of wine before us — such a companion to our converse will open our hearts and make us better friends. Thy hand, Much, I like thy spirit and its generous nature.”

“There it is, Robin Hood, and given with right goodwill. I have heard much of thee, much to make me think thee the greatest of outlaws; the poor speak well of thee, Norman as well as Saxon; none have I ever heard who has been unjustly wronged by thee and I have heard that thou hast been unjustly wronged by others. I am not sorry that we have met, and not ashamed to reflect that I and those with me have been defeated by men of such renown as thou and thy friends.”

“Why, thou hast the right down true Saxon blood in thy veins; it shines out in all thy deeds and words. Truly, Sir John Cockle should be proud of his son. Come, Much, thou and thy friends will with me and mine to Mansfield, there to make merry over a stoup of Rhenish wine.”

“With all my heart!” observed Much.

“And mine!” said one of his comrades.

“And mine!” echoed the other.

Then in a party they travelled on towards the town, and any that met them, to see them talking and laughing so gleefully, would never have believed, unless they had been witnesses of it, that they had just ceased fighting with each other. They reached the town, and as they entered Robin said unto Much –

“You are sure that I have no particular desire to have it known when I am there, that Robin Hood is seated in the hostel, so as to cause me to have to fight my way to the green wood again. It would be unpleasant and awkward to me now, for there are matters which call my presence in Yorkshire immediately, and I do not wish to be delayed.”

“I will not breathe a word,” replied Much; “but even if I did, the only opposition you might suffer would be from the curiosity of the townsfolks to see so celebrated a – a forester.”

“Outlaw you mean. Call me by the right epithet,” said Robin, with a smile; “You need not fear to hurt my feelings in so doing. I am made one by an unjust decree, and, therefore, the name and the contumely it bears are unheeded by me.”

“Well, whatever name may be affixed to thine, the people think too well of thee to offer thee harm, therefore thou need’st not be uneasy on that score. Albeit, I will not mention to one whom thou art, and will caution my comrades to observe the same secrecy.”

“Thanks,” returned Robin, “I would wish it so.”

Much led the way to a retired hostel, where he told them they would be sure of good wine. On arriving there, they entered and seated themselves round a table, and had a merry carouse; and as the wine mounted to their brain, their hearts opened to each other. They shook hands earnestly and heartily, and it required little persuasion from Robin, when he told them how joyously his men lived in the old forest, to induce them to join the band. They readily agreed to his proposition, and declaring they had no tie to keep them to any spot, that they were desirous of following the free life his men enjoyed, made an offer to accompany him to his band at that precise time. Much only requested to take a farewell of his family, and he was ready and so it was agreed that they should become members of the band.

And it was in this way, and with such men, that Robin Hood added to the number and the strength of the ‘Merrie Men of Sherwood Forest.’

A party of new comers just at this time entered the room, and the conversation was changed. But after they had been seated for some little time, one of the strangers regarded Will Scarlet very attentively, which at length drew Will’s attention, and then the man hastily withdrew his eyes, and after a little while, quitted the room abruptly. Will for a moment wondered at his strange behaviour, and at the same time fancied he had somewhere seen his face, but could not call to mind where. It puzzled him for a minute, but he speedily dismissed it from his thoughts. An arrangement was now entered into that Little John should immediately

lead the new members to the band, and having done so, and regularly installed them, was to follow Robin and Will to Barnsdale. As the day was waning apace, they departed at once — Little John and his new comrades to the forest, and our hero and his cousin, having obtained horses, mounted and proceeded to Sir Guy's estate in Yorkshire.

It was agreed between then, that when they arrived close to Barnsdale, Robin should go on alone, and prepare its inhabitants for Will's arrival, but as they drew near the Hall next morning, Will strenuously opposed it. He said he could not bear the riding even that short distance, being so close to those from whom he had been so long separated, by himself – he was too nervous, too agitated to endure it. It was therefore agreed that as active service and much exposure, besides lapse of years, had much altered his appearance, he should come to the Hall as one who had brought favourable tidings, and then, when an opportunity occurred, disclose himself.

Accordingly, at Barnsdale they arrived, and into the Hall they were ushered with many friendly greetings for Robin Hood, and courteous frank ones for the stranger, as he was deemed. Every member of the family crowded round Robin, and asked him him questions of all sorts; for it was he who brought the news, and generally some pretty presents for the females. He looked round him, and was glad to see Maude was absent, for it gave him a better opportunity of breaking the ice. Marian was also absent, and therefore there was nothing to prevent his at once commencing. So raising his hand, he requested silence, and when he obtained it, he said:

"I have rare news for ye all – news to make ye as gladsome as a bird in the sunshine – I have good news for you"

"You always bring us pleasant news, Robin Hood," exclaimed Barbara, clapping her hands, and fixing her laughing eyes upon him as she tossed back her long fair curls.

"I'll bring you a husband next time, Barby," said he merrily, and a loud laugh followed his sally. The damsel blushed up to the eyes, but said in as mirthful a tone as his own –

"And that would be pleasanter still, Robin Hood!" This created another laugh.

"So you will say when you see him," rejoined Robin. "I will not describe him to you, but mark my words, my pretty coz, the moment you clap those merry eyes upon him, your heart will jump bob into your mouth, and before it can go back to its home, you will cry 'Here's the lad for Barbara Gamwell!' "

“We will wait till he comes, and then we shall see,” returned Barbara. “He must be very bonny indeed, to make me cry that.”

“What do you call bonny? Are you very particular in your choice?”

“Oh, very. He must be as good looking as you, and almost your equal in all things.”

“Oh! then you would be content with one like me?”

“Yes, very content.”

“Then I should suit you myself?”

“The very person above all others. You are just to my taste.”

“I am very much flattered; but I am very sorry, my precious little kinswoman. If you have any hopes that way, pray destroy them at once, for I am engaged two deep.”

“Aha! I know who are the two.”

“So do I,” said Robin, quickly; “therefore you need not mention their names.”

“Certainly not; but I don't mind waiting to be the third or fourth, for I suppose there are plenty waiting for you. However, I can’t wait longer than the fourth.”

“If you wait to be the fourth before we wed, we shall never wed at all. Indeed, it is not likely we ever shall, for I tell you, next time I come, I’ll bring you a husband.”

“I am very much obliged to you, as of course I ought to be, but I hope he is a very nice one, else I won't have him – you understand that?”

“Perfectly.”

“Very well. What is the next piece of news?”

“Better far than that.”

“Not to me,” said Barbara, laughing, while a blush crimsoned her fair face at her own temerity.

“You shall see. I bring news of one about whom all long to hear – of one who was far away”

“My brother Willy?” cried Barbara, interrupting him.

“Even so. This good friend I have with me was in his company a short time since, and can tell you all about him.”

“My boy is well?” asked Sir Guy.

“And happy?” inquired his mother.

“Where is he?” cried the brothers.

“Why does he not come home?” asked Barbara, looking with earnest inquiry at Will, but he could not trust himself to speak, and so he only bowed his head to hide the tears which were thronging into his eyes, and the quivering lip which forbade him articulating a word. A silence for a moment reigned, for each looked for an answer; it was broken, however, by Barbara suddenly springing into the stranger’s arms, crying, with a sudden burst of tears–

“Mother! Father! it is Will! – this is Will come back! I know him – I know him now. Dear – dear Will you have come home to us again;” and she laid her head upon his shoulder sobbing like a child. Her screams had operated like a charm upon those present. In an instant they pressed round Will, embracing him by turns; his mother weeping over him as if she had lost him forever, instead of having just had him restored; while his old father chumped away at the huskiness in his throat, gulped and gulped, winked his eyes, and tried to appear calm in vain.

His efforts were too weak to out, “Damn it, Will my boy why did you stay away so long from us?” he sunk down in his chair, and wept as freely as the weakest there. The brothers gave an hurra that shook the whole building, and embraced each other, waiting patiently until they could get Will out of the women’s hands to embrace him themselves.

Robin, who watched the scene, discovered himself gnawing the tip of his gauntlet, and half blinded by water filling his eyes, so he withdrew to seek for Maude, in order to prepare her for the interview; for he feared, in the delicate health she possessed, the sudden shock might have a fatal effect her. As he traversed the upper chambers in search of her, he encountered Marian, who had heard the note on the bugle with which he had announced himself, and also the hurra which the brothers Gambell had given upon recognizing Will, and she was hastening to the Hall to obtain an elucidation of the sudden uproar.

As her eye lighted upon the form of Robin she hurried forward with a cry of joy to meet him; and when they had met, and a few kind words passed between them, she inquired the reason of the shout.

“There is a happy return in the family,” said he.

“A happy return!” she echoed, turning pale; “It cannot be. Is it Allan?”

“No!” replied Robin, taking her hand, “It is not him, but even bonnie Will Scarlet, who has re-turned, unscathed, from the wars, looking the pic-ture of manly health and robustness, fully redeeming the promise his person gave while yet a boy.”

“Will Scarlet come home! How happy am I to hear it. Where is he?”

“Where he is not likely to escape for some time to come – literally in the arms of his family – the scene was more affecting than I could withstand, so I withdrew.”

“And Maude?”

“I am on my way to find her, to prepare her, poor girl, for his arrival. It is rather a difficult task for one who knows more of the intricacies of the green wood than the recesses of woman’s heart.”

“You need not possess much modesty on that point, Robin: you know how to find your way to a woman’s heart better, I believe, than a woman does to a man’s and that’s a knowledge which comes to our sex intuitively.”

“Really, Marian, I believe you have entered into a compact with the females here to make me blush – you are all in a league to say flattering things.”

“I was not aware you had been flirting already with Barbara or Winifred; but I may guess very well now that you have. You had better beware, sir, or I shall with our new arrival.”

“And so you shall, Marian, if you please. But let me warn you of Maude. I’faith, if you commence setting your cap at Will, she will quickly deprive thee of it – making poor Will blush as much as I have done ever since I have been in the Hall.”

“Blush, forsooth!” said Marian, laughing. “If he can only blush as much as thee, I need not fear; for I tell thee, Robin, I never saw thee blush but once, and that was when we first met. Since then, the sun has called the colour into your cheeks so frequently that it has forgotten to leave them.”

“Well, I am glad you give me credit for having blushed once in my life – that at least is something in my favour. Now, shall I tell thee why I blushed then?”

“I am almost afraid to assent. There is such a wicked laugh dancing about your eyelids and the corner of your mouth, that I fear me I shall repent it if I put the question.”

“Nay; if you are afraid, do not ask. I will not tell thee – only I am sure you would like to know.”

“You are very impertinent today. You wish to raise my curiosity – you know the weakness of our sex, and take advantage.”

“No, indeed; ‘tis likely thou dost not wish to know.”

“Thou knowest to the contrary; but if I ask thee I say, if I should, out of sport, ask thee – I’ll not believe thy answer.”

“Then, out of spite, I’ll not tell thee at all.”

“Nay; but thou shalt. I mean, I’ll use a discretionary power in believing thee.”

“Oh! to be sure; we all do that when we hear anything. Now, shall I tell thee? Mind, thou askest for it.”

“You frighten me. What was the reason?”

“You remember the first time we saw each other I led the way to our cottage home?”

“I shall never forget it.”

“Nor I. I have a most tenacious memory on such points. Well, all I could see of your features were those eyes, Marian, of thine; and they sparkled and glittered so brightly, that I had a great desire to look upon their companions. But you seemed determined to prevent me, for you kept your face covered with your hood.”

“I had no such thoughts.”

“Perhaps not, but so it seemed to me, and I could do nothing but think if they were equally beautiful; and if they were, that I would make love to you –”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, thought I. And if the lips are only equal to the eyes, it shall go hard but I will have a delicious kiss of them –”

“Robin! and you so young –”

“And I so young! Pshaw! I was a lover – a general one, understand – when I was ten years old; but that is not to the purpose. I was then sixteen, and in my own opinion, quite old enough to make love to anybody. I had had some experience, and only wanted an opportunity to display it; your arrival, I fancied, ere I had seen you five minutes, and I was about to lead you to my home, placed a good one in my power, and I

resolved to profit by it. Well, while I was speculating upon your lips, it struck me suddenly whether you would ever return the compliment, and kiss my lips."

"How absurd, Robin!"

"Oh, no! not so absurd, I can assure you, for at that precise moment you uncovered your face, and took my heart by storm. I uttered something, unconsciously, at the very time that this fancy rushed again into my head; I looked into your eyes, and they seemed to say to me 'Some day, Robin, I will.' Your face became crimson, and I blushed with delight at the thought. There, Marian, that is the history of my first and my last blush."

"I don't believe you, Robin. I told you I would not, neither will I. You blushed because you uttered some nonsense, and was detected in it; and that is the real truth."

"No, it is as I say, and for years I have dwelt on the thought. I have consoled myself that the day would come when I had a right to ask you for it, and yet I thought I would rather receive it as a free gift than when asked as a right, and so I hoped that a favourable hour would arrive when I could screw my courage up and say – dear Marian beloved of my soul, wilt thou –"

"Nay, no more, Robin; it is not so much to ask from thee of me."

What more she would have said became inaudible, for Robin, while talking, had encircled her waist with one arm, and he breathed his words in so low a tone that he was obliged to put his mouth close to her ear that she might hear all he uttered. As she turned her face to speak the last sentence, his lips being provokingly near, he received upon them the kiss he so had coveted.

But it was given with such gentleness, such softness, that, had it not been for the thrill which passed like lightning through every nerve in his body, he could scarce have told that her lips had been in contact with his. Still the pressure was perceptive enough to tell him that she had kindly accorded his tender request, and as he did not require a smack as loud as a clap of the hand to assure him that he had been kissed, he felt perfectly satisfied with that he had received. Determined not to be outdone in generosity, he repaid her gift with one of a similar nature, with the addition of being presented with we-can't-number-how-many-times-the-warmth, and exceeding the duration of the other in equal proportion to the warmth.

When this little agreeable passage had terminated, and Robin had quite forgotten that there existed anyone else in the world besides himself and Marian, the lady brought him to his recollection, when she had herself somewhat recovered the pleasing embarrassment into which this display

of tenderness on both sides had occasioned her, by saying – “You gave me to understand, sir, that you were looking for Maude, to communicate agreeable tidings to her. Judging by your haste, when I met you, your mind was filled with her, and I was no more remembered. Ah, Robin! I fear you forget, in any society in which you may be present, those who are absent.”

“You are ever present to my thoughts, at all times and in all places.”

“I don’t exactly know that; however, unless you depart at once, your kind intention will be frustrated. Maude will descend to the Hall, and you must ever after blame yourself for any ill effects her sudden meeting with Will may produce.”

“It shall be as you wish, Marian. I leave you for a short time, until my sight shall again be filled with your fair form.”

“Oh, you say I am ever present to your thoughts!”

“Ever – ever!”

“Very well, then, sir, your sight will not need filling with my fair form! for, if I am to believe you, you always carry my image in your mind?”

“Indelibly fixed there, ever shedding its gentle influence upon my heart, like unto a holy balm upon the fevered and parched limbs of the wounded.”

“You make me smile, Robin. You should have been a courtier, you flatter so well.”

“I ever speak truth to thee.”

“Well, I pay myself the compliment not to doubt you, and so there’s my hand; and, as you have my imaginary form with you, my real everyday self will descend to greet bonnie Will upon his return to his father’s halls.”

Robin raised her hand to his lips, and then, with a pleasant smile upon their countenances, they waved their hands, and separated. When the winding stairs hid her from his sight, and he could no longer see her, he turned on his way to seek for Maude, feeling as if one of the gods had by accident suddenly snuffed out the sun. When he arrived at the door of the apartment, where he was told he should find Maude, he knocked a low tap at it, and he heard her gentle voice according permission to enter the room. He obeyed and as he opened the door she advanced to meet him.

“I was sure it was you, Robin,” she said. “I heard the blast of your horn, and the shout that welcomed your arrival. I should have descended and mingled with the rest to greet your coming, but – but –”

“But what, Maude?”

“You will not think me unkind, or unmindful of your services to me, if I say that I had not the heart nor the inclination to meet you.”

“Not the inclination, Maude?”

“Not when all others crowd round you. I am ever glad to see you, but feel when you first come as though my presence was, if not an intrusion, at least a damp upon the cheerfulness which all others feel.”

“You must not think any such thing, Maude. Why, what put such a strange thought in your head?”

“I’ll tell you, for you are like a brother to me, and listen so kindly and sympathizingly to all the little thoughts and whims – which to me seem griefs – I may possess, and which I can utter to no other than you, for there are none here to me like what you are.”

“It is you who make me so, for you are so grateful for everything. So much more so than anything I have done for you deserves, that I am obliged in self defence, as a return for your gratitude, to appear to thrust my services upon you almost ostentatiously.”

“Oh, fie, Robin! you always depreciate the natural goodness of your heart by some strange explanation; I will not hear it.”

“Well, and why had you no inclination to meet me?”

“For this reason, that when you come you have always some little piece of news for everyone but me.”

“But you?”

“Yes; there is always something to tell Sir Guy and his lady about their sons, and other affairs interesting to them. To Winifred there is some long message from Little John. To Barbara, a description of head gears, bodices, and skirts, of doublets and feathered cape, and those who wear them; to Marian, to whom the sight of you should be all-sufficient to make glad her heart, who receives in your presence more than the value of what all the rest receive collected into one gift, even for her you have still some tidings dear to her heart; for, every visit you pay, there is always some fresh intelligence of her brother, which you have gained during your absence; but for me there is nothing.”

“Nothing, Maude?”

“You never forget me, Robin, in the little presents you bring every time you come, and in dispensing kind words, I ever have the largest share. For you always strive to make up for the lack of news you have to tell me, by speaking more kindly and proffering on me the fairest gift; and I can see the motive which prompts it, and it pains me – indeed it does. When I reach this chamber, I give way – am quite, quite down – near broken-

hearted. It is foolish of me, I confess, but I cannot help it; and so, today, when I heard your horn, I thought I would not come to meet you, and if I heard not all the news you brought for each, I might not feel so sick at heart that there was none for me."

"But do I not bring news from Nottingham, Maude? Do I not, at the risk of my peace of mind, pay that merry-hearted Hal a visit, notwithstanding the danger of being in the presence of his lovely little wife – that Grace by nature as well as name? Am I not reckless of all hazard, when I reach their house in the morning and never get away until night, and sometimes Hal absent, while Grace's eyes are blazing away, and her sweet lips smiling all the time, and I feeling my heart go pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, until I begin to feel an affection for the whole world, especially every one bearing the name of Grace? And do I not do all this for the sake of bringing thee news?"

"I know I am a dissatisfied creature; still, albeit I am glad to hear of them; yet it does not appear news to me."

"Then I shall not tell thee I have been there, that I have seen Hal, and that he is looking so hearty and well, and is the same merry, good-hearted soul as ever. Neither will I tell thee that I saw his bonnie Grace, who looks just as lovely as she did when I first saw her a sweet smiling girl, nor that she was as gracefully gracious to my graceless self as hitherto; and I am resolved you shall not hear from me that their fair child, whom they have called Maude, after thee, even thy godchild, has grown very much, and that what with her large blue eyes, and her light shining hair, she looks like a little angel come to pay us a visit, to show what folks in Paradise are made of. None of this will I tell you, because you say it does not come to news."

"I thank you, Robin," said Maude, smiling, "for your manner of keeping this all secret from me, and shall rest just as satisfied as if you had told me."

"But I have one thing to ask, does Marian know your opinion of Hal's wife; have you told her what influence her charms have had upon you?"

"It is a wicked question; but to show you that guilty conscience is not busy with me, I do not mind answering it. She does know, partially; but as I have taken a fancy to my hair, and am desirous that it should remain upon my head, I have not told her quite all."

"Then you are a deceitful fellow; and I think I shall proceed at once and inform her of the full extent of your villainy."

"I would accompany you, Maude, only I have really some news for you."

“Really news for me!” echoed she, looking doubtfully at him; “You are jesting with me?”

“No, upon my honour, I am serious,” he replied, taking her hand. “Tell me, Maude, what should you consider good news?”

“Good news?”

“Yes, really good news. Some that I think particularly good.”

“I cannot think of anything that would be particularly good to me. I hardly understand you. What is the nature of your news?”

“What think you of a husband?”

“A husband! What a strange idea! What made you think of such a thing? Is this your good news?”

“Why not? You tell me that I have news for others – that I hear of Marian’s brother – why should I not learn something –”

“Of Will – of Will! Speak, Robin, have you heard of him? I am sure you have, by that smile. Tell me all. Oh! I am so anxious hear – Oh! My heart” and she pressed her hands forcibly to her side, as if to repress the violent and painful pulsation which the inference she had drawn from his speech had produced.

“I have heard of him.”

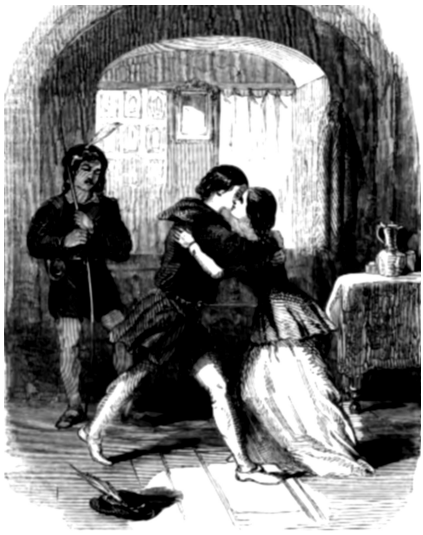
“And he is alive – he is well – and he is coming home he will soon be among us again? Speak, Robin, is it so?”

“Even as you surmise.”

“And when will he come? Where is he? When will he come! Oh, Holy Mother, I thank thee!” she uttered, falling upon her knees, and, with streaming eyes, raised her hands to Heaven, breathing a fervent prayer of thanksgiving. She had scarce concluded, when, turning her head to put a thousand questions to Robin, she beheld Will Scarlet standing a few feet from her, gazing with glittering eyes of adoration upon her. She sprung to her feet, uttered a scream of joy and, throwing herself upon his neck, fainted.

“Poor girl!” muttered he, his lip quivering terribly, and tears raining from his eyes, “Poor girl, it is more than she can bear – take her Robin – I – all this makes a child of me; I can’t endure it – I –”

Robin gently withdrawing Maude from Will's arm, the poor fellow buried his face in his hands, and gave way to an uncontrollable burst of grief. In a little while Maude recovered, and when she had done so, and her arms were twisted round Will's neck, and his were round her waist, and she was looking upon his face smiling through her tears.



Reunion of Will and Maude

Robin suddenly remembered that he had something to tell Marian – at least, he said so – and, therefore hurried away to communicate it, leaving them alone.

For a short time neither spoke a word, and then the silence was broken by Will uttering in a low voice – "Maude!"

"Dear Will!" was the reply.

"I am back again, you see, Maude. I am once more with you, although I began to think, when so long a time had elapsed since we parted, that I should never, never see you again; but I hoped, and hoped, with as good a heart as I could, that we should meet again, and you see we have."

"We have indeed!"

"And you are glad, Maude?"

"Glad, Will! Can you ask that question?"

"I think you are pleased?"

"I am very happy. Very – very happy, now!"

"And you would not like me to leave again?"

"Leave again! You surely do not think of such a thing? Oh! do not talk even of it!"

"It all rests with you, Maude. You remember the night we parted?"

"Oh, well! ***Too*** well!"

"I have never forgotten one word or act that transpired that night. I left you with a heavy heart, Maude – a very sad heart, still little thinking that that separation was to be for years. I was called from that you – the voice

was Robin Hood's. I joined him, and he noticed my dullness and challenged me with it, and I confessed it. I told him the cause, for we had been like brothers, or more than brothers, from childhood upwards, and he explained away a misconception I then laboured under, but it was not until late in the evening, and that by accident, that I learned it was to him you had given your heart, when I begged it for myself. Nay, never hang your head, Maude. An explanation between I and Robin settled that matter rightly; and he made me understand that, if you gave me your hand, you would not be miserable all your life because you were not wedded to him you first loved nor have sacrificed your happiness, merely to repay some attention I had previously paid you."

"Robin was right, Will. And now I will set all reserve aside, and tell you all I wish you to know, for fear some unfortunate chance might again separate us. And I could bear it better, Will, if such a miserable occurrence was to take place, if I knew that there existed no longer a misunderstanding between us –"

"Dear Maude!"

"And so I will tell thee what I should have told thee on the night we parted, if you had not so suddenly quitted me. I told you I had given my love to Robin Hood, and so I had, with all the warmth and earnestness which a heart like mine could at such an age bestow. But consider, Will, under what circumstances we met. I was a giddy girl – far too thoughtless. He showed me kindnesses. He took me from a miserable, uncomfortable home; his every act was such as to raise such a feeling as love in the breast of a warm-hearted girl. I need not tell how such a passion grows upon you, if you do not desire to check it."

"With me it became a cherished idol, until I ascertained too surely that I could never share his love – that Marian was adored, idolised by him. It was a bitter time for me when I could no longer keep it from myself; when it forced itself upon me with a conviction which there was no evading. I acknowledge it was a bitter time. But I struggled hard with it during many a midnight hour, and even like a violent spasm passing away, as I surmounted its bitterness, though it still left a weakness, which was the result of violence, still I had cured the sting, and learned to regard him as a dear brother. At this time your love for me became only known to me, and it was exhibited in so free, so frank a manner, that its sincerity was beyond a doubt. It was accompanied, too, by such kindness, such extreme tenderness to one who was a stranger in your house, and possessing no claim upon your sympathy —

***Do not interrupt me**, Will.*"

“I had no claim upon it and yet had there existed the greatest, you could not have been more kind to me. I felt it deeply, I appreciated it to its fullest extent, and I learned to regard, with an eye of affection, he who loved me for myself, and thus kindly, thus nobly to me. And when you asked me for my love on the night we parted, I would have granted my hand as freely as if I had never loved another. There was no sacrifice of feeling in doing so, and I mentioned my former love, to you, for the sole purpose of convincing you that I met your sincerity by an equal feeling, and also that the love I had borne another had merged into a sisterly affection. Since we have been parted, Will, your kind acts have risen up in such a formidable array, and I have dwelt upon your good qualities for such a length of time, that I really now begin to wonder if I ever loved anybody better than you – aye, half so well.”

“And you do love me now, Maude?”

“Most sincerely.”

“Ha, ha, ha! I knew you would some day! Bless you Maude, I knew you would! I said so. And marry me now, Maude, won't you?”

“Will!”

“Oh! say you will. You have only got to say ‘I,’ and then speak my name, and that will be ‘I will,’ you know, Maude.”

“Well, Will, I will. There’s my hand.”

Will grasped it, kissed it, and then sealed the bargain by giving her a hearty kiss upon her lips with a fervour which showed he meant what he did, and did no more than he meant.

“And when will you marry me, Maude?”

“Oh! I cannot say – some day.”

“Of course it will be some day. Suppose we say tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow, Will? Oh, impossible!”

“Impossible! Why impossible?”

“It is sudden – so soon.”

“It can never be too soon. If we were to be married this instant, it would not be too soon –at least not for me, but I would rather it be tomorrow than any other time.”

“Why tomorrow?”

“For two reasons: First, because tomorrow is the anniversary of quitting England six years ago and secondly because it my father’s seventy-sixth birthday, and they mean to have rare doings here, the more especially as I have come home. And why should not this festivity celebrate our wedding? Besides then I shall make sure of you.”

“And what will your father say to our sudden marriage?”

“Say! Why he'll shout hurrah, and throw his stick to the other end of the hall for joy. I know him. He loves to see us all happy; and how could I be made happier than by having you for a wife?”

“Well, Will, you have such a persuasive power or else it is taking me at an unfair advantage for today I can deny you nothing.”

“And you consent?”

“Why, I suppose I must”

“Not ***must*** Maude.”

“You are very particular, Will; I suppose I had better say I will with all my heart –”

“Be married to me tomorrow?”

“Be married to you tomorrow.”

Will again enfolded her energetically in his embrace, then seizing his cap, tossed it to the ceiling, indulging in a shout of stentorian strength. Then taking Maude by the waist with his left hand, and holding her right in his, he led her down stairs to announce to his friends below his intended marriage.

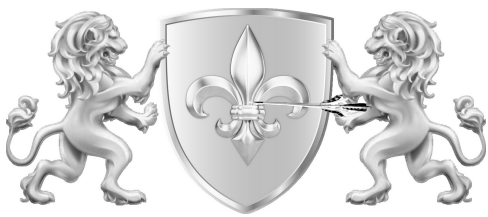
The greetings which Maude received from all present when Will presented her as his wife-elect, was quite sufficient to assure her of the perfect acquiescence of his family with the arrangement he made. A council of ladies was immediately called, and Maude was led away

by them to make preparations for the forth-coming celebration. The gentlemen were left by themselves, as is usual on all such occasions, to amuse themselves the best way they could, for the ladies’ presence was required elsewhere on important business.

The gentlemen, however, were at no loss to amuse themselves, and the remainder of that day was taken up in assisting at the preparations for the morrow. And the morrow came, as morrows generally come, when they are expect-ed – and a most lovely morrow it was. The people began to flock from all parts within a few miles, to partake of the bounteous

provision made for them. Poles were erected, decorated with garlands, targets, and every-thing requisite for the exercise of all manly sports, and it was all quite charming to see the many patient barrels of ale standing here, there and everywhere, waiting to be broached.

The time for the ceremony which was to make Will Scarlet and Maude Lindsay one, drew on, and when it had nearly reached the hour appointed, it was discovered for the first time that Will was missing! At first it was thought nothing of – that he was about the ground somewhere, and twenty voices were raised to call him and chide him for his absence at a moment like this. But the ground echoed back only their voices without bearing a response to their call from him. An hour after the time he was to have been united passed, and he was nowhere to be found. The family, as well as the visitors, divided themselves into bands and searched the country for miles round in vain; and when midnight arrived, the seekers had reassembled in Barnsdale Hall – but he whom they had sought so earnestly with unwearied exertions the whole of that day, was not among them.



Chapter 8

As Robin Hood in the forest stood,
All under the greenwood tree,
There was he aware of a brave young man,
As fine as fine might be.
The youngster was clothed in scarlet red,
In scarlet fine and gay,
And he did frisk it o'er the plain.

----- Robin Hood and Allan a Dale

Forth from the green wood they are gone,
Yea, all courageously,
Resolving to bring Stutely home,
Or every man to die.
The gates were opened wide,
And out of the Castle Will Stutely came,
Guarded on every side.
And when he was forth from the Castle come,
And saw no help was nigh,
Thus he unto the Sheriff said –
Give me a sword all in my hand,
And let me be unbound,
And with thee and thy men I'll fight
Till I lie dead on the ground.
But his desire he would not grant.

----- Robin Hood Ballad

Baron Fitz Alwine, after an absence of some years, was again seated in a chamber in his castle at Nottingham, engaged on some very important business. Opposite to him sat an old man, richly habited, and, if there is any richness in ugliness, he was immensely wealthy in that particular. His age exceeded, judging by his wrinkled visage, that of Baron Fitz Alwine something more than a trifle, and his voice bore a more tremulous tone. They sat eyeing and gibbering at each other like a couple of very antique monkeys, discussing old times; that is, if antique monkeys ever do such things. There appeared to be a point in question which each wished to obtain, and were trying their best to coax and carney out of each other.

"You are too hard with me, Fitz Alwine," said the very ugly old man to the Baron.

"Not I, forsooth," returned he. "I gain no object by it but the furtherance of my daughter's welfare. I am sure you will acquit me of any other feeling, Sir Tristram?"

“Most decidedly! Most certainly!” he replied “To be sure, to be sure! It is natural that a father should see to his daughter’s welfare. How much do you propose to give her as a dowry, eh?”

“Five thousand merks when she is wedded,

and five thousand more that day five years.”

“It is not much – it is not much!”

“You try my patience, Sir Tristram. You will remember that you are to receive a young and youthful bride and that you look not so youthful withal, as you did fifty years agone.”

“Nay, don’t be angry – I mean well; but I could perhaps put to her ten thousand merks, a million, perhaps more – say two –”

“I know you are rich. I tell thee I am not so, but would see my daughter shine like the highest born princess in Europe. Would have her state equal to it. Then why refuse to place a sum in my care, which would insure it?”

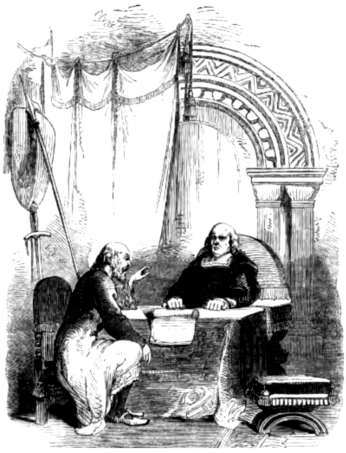
“I don’t see, my dear Fitz Alwine, what difference it can make if I keep the money myself. I can insure her state being equal in all respects to that of a princess as well as you, without, besides, putting you to all the trouble.”

“But, Sir Tristram, you will excuse my daughter’s happiness being the first consideration I have. I know well that it frequently happens that, where there is a disparity in years, man and wife live not quite so happily after as before marriage. Therefore, you might take offence at some of her whims, and, if you should do so, what guarantee have I that you will not break the agreement now existing between us. On the other. hand, if I have possession of half your wealth, you can quarrel as much as you please; I shall then be sure my daughter’s rank will be supported even as I could wish it.”

“My dear Fitz Alwine, there is no fear of Christabel and I quarrelling: I love the little dove too well. Have I not for more than twelve years been a longing suitor for her fair hand?”

“It is true; but the unsettled state of the times

has prevented the accomplishment of our mutual wishes. And allow me to say now, Sir Tristram, that although we have made every other arrangement, and this the only point on which we differ, yet if you still persist in refusing what I conceive I so justly demand, I must waive all other considerations but my daughter’s happiness, and with many thanks for the honour you have done me and her, beg to decline the offer of your hand.”



Sir Tristram and Baron Alwine

"Stop, stop, you are too hasty— let us talk the matter over a little further."

"I have said enough – I am quite satisfied – all the talking in the world will not change me."

"A – a – don't be so headstrong. A – let us see. Suppose I was to place fifty thousand merks in your possession."

"I should laugh at you, and ask you if you meant to insult me."

"Insult you! Lord, no; the farthest from my thoughts. Shall we say two hundred thousand?"

"I know your wealth, Sir Tristram; I know of your property in Normandy as well as here in England. I know, with all King Henry's enormous wealth, thine is almost equal to his. What, therefore, dost thou mean by thy paltry two hundred thousand?"

"Did I say two? I meant five – I say I meant five hundred thousand merks. A noble sum – a right noble sum!"

"Why, so it is; but thou saidst but now thou couldst place two million to my daughter's humble ten thousand. Therefore, place one million in my possession and my Christabel is yours tomorrow, if thou wilt."

"A million, Baron Fitz Alwine! Place a million merks in thy keeping! It is too much. Place half my money in your hands? I cannot!"

"Do you doubt my honour?"

"Not in the least. Of course not – oh, no!"

"Do you suppose I have any other motive than in seeing my child well provided for?"

"No other, to be sure I am satisfied of that; but–"

"But what? Decide at once, Sir Tristram, or our engagement must be annulled, never to be renewed."

"You do not give me time to reflect –"

At this moment there was a loud rap at the door, the Baron gave the permission to enter, and a retainer opened the door, saying –

"My lord Baron, a messenger from the king waits without to see you on matters of pressing importance."

"Admit him instantly."

The man bowed and withdrew. No sooner had he turned his back, than Fitz Alwine, seizing him by the arm, exclaimed, earnestly –"Now, Sir Tristram, if you do not consent before this messenger enters, our contract is destroyed!"

"Fitz Alwine, hear me! – hear me!"

"Nothing – not one word. My daughter is passing fair, – you say you love her –"

"Most dearly – most dearly."

"Well, Sir Tristram, she has another suitor, who is wealthy who is young and handsome too, who only waits my consent to make her his. Now, if you hesitate a second, even till the messenger be upon the threshold, I withdraw my promise to give her to you, and tomorrow you shall see her another's."

"You are too hard – indeed you are –"

"I hear his step upon the stair. Do you consent, once for all – yea or nay?"

"I – I consent – I consent, but you are too hard,"

"Nay, my dear friend, Sir Tristram, consider the prize you receive."

"Why, is very fair. A – a — and her cheeks, if they are not so rosy as they used to be, still they are round and tempting."

"And worth a million of merks, eh? Here comes the messenger. Sir Tristram, she is yours!"

And so Baron Fitz Alwine sold his daughter, the fair Christabel, to Sir Tristram of Goldsborough, for one million merks.

The messenger bore tidings relative to the escape of a soldier, who had killed his captain in Normandy, fled to England, and had been traced to Nottinghamshire. A copious description was given of him, and Fitz Alwine received orders to make a hot search for him, and in the event of being successful in capturing him, he was, being the sheriff, to hang him at once without a trial. When the messenger had communicated his message, Fitz Alwine dismissed him, and breaking up his interview with Sir Tristram, proceeded at once to put into execution the King's commands. Shortly after this, he received some unexpected intelligence respecting the fugitive.

He laid his plans accordingly, and his measures were so well-concerted that, in two days subsequent, the man he was in pursuit of was captured,

and in as short a time as the distance could be accomplished, was confined within a dungeon in Nottingham Castle.

Robin Hood was one of the most active in the search after Will Scarlet, who, the reader will easily perceive, was the prisoner. Baron Fitz Alwine had received orders to capture him, and had succeeded in fulfilling them. Every conjecture but the right was made as to his disappearance. It was impossible to arrive at any conclusion.

The idea that he had been discovered, pursued, and captured, never entered the imagination of those connected with him, and they were at an utter loss to assign any other motive. All was one wide sea of speculation and doubt; and so, far from the natal day of Sir Guy proving one of joyous mirth and festivity, it was one of distraction and misery. Robin had kept up an unwearied search after him, and, although he rejected the idea of his having fallen into the hands of ministers of justice as impossible, still it was the only feasible reason he could assign for his absence.

In the event of such a circumstance, he was satisfied he could ascertain everything pertaining to it from such of his men as had been stationed in various parts of the forest, commanding the road to Nottingham, to which place, if the capture had been made, the prisoner would be sure to be carried.

As the neighbourhood of Barnsdale had been scoured by parties in search of Will, without success, Robin determined to delay no time, but at once repair to Sherwood, and leave nothing untried to discover if Will had been taken prisoner, how it had been effected, if it had been effected, and if it had, how to rescue him. Leaving the family of the Gamwells in great grief, and poor Maude almost inconsolable, he departed, and on his way to Mansfield, when within a few miles of the town, he met Much, the miller's son, mounted on a mettlesome steed, riding at a brisk pace in the direction he was leaving. So soon as Much perceived Robin, he reined in his horse, and hailed him.

"I am very glad I have met with you," he said; "I was on my way to Barnsdale to see you, having some particular news to communicate concerning that friend of yours, who quitted Mansfield four days since with you in this direction."

"Ha! What is it?" cried Robin, eagerly. "It is on matters respecting him that I am now returning to Sherwood. Say, have you seen him?"

"Yes, last night."

"Where?"

“In Mansfield. After Little John had installed me and my two friends in your band, he quitted us to follow you. I had still some little arrangements to make at home, and so returned to Mansfield. On my father’s threshold, I observed a troop of horse clustered round it, and in the centre a man bound hand and foot, seated behind a stout trooper, to whom he was strongly fastened. My father having the reputation with King Henry and his followers of being exceeding loyal, had been favored by the troop with a visit, for the purpose of baiting their steeds, and I being his son had the opportunity of mixing among them unquestioned and unsuspected. I soon found that the prisoner was your friend and one of the community.

I contrived, unnoticed, to let him know his situation was known, and that means would be tried to set him free. He understood me at a glance, and his countenance, which had betokened the greatest anguish of mind, now brightened up; he seemed suddenly to have become a new man. Some drink, which he previously sullenly refused, he now asked for, and drank with an appearance of great satisfaction. Altogether, he became as gay and light-spirited as he had been dull and wretched. I inquired of one of the troopers what was to be done with him, and his reply was that he knew nothing further than that they had been sent, under the guidance of a stranger, to Yorkshire to capture him – that they had done so, and were now on their way back to Nottingham, from which place they had departed on this errand. Conjecturing that the capture had been made under some extraordinary circumstances, which might, in some way, affect you materially, I thought it as well to lose no time, but seek you out and make you acquainted with the foregoing, leaving it to you to act further in the matter.”

“You have done well, Much,” replied Robin; “You have told me all I wished to ascertain, and it shall go hard but I will restore poor Will to his friends again, or there shall be a heavy payment for my failure. Come on, Much, to the forest haunt, and I will there concert means to carry our intentions into effect.”

“Where is Little John?” asked Much.

“He will be at the haunt nearly as soon as we,” returned Robin. “I despatched him there by a different route to this, in the hope that if I failed to learn anything respecting Will this way, he might be able to hear something in his path. I am the fortunate one, it appears, and I will do my best, but the issue shall be equally fortunate. Let us on: if I conjecture rightly, they will make Will’s punishment as severe and as summary as possible.”

“Your will is the law I follow – I am with you captain.

Robin smiled, bowed his head, dashed on at full speed, closely followed by Much. Upon arriving at the general rendezvous he found that Little John had just reached it, and Robin at once proceeded to concert measures for ascertaining exactly where Will was confined, and the means of effecting a certain rescue. He despatched Little John to call in the men, who were in small bands in different parts of the forest, and form them into one body.

When that was accomplished, he was to lead them to the confines of the wood, as near Nottingham as could be, and there await in perfect readiness Robin's summons, and be ready for desperate action at a moment's warning. This being all settled, Robin and Much departed for Nottingham, but our hero would not enter the town, for fear of being recognised — not that he was afraid from personal motives, but on account that his person was well known to many of the inhabitants, and were it known that he had been seen in Nottingham, expectations would be formed that he proposed rescuing the prisoner, and, consequently, such means might be taken to frustrate every effort he might make to set his old friend free.

He, therefore, sent Much to Hal of the Keep's residence, desiring him to repair to him on the borders of the forest. He sent for him because he knew that Hal's situation in the town was such that he was acquainted with every matter of any interest which occurred there or in the castle, and consequently, would be the person who could give him the most information on the subject he was interested in. He was seated under an old oak tree awaiting the return of Much with Hal, when he noticed the approach of a stranger most gaily attired.

"By my faith," he muttered, "if this spruce cavalier be a Norman, he shall pay for the bows and staffs which tomorrow or tonight may see broken. His gear is of the true Norman fashion, and right gorgeously decked too. You advance it right sprightly, my bonnie sir; we shall see, when your coffers are somewhat thinned, if you foot it away so merrily."

The stranger rapidly advanced and Robin, arising from the shade of the tree, leisurely crossed his path, and confronting him, prepared to resist his further progress. The stranger stopped as Robin stopped before him, but said nothing, awaiting a greeting.

"Well met, my bonnie cavalier," said our hero, on finding the other offered no speech. "The heavens are somewhat cloudy, and thy attire is withal so gay, that thou comest like sunshine among the green leaves. Thy countenance, too, is so pleasant, that while thou art here, the old wood and flowers will not miss the sun, albeit there is a thick curtain of cloud to screen him from their sight."

“Art thou one of the famed Robin Hood’s band?” demanded the stranger, slightly smiling at Robin’s speech.

“Thou canst see, by my garb, I am a forester. Thou meetest me in Sherwood Forest, and so thou dost think I must be one of Robin Hood’s band. All the foresters in Sherwood Forest, Sir Stranger, are not of Robin Hood’s band.”

“Possibly not; I can believe a man may be a forester, pass his days in this forest, but yet not be one of this celebrated band. I asked not for such an answer, but simply questioned thee if thou wert one of the band.”

“Thou dost question simply. It is only at certain times, in certain places and to certain persons, that any of the band acknowledge themselves to be such. Still thy appearance likes me so well, that albeit I can tell by thy accent thou art a Norman, a race for whom I hold the most thorough and unchangeable detestation, yet I mind not to tell thee I am of the band.”

“Thou’rt mistaken, friend, with regard to me, though my appearance, and, as thou sayest, my accent, bespeaks me Norman, yet am I not of the race, but Saxon by birth, although there is a tinge of Norman blood in my descent.”

“I am glad on’t; ‘twould be a pity the Normans should boast of one so comely as thou; and in knowing thou’rt a Saxon, I feel little hesitation in acknowledging to thee that I am one of Robin Hood’s band. We have usually a different method of proclaiming ourselves to Normans.”

“I can believe it; report hath taught me much of your method. I am glad I have fallen in with thee; I would be led to Robin Hood’s presence.”

“Supposing I were to say he stood before thee.”

“Then should I say, is Allan Clare no more remembered?”

“Allan Clare! Thou Allan Clare?”

“Even he. I knew thee, Robin, almost as soon as thou hadst spoken, and marvelled thou shouldst have forgotten me.”

“How glad I am thou’rt here again! How entranced will Marian be to again clasp thee in her arms!”

“My dear, dear sister, and she is well and happy?”

“She is indeed well, and only unhappy on account of thy absence.”

“She shall no more complain of that; we will never again be separated but by death. Dost thou know, Robin, that I have, since my absence from England, been in the service of Louis of France?”

“I have heard so from several sources.”

“It was truth. I had succeeded in obtaining Louis’ notice by my conduct in the army; I was fortunate enough to save his life, while hunting, from the desperate attack of some wolves; Out of gratitude he inquired of me how he could serve me. I represented to him my long absence from England, and – knowing Christabel had returned hither – requested my discharge. He granted it freely, regretting, at the same time, I should desire to quit his service. I explained the cause of my yearning to visit the land of my birth and found in him an attentive auditor. When I had concluded my little story he no longer sought to detain me, but offered his services with King Henry if I desired; for though not at peace with him, yet they are in frequent habit of doing each other personal services. I spoke of my confiscated estates, and so soon as he learned that adherence to the cause of St. Thomas à Becket was the reason of their confiscation, he wrote a letter to Henry, which on quitting Louis’ Court, I caused to be placed in his hands, and the result is that I am restored fully to my inheritance, and have an order on the treasury for all arrears from the time of their confiscation. I have also realised a certain sum, independent of my estate, which meets with an agreement I entered into with Baron Fitz Alwine seven years ago – at least the seven years expire tomorrow, and then I offer myself as a suitor for her hand, which he has bound himself down not to refuse, if Christabel consents, and of her willing assent I am well assured –”

“Seven years!” interrupted Robin, thought-fully. “It must be eight years since you entered into that agreement with him.”

“No, I am positive with respect to the time, because the agreement expressly was that I was to offer Christabel my hand, if reinstated in my family estates, as well as possessing a certain sum on that day seven years; that I was not to see her or make the offer before; and if that day passed without doing it, he was to bestow her hand upon whom he pleased. To this both Christabel and I assented. I have not seen her from that hour, and tomorrow I fulfill my conditions; I am satisfied of the correctness of what I say. Why do you assert it to be eight years?”

“It is now rather better than five years since the capture of Will Scarlet took I and Little John to Nottingham Castle.”

“Little John! Is not that the gigantic nephew of old Sir Guy of Gamwell?”

“The same; and he is, if possible, more huge than ever. Well, we there had an interview with the Baron Fitz Alwine, and Little John succeeded in obtaining from him an account of you, as well as of the transaction you have just mentioned. He stated it to have then occurred three years.”

“It was a vile falsehood, and done for some base purpose. It is now a trifle over five years since he quitted Normandy for England, and two years of our agreement had not then elapsed. An opportunity occurred shortly after to correspond with Christabel, which I availed myself of. It continued during his absence, but upon his return it no longer existed. I am, therefore, quite positive I am right. Besides, you do not imagine I could let a year elapse without being conscious that it brought me nearer the object of affections?”

“You are no doubt right; but I expect that Fitz Alwine will clap a year on the agreement, without the least compunction, if he believes by such a stratagem he can evade it; and unless you are provided for some such occurrence, you will yet be defeated in your hopes of obtaining the Lady Christabel, even after your long term of servitude for her gentle hand.”

“By Heaven! If he plays me false, he shall rue the hour he made the attempt.”

“You have then some means of making him hold your threats in awe?”

“I have; and if I had not, I would make a means. He shall find I am not to be trifled with; and I’ll have Christabel, if I storm his castle to obtain her.”

“If you should need assistance, you may command me; I have nearly two hundred men at my beck, stout hearts, who fear nothing, and can handle bow, spear, sword, and fear with any band in Christendom.”

“I thank thee, Robin; I am well convinced if I lack assistance, I may command thine.”

“You may, to its fullest extent.”

“And should I need it, I will not hesitate to ask; for I know that if thou didst not wish me to have it, thou wouldst not proffer it.”

“You do me but justice; and now, let me ask you, how you learned that I was connected with the forest?”

“Upon my arrival in London, I lost no time in coming to Nottingham. There I ascertained that Christabel was in the castle; from thence I proceeded to Gamwell; but judge my surprise upon reaching it, to find scarce a vestige of the village to be seen. I fancied I had mistaken my way, and found my way to Mansfield, where I learned the history of the events which had produced this change; that you had been outlawed, and made yourself famous by your acts of kindness, as well as daring, but that nothing was known relative to the fate of Sir Guy Gamwell or his family. It was only supposed they had been carried away to some place of

safety, and that they still remained in secluded security. This eased my mind respecting my sister's situation, but I resolved to find you out, and learn from you the truth."

"Ten years had not made such a change in you but I could recognise you when I saw you; still I fancied I might be deceived, and asked to be led to the presence of Robin Hood, purposely to satisfy my doubts."

"And yet ten years of a forest life makes a greater change in a man's looks than the same time does in a camp life, judging from your appearance. Your dress, too, is different in its style from any I ever saw you wear, and that is some slight reason why I knew you not at first, but now I look upon you, I wonder how I should have forgotten you, you are so like your sister Marian."

"Poor Marian, how looks she?"

"As beautiful as ever."

"Has she – is she married?"

"No."

"I am glad of that. Do you know if there is any suitor for her hand? Has she given her heart to any one?"

"She will tell you herself. Phew! It is very warm today. I wonder Much does not return. Do you remember Will Scarlet?"

"What, the lad with the bright red hair, that used to do everything like you – one of Sir Guy's sons?"

"Yes. He has lately returned from serving with the army in Normandy. Poor Will! He was anxious to get home, and cut down his commander because he refused to grant him his discharge. He escaped, arrived in England; I met with him, I took him to his father's. He was only there two days – not two days – was to have been married to Maude Lindsay –"

"Maude Lindsay! Who is that?"

"She waited upon the Lady Christabel, you must remember, from childhood until the night on which she escaped from Nottingham Castle."

"What, that little merry-hearted, wicked-eyed daughter of the warder?"

"Yes. She and Will have long loved each other."

"Nay, I thought it was you she loved?"

"No, it is a mistake."

“Then you loved her; I know it was one or the other,”

“No, never; I never loved her – that is, only as a sister.”

“Oh!”

“Nothing more, by my honour! Poor Will Scarlet was to have been married to her the day after his return, but he was captured by Fitz Alwine’s men and I am here with my men within call to rescue him.”

“To rescue him from whence?”

“From Nottingham Castle, as soon as I can learn for certain that he is there.”

“Do not be too hasty in your decision. I shall most certainly be at the Castle in the morning. I will then ascertain everything connected with him I can for you, and if I should possess any influence at the same time, which I fully expect I shall, it shall be all exerted in his favour.”

“But suppose the old villain seizes some pretext to act summarily?”

“Have you cause for such fear?”

“Can you ask a question which none could resolve so well as yourself? Does he not thirst for blood? Will he not gladly hail the chance to hang up one through whom he has received contumely, nay, corporeal punishment? My object is to keep all such opportunity out of his power; and to do so, I must be doing at once, or my efforts may come too late.”

“Thy acts might compromise my desires in a great measure; but as I have no right to interfere, as thy motive is a kindly one to him thou’rt endeavoring to save, I will meet thee half way and go to the Castle today instead of tomorrow; I will but express my intention to Baron Fitz Alwine of appearing to claim my bride upon the day appointed, and at the same time do my best to discover what is to be done with Will Scarlet; and so far as I have it in my power, I will render him service”

“But if it should be of little use, I will imme-diately acquaint you with his situation and position exactly, leaving you to decide what had best be done.”

“Be it so. I see Much returning with Hal of the Keep. We will hear what they have to say, and then you can depart and put your intention into execution.”

As soon as they arrived, Robin Hood, after greeting Hal warmly, and inquiring respecting the little wife and the sweet daughter, asked him to pour out what intelligence he possessed in a flood, and as speedily as possible.

“I have very little to tell you,” he replied. “I know that a prisoner has arrived, and I learn from Much that it is poor Will Scarlet again in trouble. I fear me that it is desperate trouble, for a *Palmer* [*a Holy Land Pilgrim*] who happened to be near the castle, being a holy friar also, has been carried in to shrive him.”

“He shall not die yet, by the Holy Mother’s help! If he do, then shall many a back be stretched on the ground for his sake,” cried Robin, fiercely, clenching his hands.

“Know you more respecting him?” he continued to Hal.

“No,” he replied, “but I have learned that the

Lady Christabel is to be married at the end of this week.”

“What!” cried Allan, in a loud startling tone.

“It is even as I say,” said Hal, looking upon Allan with some surprise. “She is to be wedded to the richest Norman in England.”

“**Married? Impossible!**” exclaimed Allan.

“The rumour is very strong, I assure you,” he answered, “and great preparation is making for the festive occasion.”

“Festive occasion!” reiterated Allan, bitterly. “What is the name of the villain who dares to offer his ungainly hand to the Lady Christabel?”

“His name?” echoed Hal, looking at Allan, as if he believed the young man to have lost his senses. “Why, everyone knows his name, for the Baron has been trying, I don’t know how many years to catch him – it is Sir Tristram of Goldsborough.”

“He! Why I thought the old miser had been in his grave years since. If he dares to continue his vile suit now, he shall descend at once to the grave he has been so long dwindling into. The Lady Christabel is betrothed to me, and none other shall she wed while I have an arm and strength to defend my right.”

“Betrothed to you!” echoed Hal.

“Yes,” said Robin. “This is Allan Clare.”

“Maid Marian’s brother! The first love of the Lady Christabel?”

“The same.”

“Wheugh!” and Hal gave a long energetic whistle. “I had no idea,” he said, when he had concluded his strain, “that my news was so interesting to you. Welcome to England, sir; you have just arrived in time to save the

lady from being forced to become the wife of one she detests. I am sure that it is to take place the last day of this week, and if you propose doing aught to prevent it, you have little time to lose."

"I thank thee for thy news; it is time to act, indeed. Robin, I will at once to the castle, and hear the worst. This accursed marriage shall not take place. I will perish rather."

"You may count upon my best assistance to prevent it; but Will's is a more pressing case of emergency. We have several days to concert measures for the furtherance of your wishes, while we have but a few hours perhaps to enable us to rescue Will. We will on, however, to the castle, at once, and see what can be done in both cases."

Accordingly, on they went – Robin Hood, under the circumstances deeming it unnecessary to disguise himself, the situation of Will being too urgent to admit of any such thought; still, precaution was taken to proceed by such bye-ways as the town afforded, and a short hour's trudge took them to the castle gates. Just as they approached, they observed the drawbridge lower, and they retired a short distance to reconnoiter. There was, however, only an old man who made his appearance over the drawbridge, and he was habited in the garb of a pilgrim.

"This is the holy palmer I told you of," said Hal, eagerly, "Let us question him; he can tell us Will's fate."

"It shall be so," exclaimed Robin, "None can so well tell as he the Baron's purpose."

The old man slowly approached; he was feeble with great age; and long travel, with rigid penance, had helped to bend him to the earth.

"The Holy Mother keep thee, good father!" said Robin, as he neared them.

"Amen, to thy kind prayer, my son," replied the pilgrim. "*Benedicité*!"

"Thou hast travelled far, father."

"From the Holy Land, my son, whither I have been on a pilgrimage – a penance for sin done in my youth. I have walked thither and hither, and have now come to lay these old and wearied bones under the green turf, upon whose pleasant face, and among whose sweet flowers, I frolicked, when a laughing child, free from sin and care. Holy Mother! That childhood's innocence can change to such a nature as man's."

"Thou hast lived long, father?"

“Eighty years agone I was a sturdy boy of nine, smiling lovingly in my mother’s soft eyes, and rearing my little head proudly beneath the pat of my father’s hand. It was a dream, all a dream – all faded, agone long since; but, oh! it was sweet while it lasted; so sweet, that it refreshes, aye, gladdens me, even to recall it to my memory.”

“May your succeeding hours be as calm and free from care as those of your childhood, father; and may you, when you pass away, rest as the wearied child after its gladsome play sleeps lightly and freely, dreaming only of the fair things dwelling in the world to come.”

“Amen, my son! My patron’s blessings on thee for thy kind wishes for an old man on the verge of the tomb. And let me request thy prayers for the repose of the soul of one who is now on eternity’s brink, and who, ere a few fleeting hours have passed over a head scarce emancipated from childhood, will be sleeping to wake no more in this life.”

“And is he now in the castle whom thou hast just shriven?” asked Robin, drawing a deep breath.

“He is, my son, and immured – Heaven help him! – in a lonesome dungeon.”

“He is doomed to die?”

“He is, my son, and there is no earthly help for him.”

“By the Virgin’s aid there shall be, if I cast away my life in the effort!” muttered Robin, between his teeth, and then speaking loudly, said “At what hour do they take his life?”

“At sunrise tomorrow morning.”

“Ha! not before?”

“Not before! Holy Mother, is not that speedy enough? Nay, too speedy. Dost thou wish him dead, son?”

“I would rather die myself; would cheerfully lay down my life, if by so doing I could save his. I know him, and love him, father; and it was a fear that he would perish earlier than you have mentioned, which made me ejaculate those words. Is he to die within the castle walls?”

“No, my son, he is consigned to an ignominious death. He is to perish at the foot of the town, upon the gallows tree, by the hands of the hangman.”

“Fortune favours me,” muttered Robin. “My old friend, thou shalt yet escape, if one true heart beats beneath the green doublet of him who owns Robin Hood for his leader. Father, will you do me a favour?”

“Name it, son.”

“Will you again enter the castle, and say that you will attend the prisoner to the gallows tree, to perform the last offices for him, and that he may die as becomes a true Christian and a Saxon.”

“I have not forgotten my duty, son. I have already said so and I shall be there.”

“It is well; I thank thee, father, most sincerely. We shall meet i’the morning, if thou wilt. Ere the cavalcade approaches the fatal tree, be at the foot of the elm tree which stands between two oaks, an hundred yards west of the pathway from this town to Mansfield. I have somewhat to say to thee there, which it is not fitting to mention now, and so will feel thy kindness greatly if thou sayest not nay.”

“I will be there.”

“Many thanks, father. I will no longer detain thee. Farewell – the blessing of St. Julian upon thee.”

“Amen. *Benedicité*, my son. Peace unto us all.”

So saying, the old man, crossing his hands over his breast, walked slowly away.

“The good old man! and he will be there,” said Robin, gazing after him; “and so will I, and will my merrie men; and it shall go hard but Will Scarlet comes into the green wood with those who go back.”

“It is to be done, if you can post your men so as securely hidden,” said Hal.

“You ought to know, Hal, that my merrie hearts have a knack of hiding themselves even in open paths. And, trust me, they will not thrust their doublets under the noses of the troopers until I tell them with a blast of my horn it is time.”

“I wish my prospect of success was as good as thine,” said Allan, thoughtfully.

“We must contrive to make it so,” said Robin, gaily. “Once let me get Will Scarlet into Maude’s hands, and we will see if the Lady Christabel is not speedily the wife of Allan Clare. Nay, never shake thy head thus dolefully, Allan; I have almost the means to ensure it – I have all the will – and we will see if means and will cannot make a power sufficient to accomplish your wishes.”

“I hope there will be no need to put thy kindness to the test. I will enter the castle at once, see Fitz Alwine, and learn from his own lips the truth of the report our friend Hal has conveyed to me. If it should be true, I will no

longer be duped. Since he has thought fit to break through a solemn engagement, I will not respect what I deemed his due, but leave nought untried to make his daughter mine."

"Thou'rt in the right. Well, Allan, I will back to the forest again, to make preparations for the morning and thou canst meet me there, some thousand yards from the spot where we met today. Some of my people will sure to be about, and bring thee to me. If Fitz Alwine should deny thee his daughter, will he not also detain thee?"

"He dare not. I hold a rank and power so nearly equal to his own that he dare not, if he would. Besides, if he purposes a denial, he will do his best to rid himself of me."

"True I had forgotten that," laughed Robin; "But take care he does not do it by cold steel, instead of requesting it by word of mouth."

"If my fear of losing Christabel was no greater than that, I should have little cause for alarm. I fear his cupidity, not his sanguinary spirit. I know the immense wealth of Sir Tristram would be sufficient to tempt him to any degradation of principle; and if, as Hal tells me, Sir Tristram is a suitor, then my chance of wedding his daughter by his consent is indeed a poor one."

"We shall see – you must hope for the best. Christabel will be your best friend. She will not give her hand away to this old wretch without a hard struggle in your favour, depend upon it. Every delay she can make, I have little doubt she will, and every obstacle will be in your favour."

"I know not in what way her father may have worked upon her mind; the prospect of shame, misery, and ignominy occurring to him would induce her to sacrifice herself, without a thought upon the personal anguish she might endure afterwards. I must endeavour to see her, to ascertain the extent of his influence over her, and his means of obtaining it. To me there appears no more time to lose than you find in poor Will Scarlet's affair, so I'll e'en wish you *good den* ['*good evening*'], and meet you again, as soon as I can, with satisfaction to myself, quit the castle."

"Agreed. You will find me in the wood, as I have told you. Farewell for the present."

"Farewell," answered Allan.

Robin, followed by Hal, took his way rapidly down the town while Allan demanded admittance at the castle gates. It was granted; and in a short time afterwards, according to his request, he was ushered unannounced into the Baron's presence.

If a spectre had risen from the grave and confronted Fitz Alwine, he could not have well looked more astonished or more paralysed. But when he recovered a little, he glanced round to see who had ushered Allan in; but the man, observing the sudden expression his face had assumed as his eye alighted on his visitor, and thereby judging the amount of glee he felt at the visit, had thought it prudent to decamp as speedily as his two legs would convey him away. The Baron, disappointed in this, turned to Allan with rather an equivocal welcome.

“I did not expect to see you,” he said, rather faintly.

“Very likely not – nevertheless, my Lord Baron, I am here,” was Allan's reply.

“I see it; but you are, I think, a – a – little after your promised time, are you not?”

“No, on the contrary, I am a little before my time.”

“I can hardly think that.”

“I am sure of it; I have kept too correct an account to be mistaken on that point. Besides, I have good means of proving it. Tomorrow is the day on which, complying with your terms, I claim the fulfillment of your promise – that of bestowing your daughter’s hand upon me.”

“Are all the conditions I made complied with?”

“To the letter. There were but three: viz. [‘*in other words*’], That I should be reinstated in my father’s estates; that I should possess one hundred thousand merks and that I should come upon the day seven years that the agreement was made, to claim her. If I was unable to fulfill these conditions, you were to bestow Christabel upon anyone you thought proper; to which, in the event of my failing, I prevailed on her to consent.”

“But you cannot have fulfilled these terms?”

“I have. King Henry has restored to me my estates, with an order to receive the arrears since they were confiscated until now; I have a hundred thousand merks; and tomorrow I shall be here to claim the redemption of your promise.”

“Tomorrow!” cried the Baron, a light suddenly brightening his features. “If you are not here tomorrow, the agreement is null?”

“It is. But mark me, Baron Fitz Alwine. I can tell by the expression of your countenance some devilish device has crossed your mind, to free yourself from your promise; but remember, that even should you proceed to such a length as to confine me, recollect I am here when the time

arrives for my presence, and that it matters not whether I am in a dungeon or this apartment – I am here. There was no particular room specified in our agreement, therefore any evasion of that nature you may attempt will be of no avail and if I see the slightest disposition on your part to play me false, you shall suffer terribly for it. I have you in my power. You have compromised your safety by treasonable acts, of which I am cognisant. Believe me, I have lived in a French Court, and choosing to have open ears, have learned what base knights, calling themselves English, have offered to sell their country to a foreign yoke for mercenary considerations. You may start, Baron Fitz Alwine, but the moment you break your boasted, solemn promise, my despatches, disproving your boasted patriotism, shall be on their way to King Henry."

"Allan Clare, 'tis well for you that I am of a mild and forbearing disposition, else would I, after hearing such a speech as you have just favoured me with, not only refuse to fulfill the agreement, but have you thrown from the highest turret the castle possesses –"

"You dare not."

"Do not provoke me. You are young and head-strong, and therefore I can make allowances for your impetuosity. But ere you make such a fiery outbreak, you should be well-assured that I intended to play thee false."

"I am assured that you do – in this — that you intend to wed your child to that miserable, miserly hound, Sir Tristram, of Goldsborough, ere this week has passed away."

"Ha! what tattling fool has told thee this?"

"No matter, I have heard the report."

"But I am not responsible for every lie report chooses to circulate."

"Then you do not intend her to wed Sir Tristram?"

"I see no right you have to ask any such question yet. Tomorrow is your day, and tomorrow you shall have my answer."

"Tomorrow I shall have fulfilled my conditions, every one of them, to the very extent they may be fulfilled; and tomorrow you shall consent – mark me, you shall. I have carried out all I promised to do without attempting to evade or infringe one clause in thought or deed; and now, when it comes to your turn to act with honour, you shall not have the chance of dereliction."

"I have no more to say; come tomorrow. You are free to depart; good den, Chevalier Clare."

"I know I am free to depart – you dare not detain me; but tomorrow I claim my bride, nor depart one inch without her. Farewell, my Lord Baron Fitz Alwine."

Allan turned and left the room, his bosom raging with anxiety and dread. He could tell full well, by the Baron's manner and the tone of his voice, that some wrong was intended, and he resolved to seek Robin Hood at once, in order to have assistance at hand in case of need, when he made his application on the morrow. He had no sooner quitted the room, than the Baron violently rang a small bell which stood upon the table; the summons was instantly answered by the entrance of a servitor.

"Send Pierre Front de Noir to me on the instant," cried the Baron. The man bowed and disappeared, but returned in a minute followed by Pierre, and then departed.

"Pierre," said the Baron, "You have some followers who will do their bidding without asking questions, and, if required, forget what they have done?"

"Yes, my lord, I have."

"It is well. A cavalier, habited gaily in scarlet gear, has just quitted my presence – follow him with two of your men, and let him trouble no one again. You understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord," replied Front de Noir, with a grim smile, half drawing a formidable dagger from a sheath which hung by his side.

"I see you do; but let it be done secretly; get into the wood if you can, and then stuff his carcase beneath the roots of some old tree, so that nothing may be ever known."

"It shall be done, my lord."

"And your pay, if you succeed well, shall be large. Away!"

"Your lordship is generous. I am gone, my lord; when next you see me, he will be sleeping with the worms."

Making an obeisance, the man left the Baron alone, chuckling in anticipation of success, and proceeding to the quarter of the castle containing his choice companions. He found them, and a few minutes after Allan had crossed the drawbridge, Pierre Front de Noir, with two villains of equal caliber to himself in infamy, were on his track. Allan, too intent upon the chances of the morrow, and unsuspecting immediate foul play, hastened on to Sherwood, without casting a look behind. His followers, therefore, had little difficulty in dogging his steps unperceived by him. When they saw him making for the wood, they were especially delighted, for it seemed as if he was walking to the sacrifice with an intention of sparing them all the trouble he could.

They determined that he should not be obliged to walk far, for as soon as he had entered the wood far enough to escape from sight of the town, they purposed to spring on him, and murder him at once. Allan slackened not his speed, gained the borders of the forest, and as he expected Robin would be actively engaged in making arrangements on behalf of poor Will

Scarlet, he determined to wander about for a while ere he sought him. So, instead of turning to the west, as agreed, he struck to the north, intending to make a circuit to the meeting place. He had not advanced more than two hundred yards in the forest, when he heard hurried footsteps in his rear. He turned hastily, and beheld Pierre Front de Noir, with two fellows, coming upon him, holding drawn swords in their hands, their forbidding countenances betokening their villainous purpose. To draw his sword and place his back to a tree, was but the work of an instant to Allan and facing the three, with a determined look demanded, in a resolute voice —

“What is your will, fellows?”

“Thy life, my gaudy butterfly,” cried Pierre, springing upon him and making a desperate cut at him with his sword.

The blow was, however, parried with the greatest ease, for Allan was a most accomplished swordsman. And the second who attacked was not only disarmed, but his sword, whirled into the air by the jerk, lodged in the branches of the tree above them, he receiving at the same time a tremendous cut in the left arm, from which the blood poured like water. He retired from the contest, and Allan kept the other two at bay – nor could all their cunning gain them a blow in any part of Allan’s body. He kept his back to the tree, and as both of his antagonists cut and thrust with great rapidity, he had as much as he could manage to defend himself, without returning a blow. They kept for some little time at this work, without abating one atom of their speed – and it seemed as if Allan would, by his superior use of his sword, be enabled effectively to defend himself against all their attacks.

An end was, however, suddenly put to the contest, by the disarmed villain having torn a branch from a young tree growing near, struck over Allan's guard with all his force. Although he saw it descending, and raised his sword to oppose it, it was delivered with too much force to resist; it alighted on his head, and felled him to the ground like lightning, quite senseless.

“The prey is down, and the work is nearly done. Away, both of you, and leave me to finish it. One is less easily seen than three,” cried Pierre Front de Noir. “I’ll dig the hole for him myself – where’s the spade?”

“It is here,” returned the wounded man; “I am faint – I shall bleed to death if I am not helped.”

“Away with him, Gascoigne, to the castle! I will do the rest,” exclaimed Pierre, immediately commencing to dig a grave.

His two companions departed, and Pierre had nearly finished the grave, when he unexpectedly received such a tremendous thwack over the shoulders, that, besides being prostrated, he felt as if his back was broken. It quite took his breath away, and turning his eyes faintly to see from whence this gift had been presented, he encountered the rubicund

visage of a sturdy fellow, clothed in the dress of a black friar, leaning over him, twirling a stout quarter staff in his hands, evidently the weapon from which he had received the knock.

“Why, thou black-muzzled, ungodly rogue!” cried he to Pierre, “Who art thou who knocks folks of gentle blood o’ the head, and then hide thy villainy beneath the roots of an honest oak? Speak, thou dark-visaged varlet!”

“My sword shall speak for me!” cried Pierre, springing to his feet. It shall send thee to hell, and the foul fiend himself shall tell thee who I am!”

“Excuse me, I cannot go before thee; and, as to asking Satan any such question, I need give myself no such trouble. Thy visage shows me thou art at least half-brother to his first cousin, and, as a wind-up, let me advise thy sword not to speak at all, for, if it should attempt to wag its tongue, the language my quarter staff talks may silence thy sword’s master forever; therefore, depart while thy skin is whole.”

“We will see!” cried Pierre, giving the friar a blow over the hand with his sword, which cut three of his fingers to the bone.

It was a rash act. He had much better not have done it – much better have departed quietly; for the cut had scarce been given when he received such a rap on the ear that it sounded loud enough to be echoed by the wood. He felt stunned – he was scarce conscious of a succession of terrific blows – he did not know that his sword had been dashed from his grasp! A dreaminess seemed to come over him, and he began to fancy himself among scenes and in times far away. When the friar paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, Pierre Front de Noir lay dead upon the ground, beaten to a jelly!

“The knave!” muttered the friar, breathing heavily – “The knave! the knave! Did he think Friar Tuck’s fingers were made to be cut off by such a black-bearded Norman cur as he, the dog? I have taught him better. Marry! these Normans think it is their province only to cut, slaughter, and slay. They will be taught differently ere we Saxons have done with them.”

“Who is this smart youth he has killed, I wonder? Ah! his body is warm; there is a beating here – he is not dead. I’ll carry him to the haunt, and see if there is yet life enough in him to restore him to the world. So, so – there, you shall ride on my shoulders, albeit I am not used to be a beast of burden to any one – so, he is not so heavy. As for you, you ugly ruffian, lie thou there; and, if the wolves make a dinner of thee, it will save the worms a disagreeable meal, for I am sure such a hideous rogue cannot be pleasant eating.”

With these words on his tongue, Friar Tuck – it was our old friend Giles, bearing Allan Clare upon his shoulders, took his way among the trees to the forest haunt.

A few words will explain the manner of Will Scarlet's capture. He was hotly pursued to England, and on his arrival was tracked to Nottingham. There all traces were lost, but a scout followed on to Mansfield, where he accidentally encountered Will in the hostel. He had served with him in Normandy, and knew him on the instant; but, being accompanied by five stalwart friends, he thought it advisable not to attempt to make him prisoner. He, therefore, went out and dispatched a messenger to Nottingham for assistance, while he followed the route which Robin and Will took, leaving ample directions for the expected assistants to follow him. His messenger arrived at the castle soon after king's messenger, and, upon giving his information, received assistance in the shape of a band of troopers, whom he guided on the track which the scout had left directions to pursue.

They arrived at Barnsdale in the middle of the night, as Robin and Will had reached there in the morning. They were posted in various parts of the grounds, securely hidden, and the following morning Will, strolling about, fell into their ambush, was gagged, and borne off ere he had an opportunity of making the slightest resistance.

He was almost broken-hearted at his adverse fate. To be thus snatched away when the cup of bliss was at his lips was terrible; and, although naturally of good spirits, he sunk under this reverse. He knew that he should be dealt with summarily – perhaps his friends never be able to ascertain what had become of him; and Maude – he could not bear to think of her situation – he felt completely sunk in the depths of misery, and quite gave himself up to despair.

At Mansfield, however, he recognised Much, and saw that he also was recognised, and from that moment hope took possession of his soul. He knew now that Robin Hood would know his situation, and, if there was a means by which he could escape, he felt quite assured that Robin would employ it, and never leave him until every chance was lost. He knew, also, that if he was unfortunate enough to suffer death now, that Robin Hood would revenge him fully, amply; and so he cheered himself up and looked his danger in the face with a calm air, and the satisfaction that if he fell, there were eyes to weep, and hearts and hands to revenge him.

The Holy Palmer and Will Scarlet

He was immured in a wretched dungeon, but he smiled and talked gaily. He sung his old ballads, and appeared more like one anticipating a pleasant festival, than one who was doomed to die on the morrow. He made a good shrift.

When the old palmer came for that purpose, he received him kindly, made his confession cheerfully, and dismissed him with happy words of hope for the future.

The morning came, and, although he had received no sign from Robin, yet he did not cease to hope: he took his very silence as a good sign. Ere the sun had reached the horizon, a party of guards came and fetched him from his dungeon. He was placed, on his arrival at the courtyard, in the centre of a strong body of troops, and, when the disk of the sun began to appear, the cavalcade moved on. As they descended the town, numbers of the towns people thronged to join the procession; and, though Will turned his eyes anxiously right and left, there was no sign of Robin or of any of his companions. A pang shot through his heart, but he dismissed it; he would not believe but that Robin was at hand, and he hoped on, and even smiled cheerfully, as he saw the earnest faces of the town's people turned on him in pitying gaze.

Presently he came in sight of a tall gallows with all its mournful appurtenances. A strong flush crossed his brow: he did not think he was doomed to such a death, even if Robin could not save him. He looked eagerly round – there was no one yet whose face he knew – his heart smote within him. And now they stood beneath the gallows, and preparations were made to append him thereto, and there was no one near to help him. How earnestly, how anxiously, did he scrutinise each face near him, to see if he could trace one feature of a friend who would assist him; but no! They were all strangers, with no more than cold pity on their inquisitive faces. In his agony he asked for the Baron, who, as sheriff, attended the ceremony. He approached and said – "Miserable wretch, what want you with me?"

"I must die – there is no help for me."

"None."

"I have a boon to crave; if thou hast the soul of a man, if thou art of human kind, thou wilt grant it"

"Name it."

"Look you, Baron Fitz Alwine, I am of a Saxon family which has never been stained by the infamous death of one of its descendants; Let me not die a dog's death."

"You must die upon yon gallows."

"Baron Fitz Alwine, thou art a soldier, hast seen much service, and know a soldier's feelings. It is hard for one who has risked his life in many a hard-fought field, to be strung up by the neck like a thievish cur."

"What wouldst thou have?"

“Let me be unbound, give me a sword in my hand, and get your whole troop on me. I am a soldier and would die a soldier’s death – would fall with my back to the ground and my face to the sky.”

“Dost thou think me fool enough to hazard the life of one of my men, just to humour your whims? Pshaw! It is too absurd. No, thou shalt hang like a rogue as thou art on yonder tree; nothing shall move me to alter my determination.”

“Baron Fitz Alwine, I entreat you to hear me! Let me not die like a slave; if you have a spark of human feeling, unbind me; I ask for no sword, no weapon, but my free hands; I will fight with nought but them, and would smile even as the troops cut me in pieces, if thou with!”

“Never! A death by the sword would be too great leniency to thee, base Saxon dog. Didst thou not cut down a Norman? And for that thou shalt hang on a gallows tree, where all Saxon churls should swing, had I my will.”

“Will you not give the alternative to stand here, bound as I am, and let me be cut to pieces by your men? I will not shrink a muscle, but bless thee with my dying breath for thy mercy.”

“I will see thee hanged on yon gallows first, then I may have thee cut in pieces and tossed to the dogs: and it shall go hard but he who infests these woods, with his thieving outlaws, shall be treated to the same fate.”

“Were he you speak of here, were Robin Hood by my side, with him only would I defy your vengeance, dastard, coward! Thou churl, worse than peasant’s cur! Thou wolfish cub in man’s form, hear my last words – beware of Robin Hood, if I die on yon tree; a week will not pass ere you swing from the same beam!”

“Fool, thy words are idle ravings. I will soon have him and his gang in my power, and he will be too kindly dealt with if he meets with thy fate!”

“My fate will be paid for by him in full, never fear; hadst thou thrice thy number to back thee, he would scorn thee and all thy efforts to capture him; but as thou art, I have at least the consolation to reflect that you will shortly dangle from the same gallows which will have held me.”

“I’ll have no more of this prating! Hangman, to your duty – away with him!”

“Hold” the tremulous voice of the old palmer, who had stood by unnoticed during the latter part of this colloquy. “I have a few things to say to this youth ere he is launched into eternity – mysteries of our holy religion, which human ears, save those of the church, or those on the verge of death, may not hear.”

“He has said and heard enough!” roared Fitz Alwine, “To death with him at once!”

“Hold” exclaimed the palmer, in a voice which was startlingly loud for one of his years. “Impious man, would you interfere with the rights of the church?”

“Be speedy, then, in what you have to mumble, or it is very like I may,”

“Let your people withdraw a space.”

Baron Fitz Alwine waved his hand, and they fell back. He walked to the foot of the ladder to give directions to the hangman, and Will Scarlet and the palmer were left alone. The palmer suddenly changed his voice, and said –

“Make no start, Will – I am Robin Hood: I’ll cut your bands in a minute and then we’ll fight our way out.”

“God bless you, Robin! God bless you, my old friend. I knew you would not desert me!”

“Not while I had life. Stoop down, Will, as if I was uttering a benediction – so – that is it. These thongs are tough, but the steel is sharp; so, that is well. Now, Will, there’s a sword, clap your back to mine and show them that you were not born to be hung.”

At the same moment Robin Hood threw off his disguise, and showed himself in a dress of green. Back to back stood he and Will Scarlet, laughing at the astonishment which was depicted on every countenance.

“My Lord Baron Fitz Alwine,” exclaimed Robin, in a loud voice, “Will Scarlet is one of my retainers. – I cannot spare him; so, if you please, I have come to take him back with me. But, in order that you should not complain, I can restore you one of your men, a fellow with long black hair and black beard, who thought to deprive of life one Allan Clare – whom your lordship knows — but failed therein and lost his own.”

“By Heaven!” shouted Fitz Alwine, “This is Robin Hood himself! Five hundred merks to him who takes him dead or alive.”

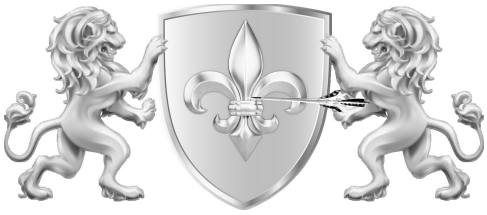
“I would advise no man here, if he values his life, to attempt it,” cried Robin, and blew three blasts upon his bugle, which made the welkin ring again. Before the echo had died away, it was answered, and, upon the instant foresters, with bent bows, came running from the wood,

“Ha” shouted Baron Fitz Alwine, “To arms! cut down the dogs; To arms! my brave hearts!”

A shower of arrows from the merrie men replied to his speech, and he saw fit to mount his horse and gallop up to the castle. The townspeople followed, shouting and shrieking, and the troops, panic-stricken by their cries, and the unexpected attack, were thrown into disorder, and fled almost as impetuously as the townspeople themselves.

“The green wood and Robin Hood!” shouted the merrie men, driving their foes, like flocks of frightened fowls, before them. Up the town they went, pell mell, all mixed together – the Baron arriving at the top of his speed at the castle, followed closely by his retainers, who, when they entered the castle gates, formed and prepared to defend the castle, if attacked; but the merrie men had no such intent, for they had gained their object, and now quietly returned to their home in the green wood again.

When they had departed, the townsmen, who found they were not hurt, and had lost nothing, said that “Robin Hood and his men were gallant hearts – stout hearts;” while the young girls said, with merry eyes, that they were more gentle than they seemed, and many of them declared they should not be afraid to go through the wood alone.



Chapter 9

And still, and pale, and silently,
Did Parasina wait her doom;
***
Her eyes unmoved, but full and wide,
Not once had turned to either side –
***
And there with glassy gaze she stood,
As ice were curdled in her blood;
But every now and then a tear,
So large and slowly gathered, slid
From the long dark fringe of that fair lid.
----- Byron

Young companies nimbly began dancing,
To the swift treble pipe and humming string;
Aye, those fair living forms swam heavenly,
To tunes forgotten – out of memory.
----- Keats

In a great heat, but in a whole skin, Baron Fitz Alwine regained his chamber, after ascertaining that Robin Hood and his merrie. men did not intend to storm his castle. The knowledge that upon gaining their point they had quietly retired, relieved some little of his anxiety and apprehension, and made room for a quantity of choler to be distributed among his followers. His personal safety was his first consideration, and after a slight examination, he came to the assurance that he was unhurt. He then began to reflect upon the events of the morning, and the degrading defeat, with the more shameful flight, began to force itself with great power upon his mind. He threw the whole blame upon his retainers.

He forgot that he was the first to set the example of flight, and he launched forth an invective upon the cowardice of his men. He commenced a speculation whether he had ever encountered, in all the affrays in which he had been engaged, such an instance of rank fear – such gross unsoldier-like fright, as that evinced by his men on that memorable morning. What would the townspeople say? What would the army think when they heard that a band of outlaws had put to flight a body of well-disciplined troops, with scarce a blow being struck.

His reputation as a brave and tried warrior, which he had hardly earned – *very* hardly-earned – for he was by nature an extreme coward, and how he had contrived to gain and support the name was a mystery – This name would be lost to him forever. The more he reflected upon it, the more he magnified its disgrace; and to such an extent did he shift the

odium from his own shoulders, that he brought himself the conviction that, instead of being the first who fled, he was the last, left alone by his men, fighting his way to his castle gates. Having arrived at this conclusion, he went into paroxysm of fury, rage, and distraction. He danced out of his chamber – he dashed into the courtyard – the men were still, in straggling groups, discussing their defeat, and attributing its cause to the sudden fright of their liege lord.

That liege lord ordered the whole to be ranged before him, and when the order was obeyed, he gave them a long tirade upon their cowardice. He cited every instance of flagrant panic-stricken fright which history could furnish, or imagination invent; and then begged them to consider that theirs surpassed it in infamy. He exhausted every contemptuous epithet which his long life in the society of soldiery, scarce one remove from barbarians, could furnish – and to do his memory credit, it was a most extensive assortment. When his list was out he coined others.

He spoke so vehemently – assumed such an appearance of injured and deserted courage, that, guided by the feelings of deference with which they were accustomed to receive all he said, his men, alternately, instead of blaming him, as they had at first done, shifted it to their own shoulders. Taking his ungovernable rage for virtuous indignation, they therefore bowed their heads with shame, and through his eloquence, arrived at the conclusion that they really were a set of disgraceful cowards, frightened at their own shadows, and that their conduct that morning had been to the last degree vile and shameful. When the Baron had ceased and he had made such a long-winded speech of it that it had carried off all his passion, acting as a heat conductor – one of the men proposed that they should sally out, follow the Sherwood men to their forest lairs, and there conquer them, or perish in the attempt.

The proposal was received with acclamations, and the Baron was requested to lead them on. He was much obliged by their kind offer, but he would rather be excused; he begged to decline it – at least for the present – and wait until some auspicious moment placed them so completely in their power, that the victory might be gained at the expense of little bloodshed; and he then and there dismissed them, fearing that they might urge their request beyond a point where he could not well refuse to comply with it; and being now satisfied, and having satisfied his men that he was a most high-couraged, virtuous, and forbearing sufferer in the late case, he again sought his chamber.

When seated, his thoughts began to revert to his daughter and her two suitors. One he knew – at least he had good cause for believing – was dead, and the other could not, in the course of nature, live long; his daughter would then be a widow, with a million merks in money, besides enormous possessions in land abroad and at home; he should, as well as his own private property, have a million of merks of Sir Tristram's in his

hands, of which nobody but himself should be any the wiser, having taken such good precautions as lay in his power, that the transaction which placed this sum in his possession should not transpire beyond the knowledge of himself and Sir Tristram. With this wealth on the part of himself and daughter, when the event occurred which should leave her a widow, what was to prevent him becoming the father of a princess?

King Henry had several sons – money was a great object to them – a wife none. He was well-descended from an old Norman family, and there could exist no obstacle on that point. His daughter was beautiful, and her charms considerably heightened by her enormous wealth. Baron Fitz Alwine pursued these ideas with ardour; he arrived at last to being grandfather to a King of England, and wondering with what foreign powers his grand-children and great-grandchildren would be allied by marriage. Suddenly the words of Robin Hood, respecting the failure of Front de Noir, rose like a bugbear, to knock his aerial castles to the ground. Upon the instant, he rang the bell. A servitor appeared.

“Has Front de Noir returned?” he asked.

“No, my lord,” replied the man; “He left yesterday with two men under his command, who have both returned, one of them severely wounded, but Front de Noir is still absent.”

“Send one of the fellows who accompanied him to me.”

The man did as he was ordered, and in a few minutes Gascoigne, who had led the wounded man back to the castle, entered the Baron’s presence. He gazed upon him for an instant, and gave Front de Noir credit for his choice of a companion, for a more remorseless, hard-hearted looking villain could not well be employed upon any business, however murderous.

“Where is Front de Noir?” demanded the Baron.

“I cannot say, my lord,” was the reply. “I have not seen him since yesterday.”

“But when you left him?”

“He was digging a grave for one who lay beside it, ready to fill it,” said the man, giving a laugh which God preserve anyone from ever hearing or witnessing the like! A shade passed over the features of the Baron. A cold creeping thrill passed through him; he could not trust himself to speak, and he waved his hand for the man to quit his presence. That day he quitted not again his chamber, but the hours passed drearily and wearily with him; he had every reason to believe that Allan was dead, but yet he had a strange misgiving that he was not; every footstep passing the door of his apartments seemed to be an indication of Allan’s approach, and as they died away, it was like a weight being removed from his chest, for he knew it was not him. He scarce dared look around for fear he should see

some *wither'd, bloody-eyed, and bloody-handed, ghastly, ghostly thing* start up from some dark nook the chamber owned. Night came on, and the day's excitement, its harass and fatigues, induced a sleep which was not repose. Dreadful dreams tormented him, and in the morning he awoke unrefreshed, sick, and weary from the night's restlessness. Soon other thoughts intruded, and a walk on the ramparts in the fresh cool air of the morning, in some degree restored him to his usual callousness.

Sir Tristram, who was at present residing in the castle, and purposed doing so until after his wedding, sought him, and had a long interview, in which the money was again a point of controversy; the Baron insisting upon having the sum agreed upon placed in his hands before the ceremony took place, a point which after a severe struggle, Sir Tristram yielded, but a mutual distrust existed.

The Baron who wished the marriage to take place in the castle chapel, met with stout and stern opposition from Sir Tristram, who conceived that he wished it from some sinister motive, and the more he urged it the more refractory grew Sir Tristram, who vowed he would be married in Linton Abbey, which was situated about a mile and a half from Nottingham, or not at all. Fitz Alwine cursed him inwardly for an obstinate old ass, who was blind to his own interest in thus refusing to make sure of being uninterrupted, for he possessed an undefined dread that an effort would be made prevent the marriage, springing from someone or somewhere.

Albeit, Allan being dead, he knew not where it was to come from, excepting that Robin Hood and his merrie men might interfere for the sake of plunder. This he mentioned as a formidable argument to Sir Tristram, but he, however, set it aside by saying he would have a body of his own followers who would ensure, by their numbers, the ceremony not being disturbed or, making an alteration in the day, perform the marriage very secretly, and thus defeat any project Robin Hood might have made. To both these propositions Fitz Alwine had an objection; to the first, judging Sir Tristram by himself, he suspected that his large body of retainers might, at the instigation of their master, walk back with the million merks so soon as the wedding was over. In those days might was right.

None knew this fact so well he, as having exercised it upon all occasions where a chance presented, and the prospect of gain made it worth his while to attempt it; he had, therefore, no desire to call their services into play. For the second, he had an aversion to going anywhere in the neighbourhood of Sherwood Forest unattended. He had a a natural fear that the odour of his name was rank in the nostrils of those who found a home beneath the broad boughs and green leaves of its old trees, and so he felt that if he must yield the point, it had better procede as originally arranged. He saw that it must be and he yielded to it with the best grace he was able, trying to make Sir Tristram believe that all he said

or did was guided by an honest, open-hearted wish for the best, and toned it with an assumption of frankness which was anything but natural.

Now, Sir Tristram was naturally a cunning, artful man, and knew as well as the most penetrating observer could have done, that the whole affair was a mutual accommodation, in which each had tried to overreach the other, in order to make the best bargain. He therefore estimated every act and word of Fitz Alwine at its proper value, and hated, despised, and condemned him accordingly.

On the other hand, Fitz Alwine hated Sir Tristram, because he had more wealth than himself; he hated him also because he thought him a consummate old fool, but he used him as a means to bring a certain wish to bear — he wanted his money, and he considered his fair daughter as goods equal in value to half or all the wealth Sir Tristram possessed and having the chance, disposed of her accordingly, as an auctioneer would any article he was selling to the best bidder. Fitz Alwine being well satisfied that no one could bid so high, took all the care he could no one else should have her, for she was the only equivalent he had for the wealth he wanted, and she, once gone in a different way to that he wished, his golden and ambitious dreams would at once vanish, never more to return.

Each finding that their favourite points would not be waived by the other, at length yielded the separate objections, and agreed that on the seventh day that the Lady Christabel should be wedded to Sir Tristram, in Linton Abbey, and that on or before the morning of the marriage, one million of merks should be placed in the hands of Baron Fitz Alwine. This arranged, they separated.

In Barnsdale Hall, grief was yet working its tearful way – the parents and sisters were mourning for the loss of their son and brother, the mistress for her lover, and the friend from true sympathy. On the morning following Will's rescue, they were all assembled in the hall, speculating in sadness upon his mysterious disappearance, when, in the midst of a silence which was more painful than even an outburst of sorrow, the wind of a horn blowing a cheerful blast met their ears.

"It is Robin Hood," cried Marian, with ardour.

"And brings good news – I know he does – I am sure of it – he always does," exclaimed Barbara, with a laugh which was as near a cry as could be. "Come, cheer up, Maude, Will's coming home, I'm sure."

Maude shook her head mournfully, the tears springing in her eyes.

"Oh! but I am sure he is. You will see now; Robin Hood always brings good news, bless his dear heart," she exclaimed in a full voice, winding up with a loud scream; for sure enough there stood Will in the doorway. Her scream was echoed by Marian, for close behind Will was Allan, who,

only stunned by the heavy blow, had with attention soon recovered, and with Robin had posted on to Barnsdale.

What a welcome home Will and Allan had. The smiles, the loud voices, and, most of all, the tears, which were plentiously poured forth, may be imagined; the glad hearts their presence made, the joy their return created, evinced itself in a language which no tongue can tell or words describe. We leave the task to the imagination – we confess our inadequacy to portray it; but there is a small still voice in the bosom of each one who looks upon these pages which shall tell them how greatly glad – how painfully joyous, the scene was.

“Did I not tell you that Robin Hood always brought good news?” cried Barbara, with sparkling eyes, as soon as she could recover her voice, and after she had embraced her brother a dozen times at least. “I think he does it purposely to make us all in love with him.”

“I am afraid he does,” said Marian, laughingly.

“Do you know, Marian,” observed Barbara, with a very arch expression, “I have a great mind to make a mistake, and fancy him, Willy, and – and – quite a mistake, you know – give him a kiss”

“You had better not,” answered Marian, “for in that case I think we should all follow your example, and probably kill him with kindness.”

“I have not the least objection,” laughed Robin, “To die so sweet a death. It would only be following the example of the bee, who, gathering too much honey, clogs his wings and dies of the sweet load.”

“I have a great mind to fall in love with him with all my might and main,” said Barbara, her sweet blue eyes laughing as only sweet blue eyes can laugh, “to seize him from all of you, and march off, bag and baggage, to some fairy land, and there – keeping him all to myself, mind – live happy forever.”

“Very pretty; but suppose I should object to go?” said Robin.

“You would not have the heart to refuse so nice an offer.”

“It won’t do, Barby dear,” cried Will; “You can just keep your heart snug in your bodice a while; if he did not refuse, I think I know someone else who would object to such an arrangement.”

“Allan, you cannot imagine the extent of the obligation under which we all lay to Robin Hood. To my father, my mother, and sisters, he has been as the one who, on all occasions, has proved the harbinger and actor of something kind, generous, and cheering. To Maude here, my little wife who shall be, and to Marian, as a brother in the truest sense of the word – to myself – what can I say? – I have no words, Robin, to tell how I appreciate you, but in my heart there is no object more dearly, or so dearly cherished as yourself. From our childhood we were friends; such

friends, Allan – brothers bound by the closest ties of amity could not have been such friends as we were – and never, at any time, under the influence of any hostile circumstance my unequal temper as a boy might have given birth to, did he turn one shade from the old friendship, but ever carried it out with a generous warmth which will ever be unforgotten while my memory lives. Allan, you have as much cause to honour and esteem him as I have; he has been tried and proved as true as steel."

"Willy, my friend, I would have you think of me kindly," said Robin Hood, somewhat affected by Will Scarlet's earnest words, "Aye, all here think as kindly and generously as you can, but I would not hear you say so; albeit Marian doubts the possibility of my blushing, yet I cannot but feel a scarlet mask upon my face while you are saying all these handsome and undeserved things of me, which glows as warmly as the love in my heart for ye, one and all."

"Robin Hood," said Allan, advancing and taking his hand, pressing it warmly, and speaking with feeling, "Twelve years ago I told you, for a good service you then rendered me, which nor gold nor words could repay, I would esteem you as my dear friend; and on the night I quitted Gamwell, youthful as you were, yet only youthful in years, I entrusted my sister to your watchful care, to tend, cherish her as a loved sister, to act in all things as I, loving her truly, would have done had I been with her, and now I have returned, I need no words from her to tell me that you have fully, faithfully, nobly, redeemed your trust "

"That indeed he has!" said Marian, with an energy amounting to enthusiasm. "Oh, Allan! if you could but know the numberless acts of his generosity, his delicate conduct, his forethought and unwearying efforts to cheer me and make me forget the pain of your absence, the anguish of being alone in the world, you would then, indeed, honour him, you would then love him – as – as –"

"You do," suggested Allan, looking earnestly at her.

"As I do! aye, Allan, even as I do!" she exclaimed proudly, in a full rich voice, teeming and tremulous with emotion. "I see no infringement of the modesty which should invest and adorn a maiden's words and acts in such acknowledgment. Did you know, Allan, how unremittingly, how unchanging have been his words and works of kindness to me, you would love him as I do – if it is possible for another to possess an equal feeling. At all times, and under all circumstances, he has supplied your place, even as you could have most earnestly desired; and it would be mean in me did I not – now I have an opportunity, and such an opportunity – acknowledge it as warmly as I appreciate it. He loves me, Allan, with a like affection. But my hand, although I freely promised it, has waited to be thy gift, and too well I knew thy spirit, Allan, to fear how thou wouldst decide."

“To hear thee say during my long absence thou hast had a friend ever at thy side, who has been to thee all a brother should or could be, gladdens me most greatly,” said Allan, warmly; “It removes from my breast a feeling of shame and pain that I have ever felt while away, that you should have been left alone so long by one who was your natural protector, and who should have remembered his duty before his inclination —”

”Dear Allan!”

“Nay, I ought to have done so, but my youth and strong feelings –”

“And the greater and better excuse – the lady,” interrupted Marian, with a faint smile, which her brother returned.

“You are right, Marian, they will plead for me: I have only one way to thank Robin Hood, and, as I once told him, I hoped the day would come when I could repay his services in some slight way. I will see if that day is not to be this day. Robin Hood, as far as words can utter thanks, I thank thee; if feelings could be coined into words, you would hear how warm and impassioned my language should be; but as that is not, nor can be, the case, I must try and give you some equivalent. Here is Marian, whom you have attended as a brother for so many years, and must be, in consequence, well acquainted with her ways and little defects of temper, her thoughts and wishes, so much better than anyone else, that I think you had better now try her as a wife, and see if you cannot live as harmoniously together for the future as you have done hitherto. You must be content with her, for I have nothing better –”

“Nothing better! –” ejaculated Robin, but had not another word to say, his heart was so full. He looked earnestly at Marian, and she flung herself in his arms in a passion of joyous tears.

Will Scarlet could not contain his rapture at the turn affairs were taking, and he gave Maude two or three earnest embraces, by way of recovering the emotion the last incident had produced. His eyes were full of tears, and his throat was full, but he tried to make a laugh of it, and produced something like a husky screech, and forced out by some means an ‘hurra’.

“We will be married together!” he cried; “eh, Robin? – let us all be married tomorrow – no, no, forgot, not tomorrow – tomorrow has been always unlucky to me. So we will be married today – eh?”

“No,” said Allan, “You are in too great a hurry.”

“Too great a hurry!” reiterated Will, energetic-ally; “It’s all very well for you to say ‘too great a hurry’ but if you had been disappointed so many times as I have, you would not say ‘too great a hurry’, I’ll wager my head. What do you say, Maude – eh?”

“Not today! Will – it can’t be done today.”

“Can’t be done today! Why not today? I don’t see anything to prevent it. I think today will do very well, and plenty of time, too.”

“No,” said Allan. “Friend Will, I must away again today, and would wish to be at my sister’s wedding. I hope, before the end of the week, to be married myself, and then, if you please. we will all be married together.”

“Stop a whole week!” cried Will, “It’s impossible – it is not in nature to do it. My heart is in one perpetual state of banging backwards and forwards – besides paying an occasional visit to my mouth – and it will continue this sort of fun until Maude is really mine as fast as the church can make us; and consider, if I have to wait a whole week, it will be worn out – Í shan’t have a bit left.”

“Nay, Will,” observed Robin; “A week will soon pass, and if we can add to the happiness of all by the addition of a couple to our wedding number, by waiting, our patience will not be much put to the test in suffering a few days to elapse ere we are made happy for life.”

“Ah! I see how it is – I must give up. There’s a conspiracy among mankind to keep me from being married as long as ever they can. Never mind, I’ll bear my sad fate as merrily as I am able, and won’t be down-hearted and low spirited, in spite of the whole world. If I get into danger, there’s a Providence and an old friend who gets me out again; and so I’ll wait the week, and pass it in as gleesome a manner as though each succeeding minute was to unite me and Maude forever; Therefore, Maude, let us make the most of our week – we have many things to talk over. Suppose you and I take a stroll, and chat the matter over together?”

And without waiting her consent, and replying to the smiles of all by a full-toned merry laugh, he led Maude from the hall, to wander lovingly among the shadows of the tall trees which covered a portion of the estate. A happy day was spent by all at Barns-dale; and when the shades of night were beginning to clothe everything in obscurity, Robin, Allan, and Will – for on learning the nature of their expedition, he would accompany them – were on their way to Sherwood Forest.

The seventh morning subsequent to the day on which Baron Fitz Alwine made his arrangement with Sir Tristram for the marriage sat the Lady Christabel alone, in her chamber.

She was habited in a rich dress of white, superbly adorned with jewels of the rarest device and workmanship; a long veil was thrown carelessly over her head, and descended nearly to her feet, her hair was braided across the temples, and then descended in long curls over her shoulders, her features wore the stamp of melancholy, betokening a spirit almost annihilated by some sudden and killing blight.

She was pale to ashyness; she sat with her hands before her, unconsciously plucking a flower to pieces, and looking like a statue carved in Parian marble; a tear ever and anon disengaged itself from her eyelid, and rolled down her marble cheek unchecked. And save occasionally a slight quiver of the upper lip – the evidence of acute inward anguish – there was nought to distinguish the existence of life. Her whole aspect was that of death-like rigidity.

For some time she sat thus; at one time perfectly motionless, and then just such slight motion as the tearing leaf from leaf of the flower she held in her hand might occasion; and when her bitter thoughts found a voice, her words were uttered in a tone faint and low, and so instinct with hopeless misery, that it would make one weep to listen to them.

“He has forgotten me,” she said, “He has forgotten me, who so fondly loved him, who never ceased to remember him when forgetfulness might have been a virtue, who vainly believed that time, and friends, and all things might change and he still be true. True; Holy Mother! That I should live to think him false. I ought to have been unforgotten by him. I would die rather than have forgotten him or ceased to love him. Why should he then forget me? I never gave him cause – never, never. I have loved him dearly and truly from a child, and, woe is me! Love him now too deeply.”

“None other have I thought upon but him. He knew it – he knew it. And yet, although he swore to love me, unchangeable, until one or both passed away to the world where sorrow is not, he has broken his oath, has loved and wedded another. Wedded! Oh, God! If this be true, there is no hope for me in this life. None, none. My heart will break with this load of agony. I have borne bitter words, stern looks, and harsh treatment; solitude, the most dreary and wretched, unrepentingly – nay, cheer-fully; for I did it for his sake, nor deemed it hard; for I hoped the reward would come one day in being united to him whose love I thought mine, who bore trials and endured hardships and griefs for me.”

“The thought that he loved me was my consolation under all despairing influences. I hoped on, and smiled at what I then endured, in the bright prospect for the future. And as the day drew near when he was to claim me, how fondly did I anticipate his appearance; and the day has come and passed, and he is not here. My father tells me he is wedded to one who is rich and beautiful, and they dwell in another land. Heaven is my judge that not wealth, nor want, nor aught could have changed me. I have never forgotten him, I never can. I would even now be true to him, despite his faithfulness, but for the promise which he made me give to wed another in the event of not claiming one.”

“Holy Mother, support me! I had thought I had suffered all that could be endured; I thought I had borne all the sorrow human nature may know; but this is a grief which nothing equals, a misery which tints everything with its dismal hue, and I have nought left but to pray that the hour may

soon arrive that shall see me change these bridal garments for the habiliments of death. There will be none to weep my loss, none to miss my presence; my own griefs and cares will cease, the blight which is now crushing my spirit with its bitter agony will be no more, and I shall be at rest, to wake no more in this weary world of woe. God help me! for I am broken-hearted."

It was terrible to see the amount of mental agony she endured; To see the utter prostration of spirit in the flood of bitter tears she shed. To hear the misery expressed in the low complaining voice. Her life, in sooth, had been a sad one; immured all her life in her father's castle, or, while absent from England, in a convent whose rules were of the strictest nature, and rigidly enforced, she had little to do but think of her first, dearest, only love; To dwell upon his form, upon the kindly attributes of his nature, to invest them with a romantic charm, until she had raised an idol in her heart which nought could overthrow or displace, and the hope always cheering her lone situation that she would be united to him by the laws of marriage as she was by the tenderest ties of sympathy – a hope which she hugged to the last, until all hope was driven out by the horrid reality of Allan's absence at the appointed time for his appearance, and her approaching marriage with Sir Tristram.

These last events had come upon her with a blow which seemed almost to have stunned her – to have deadened her faculties. She beheld herself a victim to her father's cupidity, without an idea crossing her mind of refusing to consent to his wishes, and each day, since she had learned the fate to which she had been consigned, it was like a terrible vision before her, which absorbed all power of action; she felt that it must happen – that it would kill her, and that there was no help near – None – None.

For two hours she sat there in her bridal robes, nor knew whether she had sat minutes, hours, or even days. She sunk into a reverie, quite carrying her far from present things. It usually occurs, in the midst of some frightful grief, that the memory refers to a time when sorrow and care were things unknown to us. Christabel's led her to a time when she and Allan first discovered they were lovers, that the affection was of a different order, of another nature, to that possessed by brother and sister.

It was a time when their innocent gaieties began to be tempered by a degree of thoughtfulness; When Allan, he knew not why, began to find more pleasure in gazing on Christabel's eyes than on Marian's, and when Christabel thought his the most beautiful in the world. When they began to find that their playful games merged into a quiet walking in the dark shadows of the green trees, each with their arm round the other's waist, discoursing upon the sweet flowers that grew in their path, and the streams of golden sunshine pouring through the openings of the trees, and then pursuing their ways in silence, their young hearts too full to utter

a word, but their thoughts investing each with charms which their fond wishes created, and looking in each other's eyes with an earnest, intense gaze of affection.

Even did she pursue the train of these events until she arrived at the time when Allan, yet quite a boy and she a slim, graceful, beautiful child, just in advance of her eleventh year, were walking, one very beautiful summer's evening among the intricacies of thickly clustered trees, the warm air undisturbed by a breath of wind, the treetops tinged with golden hues from the last rays of the descending sun, the birds singing their cheerful songs ere they retired to rest, and every visible thing bespoke calmness, and beauty, and happiness. They had walked some time, and the influence of the beauty around them was on them.

They had talked until they had found their eyes to speak the sweetest language, and then they consigned their tongues to silence; their footsteps grew slower and slower, until at last they stopped, and Allan went down on his knees to tell her he loved nothing in the world like her, not even his sister – that she was mixed up with his all thoughts, his prayers and his dreams and he would rather die and be forgotten by all than be separated from her, and that he would love her forever and ever; and she stooped over him, he felt her warm breath upon his forehead, and she kissed it kindly and fondly, and told him that he was to her even as he had said she was to him, and she promised to love him forever too, and never forget him or love another like him; and she kept her word!

How had he kept his? Ere she had time to answer to herself the question, there was a loud knock at her chamber door which awoke her from her reverie. She made no response to the appeal. The door was opened, and the wrinkled visage of Sir Tristram presented itself to her; she shuddered as she beheld it, and recoiled in her chair as if some fiend had appeared before her.

"My dear Lady Christabel," he mumbled, with a grin intended to be amiable, but only reached an idiotic contortion, "The time for our departure has arrived; pray allow me to hand you below, where the retinue awaits to escort us to Linton, there to become a happy wedded pair."

"I – I cannot go – I beseech you leave me."

"Nay, my dear little love, the cavalcade waits; you are dressed, and I am ready; we will depart at once, come, give me thy sweet little hand."

"Sir Tristram – Hear me, I pray you hear me! If you have a spark of pity, release me from this dreadful wedding."

“Dreadful wedding – release you?” echoed Sir Tristram. “I do not understand you, lady!”

“Spare me the agony of a recital, but consent to forego your claim to my hand; save me from that horrible fate, and I will bless you – pray for you.”

“You speak in riddles, my pretty dove. I will spare you the recital, my love; you seem agitated. You can tell me after we are married, plenty of time for that; but now we have none to lose. Let us away.”

“Hear me, I entreat you! I love another – have from childhood; shall continue to love him till I cease to exist. A marriage with you or any other, will break my heart, make me utterly, hopelessly wretched while I live. If you have a grain of mercy, if you have one spark of humanity, spare me, release me, and on my knees I will pray for you night and day.”

“You will soon forget him when you are wedded to me, my sweet love.”

“Never, never; his form is engraven on my heart, ineffaceably. I cannot love another, and to be wedded to another will make me miserable forever. Save me – you have it in your power; you are not so hard-hearted, so iron-souled, as to plunge me into an unceasing agony of mind. You will release me, I see – I am nothing to you, can be nothing; I am unsuited to you in age, in mind, in everything. It will be easy to forget me, and you will have my blessings unceasingly!”

“Poor child! You are agitated. Calm your spirits, you will be better anon; after the ceremony is over, you will recover wonderfully. You have flurried yourself in dressing. Come, my love, they wait for us below.”

“But you will spare me, Sir Tristram – you cannot be so heartless as to force me to a marriage for which I have a horror surpassing description.”

“Nay, I force no more than the fulfillment of a promise. Your father consented to this match – you consented – and I cannot now alter my arrangements.”

“Then you will not release me?”

“Not by any means. Oh no; you are mine in promise, and must be in reality.”

“Then all is over. God have mercy upon me!”

“Amen! He will, I have no doubt. Your hand, sweet dame. Ah! that is well. This way.”

So, mumbling and muttering, Sir Tristram tottered out of the chamber, leading the Lady Christabel to her doom.

In Linton Abbey, preparations were made upon a splendid scale for the wedding. There was to be a grand high mass, and the vestments of the

priests who were to serve were of the richest order. The chapel was decorated with handsome draperies; the altar was beautifully dressed — The immense golden crucifix, candlesticks, tabernacle, chalice, etc., being of the purest metal, and the finest workmanship.

The time drew nigh for the arrival of the bride and bridegroom; the monks were assembled in the chapel with the Bishop of Hereford, who was to say Mass and wed the couple. They were quietly awaiting the coming of the procession, when suddenly the heavy footsteps of a man advancing up the aisle drew their attention. The comer was habited in a long grey frock, like a friar's gown; upon his arm he bore a small harp. Without turning to the right or left, or bending his head, he proceeded to the spot where stood the bishop.

"You are the Bishop of Hereford; you are to sing the mass, and are to unite those who are coming hither to be wed," said he.

"Well, fellow, and what if thou art right in thy conjecture?" answered the bishop.

"Why this – I am esteemed the best harper the broad lands of merry England can furnish, and, for that matter, France either; I have played at all the grand masses, fêtes, and celebrations throughout the land. In passing this way I heard of this wedding, and have come to offer my services," replied the stranger.

"If thou speakest truth, thou'rt right welcome," said the bishop.

"And I do speak truth," replied the harper.

"I love to hear the harp played well upon," said the bishop; "It is a goodly instrument, and suiteth the voice marvellously well. It accords with mine to a degree which is surprising. Play me a stave, harper."

"Were I a strolling thrummer such as thou hast been accustomed to hear, then would I do as thou desirest me," replied the harper: "But, reverend father, I am the first in my profession, and play only at my proper hour."

"Thou'rt insolent, fellow. I tell thee I'll have a stave now," cried the bishop, angrily.

"So thou shalt, reverend father, if thou wilt play thyself," replied the harper, coolly; "But I draw no string until the bride and bridegroom come, and then I can draw one that shall astonish thee."

"Thou vauntest too much to be clever; but we shall soon hear thy abilities, for here comes the procession," exclaimed the bishop.

Putting himself at the head of the monks, he advanced to meet them, and then led the way up, chaunting a prayer, the monks in full chorus assisting him. When they had reached the altar, the Lady Christabel, who was in a half fainting condition, clasped her hands convulsively together, turned to her father, and said in a voice of smothered agony –

"Father, have pity. Do not sacrifice me, I implore thee, for mercy sake!"

He turned his back relentlessly. She then appealed to Sir Tristram — "Have mercy, if your heart is not stone. It is not too late – you can yet save me – do so, or you will drive me to despair, and make me do what I shudder to think upon."

"We will talk of this anon," replied the old groom. And nodding to the bishop, his particular friend, said, "Proceed."

"The bishop was about to do so, when a full clear voice cried —

"**Hold!**"

Everybody turned their eyes to see who had uttered this word, and beheld the harper standing close by the Lady Christabel's side.

"Presumptuous wretch!" cried the bishop in a rage. "How durst thou speak? How durst thou lift up thy voice to interrupt a sacred ceremony?"

"Simply because I think this an unfitting match, and I forbid its proceeding."

"Thou?" cried the bishop.

"***Thou?***" roared the Baron, with a kind of laugh, which was singularly expressive of scorn and rage; "*Thou* – ha! ha! Fool, begone!" and he laid hold of the harper's neck to thrust him aside; but he had scarce laid a finger upon him before he was himself hurled to the ground with great violence. Several retainers who formed the procession rushed forward to seize the harper.

But, placing a foot upon the steps of the altar, he cried, in a fierce voice – "Stand back, hounds! By the Holy Mother, the first who advances with the intent of laying a finger upon me, shall pour out his blood like water before yon holy image. Shame on ye! Would you stand and see a tender maiden sacrificed to such a withered, wrinkled wretch as this? Cheer up, maiden! To be a bride thou camest hither, and away thou shalt depart a bride. But thy bridegroom shall be of thine own choosing, as thou shalt shortly see."

Thereupon he drew a horn from beneath his belt, and blew three loud blasts, making the chapel ring with its notes; and while it yet echoed them, there was a sudden rush of feet, and in an instant the chapel was filled with men, habited in Lincoln green, each armed with a bow and arrow. To surround and disarm the retainers was a work of ease, and the

harper doffed his gown, and a shout arose from the men in green, which made the building shake, of

Robin Hood! And the Merrie Men of the Green Wood.

The foremost of the throng was Allan Clare. To Robin he threw his bow and arrows, and, rushing forward to Christabel, caught her in his arms, crying–

“Christabel, thou’rt mine, mine! and none shall part us again.”

“And you are true, you are true! They told me falsely. I knew you could not desert me, dear, dear Allan,” she exclaimed hysterically, and with the exertion fainted.

“This is sacrilege,” roared the bishop, “Vile, impious sacrilege.”

“Nay, reverend father, it is justice; it is our idea of justice. We who live in the green wood have a simple and plain idea of it, and whenever we can, we carry it out. We have profaned this chapel by no act of violence, and therefore have committed no act of sacrilege. And although I conceive you to have acted with a wrong, unbecoming thy sacred character, yet I will forgive it on the condition you at once unite in the holy bonds of matrimony this youth and maiden!”

“Forgive me!” ejaculated the bishop, in unaffected astonishment. “Insolent slave, hast thou no respect for the holy church?”

“Most sincere and most profound. But, beshrew me if that respect is extended to its servants. Good master bishop, my purpose here is not to bandy words with you, concerning the deference due to you as minister of the Holy Word, but to do an act of justice. Mark me; this youth and maiden have loved each other from childhood upwards. They have each made personal sacrifices, endured much and continued anguish, in the hope that they would be ultimately united, a desire to which the maiden’s father consented upon the youth’s fulfilling certain conditions, which he did –”

“Tis false!” shouted the Baron, foaming with rage, and striving to extricate himself from the hands of two of the merrie men, who had him under their especial care; “He came not on the day specified to claim her!”

“Peace, thou hoary-headed, blood-thirsty wretch! Darest thou, beneath this sacred roof, allude to the cause of his absence – thou, who sent thy myrmidons to slay him? You first forfeited your word – broke the conditions by thy foul intentions. If he, from the effects of thy villainy, did not fulfill all the conditions, the blame rests with thee. And if there is a sufferer, thou shalt be he.”

“Now, good bishop, this youth’s state is equal to the maiden’s, in birth, in wealth, and in years. As children they were betrothed, their parents consenting at that time to the union; and now I call upon you, my Lord Bishop of Hereford, to fulfill an act of justice and wed them.”

“Does the lady’s father consent?” asked the bishop.

“**No!**” roared the Baron. “**Never!**”

“Then I will not wed her to any other than Sir Tristram,” observed the bishop, decisively, “If he is still willing to proceed with the match.”

“Most willingly – I am very desirous; I am quite ready,” ejaculated Sir Tristram, whiningly.

“But the maiden is not, neither is the youth, and they are the principal parties concerned; Neither am I, who at present have the greatest power here,” said Robin Hood.

“So, good bishop, by your leave, the wedding shall be between those whom God and nature made fitting for each other, and not as those who have only a selfish will to guide them would have. Come, be speedy, for there is two couple more who purpose being wedded at the same time.”

“I will not wed them,” cried the bishop, hotly.

“And why not?” asked Robin, advancing to him with a look beneath which he quailed.

“A – why – a – because they have not been asked in the church, as is the law.”

“That is a point easily remedied,” returned Robin; “Here, Little John, just borrow the vestments of yon tall priest, and call out the names of those to be wed.”

“Ay, truly,” returned Little John, with a quiet laugh. “Marry, among all the crafts to which I have turned my hand, priest-craft has not been one of them, and I expect I shall make a strange job at it; but a man cannot expect to be expert at what he never practised.”

By the time he had finished his speech he had obeyed the command of Robin Hood; and when he stood by the side of the bishop, who was fuming and chafing, holding up his hands and threatening excommunication to one and all, the merrie men set up a tremendous shout of laughter; but Robin commanded silence; and Little John, being instructed what to say,

Asked them seven times in the Church,
Lest three times should not be enough.

“Now your scruples upon that point are satisfied, good my Lord Bishop, you cannot refuse to proceed with the ceremony.”

“I can and will, impious ruffian. Listen and tremble. On thee and those with thee, for desecrating this sacred edifice with thy sacrilegious acts, I impose a curse –”

“Hold!” cried Robin, in a loud stern voice. “Peace! it is thou who art impious, who, taking advantage of thy sacred office, would, for an infamous mercenary consideration, side with an act of injustice, and curse those who fulfill the duties which our Lord has prescribed. Shame on ye for a false servant: thou art not infallible, though thou deemest thyself such. And wert thou to rain out curses in torrents, the Holy Mother would but hurl upon thine own head; thou art unworthy to officiate, and shall not.’

“Much and Arthur O’Bland, divest him of his robes, his mitre, and his crosier; there is one here who is ordained, and a true servant of the Holy Church. He will fulfill the duties which the Bishop of Hereford refuses.”

The Bishop resisted, but in vain; he was powerless in the hands of Much and Arthur O’Bland, and the venerable pilgrim from the Holy Land, who shrieved Will Scarlet while he lay in the dungeon, stepped forth, was clothed, and took the Bishop’s place.

The monks, who had looked on in wonder and fear at the whole of the proceedings, seeing that Robin Hood was determined upon carrying his point, assisted the old pilgrim in the ceremonies, and when everything was completed, the old man asked –

“Who gives this maid?”

“Will you?” said Robin Hood to the Baron Fitz Alwine.

“No, never!” returned he, in a voice hoarse with passion.

“**Father!**” said Christabel.

“Never, minion! Hear me curse –”

“Silence him!” interrupted Robin. He was instantly obeyed. And then he resumed. “Since he who should give her, who breaks a sacred oath in withholding his consent, persists in refusing, then do I, and ye around me, contrar to this match, hear me swear, in this holy place, may God’s mercy be ever denied me, here and hereafter, if any one takes, or attempts to take her from Allan Clare, her lawful husband, then shall he pay dearly, bitterly for her! Proceed.”

The ceremony proceeded, and Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel were wedded – united to each other – never more to part until they ceased to exist.

The ceremony had barely concluded, when the arrival of a second party caused a stir in the body of the church. All eyes were turned in the direction to see old Sir Guy Gamwell and his wife, supported by his two eldest sons, enter. Behind them Barbara and Winifred Gamwell, leaning

upon the arms of two of their brothers. These were followed by Marian, Will Scarlet, and Maude, and the rear was the remaining two sons of Sir Guy.

When they had reached the altar, Robin Hood took Marian by the hand, and Will Scarlet, Maude, and when they had placed themselves in front of the altar, those around could see that marriage was intended. Allan stood at hand to give his sister away, and Hal of the Keep was there to give Maude away, and Winifred and Barbara were the bridesmaids. As Will Scarlet passed Robin, he whispered –

"At last, Robin! "At last, ha, ha, ha! I thought they had forgotten to come – how I looked out for them. Do you know my side is quite sore, my heart has beat so much. Doesn't Maude look beautiful? Bless her little heart! Oh, Robin, I am so happy!"

Robin squeezed his hand warmly, and they took their respective places. The words of the marriage ceremony were repeated by the old man in a clear and solemn tone, that brought tears into the eyes of many there.

Although the chapel was thronged, yet there was a silence as of death, interrupted only by the voice of the old man, the occasional low response, or faint sob from the overwrought feelings of some of the fair maidens there. And when the ceremony was completed, and they were fast united, Marian sunk into Robin Hood's arms, and Will embraced Maude, saying:

"Maude, dear Maude! you are my wife – mine, mine, only mine! I thought it was too good ever to happen; but it has, it has! God bless us both, Maude! may we be as happy always as I am now!"

Maude could not reply; she tried to smile and look in his eyes to echo the happy gaze which he bent on her, but her eyes were so filled with tears, she was blinded, and Will whispering she was a foolish, weak-hearted little thing, wept like a child.

The merrie men, when they saw their leader wedded, raised a succession of shouts which made the walls shake again, and then they prepared to separate. The Baron Fitz Alwine and Sir Tristram were handed out of the chapel, and were politely requested to walk home. Their horses being detained, they took hold of arms, and toddled away in 'such a state of mind,' that we cannot describe it. Sir Tristram saying as they quitted the door –

"You will restore to me my million merks placed in your keeping by me, you know, Fitz Alwine?"

"I don't see that," replied Fitz Alwine; it was not my fault that you did not have my daughter – I could not help myself."

The reply was unheard; but judging from the horrified aspect of Sir Tristram's countenance, it was neither an amiable nor an amicable one.

The retainers were also sent to Nottingham on foot, deprived of their arms and horses; but to do them justice, they intimated to the merrie men that they would make no resistance nor seek a retaliation, being satisfied that what had been done was no more than ought to be done, and it was a pleasant sight to see them shake hands and cheer each other as they parted.

The wedding party, escorted by the merrie men, all habited in Lincoln green, and their leader, Robin Hood, in bright scarlet, took their way through the leafy wood, winding among the huge trees, which were here and there decorated with garlands; and ever and anon a deer would start forth dressed in flowers, or a young fawn glide swiftly by with a necklace of wild plants daintily arranged.

Soon they reached a wide glade, and then they saw that preparations had been made for a festival. Vast trunks of the trees everywhere around were decorated with garlands of the most fanciful description; poles, clothed with the choicest-hued flowers, were erected for a merry dance; targets and rings for quarter staff play, or quoits, were marked out.

In fact, everything which could add to the festivity or happiness was there. In one place, there were some busily engaged in cooking venison. In others, broaching ale and wine. A right merrie repast made they, and when that was o'er, they betook themselves to all sorts of amusements and sports. There were many maidens from Nottingham who had never been in the green wood before, but Robin Hood having strictly commanded, and rigidly enforced, the respect for females, the timidity and half fear which they felt of the wild outlaws, as they were deemed, had worn off, and they mixed in the dance and games with all the zest imaginable.

Will Scarlet was all that day mad with delight, and Maude mixed in the enjoyment with all the glee she would have done years agone. Her heart was filled with the almost painful sense of entire happiness, and, in her extreme joy, she was almost hysterical. It was yet early in the morn when the festivities in the green wood were getting into full swing.

In a paroxysm of her happy laughter, our friend Friar Tuck encountered her, her waist encircled most fondly by the arm of her delighted husband, Will Scarlet, and her delicate arm clinging affectionately round his neck. It was a pleasing and a pretty sight, and he could not quarrel with either for thus displaying their love.

Yet, out of the tomb of buried circumstances, the spirit of his first fondness – nay, love for her, rose up and spread over his brain and soul a pall, thin and web-like, but cold and sickening, and heart and being seemed filled with a deep and regretful sorrow that the happy lot of Will was not his own. His first impulse was to turn aside and wander alone in another direction, but Will having perceived him, the thing was not to be

accomplished. With a lusty shout, our friend of the sanguine locks, but of the true and open heart, cried out to him —

“What, Tuck! Jovial Giles! Good-hearted, jolly old father Tuck! Seest thou not me and my prize, my treasure, my world’s wealth, my soul’s hope – mine – mine own! – What, art thou blinded at the sight, that thou dost avert thy head, as though thou didst encounter that only that thou hadst met day by day for years, and caredst not an’ thou didst never meet again. Hast thou nought say to me and mine – ha, ha! – mine, Giles – on this day of days, this bursting into blossom of my life?”

“Well, I have a word to say,” exclaimed Tuck, with a resolute effort to speak clearly, but his voice was husky, and it was with some difficulty that he quite cleared his throat.

“Aha!” cried Will, “You have caught a cold through sleeping in some chamber; your voice is as hoarse as the Baron Fitz Alwine’s an hour agone.”

“Nay, it is no ailing of the system that makes my voice a little thicken, cried Tuck; “It was a little impish sprite, one of the elfs of memory, that tugged at my heart-strings and reminded me that, in days long gone, I aspired – no, perhaps it is wrong to say so – but, without any hopes or reflections upon the subject, I, some years since, believed that little witch clinging to you a pearl of great price, a jewel of countless value, that it would have given me the most unquestionable satisfaction to have called my own.”

“What! you, Tuck, in love with my Maude!”

“Well, perhaps –”

“Perhaps – pooh! – ah! you knew her before Robin.”

“I did – long before him.”

“To be sure! Then why do you say perhaps? Why, of course you loved her. How could you be flesh and blood and not love her? Did not Robin Hood love her? And did not I, the first moment my eyes fell upon her – and now – oh Maude!”

He imprinted a fervent kiss upon her lips, which had many times that morning received a warm impression of his own. When he had a little recovered this delicious little episode, he turned his glittering eyes upon the Friar, and it struck him that his features by no means displayed a responsive satisfaction to that which his own bore. His eyes changed their expression, and opened to their full extent, and his face for the moment grew grave.

“Why, Tuck, you have not been a sufferer by my happiness?” he asked quietly and eagerly. “You have not borne the pangs of hopeless, unrequited love? You have not in secret mourned for the loss of one who,

in your heart of hearts, you prayed might be yours? Have you wasted and pined–?"

He paused. That last word upset the whole of the sympathy which really breathed through his words.

Friar Tuck wasted and pined! He was full *fifteen stone* [*~210 pounds*], with a face like a rising harvest moon. The serious which each bore changed with the swiftness of an electrical movement, the faces lit up, and all three burst into a hearty laugh. It was repeated again and again, until their cheeks were literally bedowed with tears, created by their convulsive laughter. When somewhat recovered, Friar Tuck stretched both his hands out heartily, and took one of each of Maude's and Will's.

He pressed them earnestly, and said in a full-toned voice – "By our Lady's grace! I wish ye both the most entire happiness it is possible for human lot to be endowed with. By the Mass! Sweet Maude, you pierced my heart through and through with shafts from your enchanting eyes, and many, aye, many many times made me feel that I had too much of the old leaven in me to well assort with the gown and shaven crown, but soon I found the coveted prize was not for me. There were others brighter, younger, comelier than I to woo and win. So I e'en patched up the hollows and the holes which were in my heart, and looked out into the world for some other object to fill my eyes and head with, and I found it."

"You found it!" cried Maude and Will, in one voice.

"I found it, repeated Tuck, with a chuckle.

"A little dark-eyed maiden," suggested Maude, "One who appreciated your worth more readily, good Giles, than one so thoughtless as I."

The Friar laughed a gleeful chuckling laugh. "A bright-eyed dame, truly," he cried. "A glittering, diamond-like eye, and lips that vie with the brightest ruby, friend Will. But whether she appreciated my worth, sweet Maude – ha! ha! That is another matter truly – I believe that she is as fond of others as I, quite as liberal in her favours, and returns kiss for kiss most impartially."

"And you love her?" asked Will, with a look of unmistakable incredulity.

"Well, I openly confess I do, although she does bestow her favours without discrimination."

"She is no true maiden," gently observed Maude, looking upon the grass.

"Out upon her!" cried Will, with sudden vehemence, "Out upon her! Why, Tuck, you must be mad. Love a maiden that loves anybody and everybody! Why, sooner than I would –"

"Tush, tush, no hasty avowal, friend Will. Be careful what thou sayest."

“Wherefore?”

“Why? thou must not speak dispraisingly of one thou hast kissed often.”

“Kissed?” echoed Will and Maude, in a breath, electrified.

“Aye, kissed often,” shouted Tuck, in strange glee. Thou canst not deny it.”

“**Will!**” cried Maude.

“**Maude!**” exclaimed Will, astounded, and looking his astonishment most unequivocally. “What, I? – ha! ha! What do you mean Tuck? You are dreaming. I kiss your ladye love?”

“Aye, often, and I can prove it.”

Maude half screamed.

“Prove it then, this instant,” cried Will, with vehemence. “Prove it! This is not a joke, Tuck; no, no, this is too serious. Where is the maiden? Shew her to me, confront me with her, bring me face to face with her, and let me see if she will shamelessly persist in an assertion so untrue.”

“So untrue!” chuckled Tuck, the water running down his cheeks. “It is thou who dost persist in the untruth. Bring her face to face with thee, aye, that will I; Aye, and lip to lip too.”

“**No, no, no, no!**” cried Maude, with sudden energy, and laid hold of Will’s arm, as if to prevent any such appropriation of property in which she had such a vested right.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Tuck. “My life on’t, he kisses the maiden when he sees her.”

“No,” said Will, doubtfully.

“No, indeed, I am sure he will not,” cried Maude, positively.

“Where is she? let me see her,” demanded Will.

“Nay, never heed her, dear Will,” exclaimed Maude, with a small twinge of jealousy, “Thou canst not wish to meet her, and I fear me, though beloved by our friend Tuck, she can be no meet companion for your – your wife, Will.”

She uttered the last words very gently. The word ‘wife’ seemed to make Will feel taller, and fill his heart with rapture. He gave her a comforting squeeze to his heart, he kissed her forehead, and said earnestly – “My own dear, dear little wife!”

Then turning to Tuck, he added “Say as thou wilt, Tuck, thou shalt not move me from the best of humour, although thou dost so unblushingly aver I have oft times kissed thy mistress, which thou knowst to be abominably wide of the truth.”

“Nay, for the honour of my word, I must confront thee with the damsel.”

“Nay, good Tuck, we do not wish to see her,” interrupted Maude.

“Nay, but thou shalt. Here she is Will. Behold her, gaze upon her, look her in the eyes, and then say, if thou darest, thou hast not kissed her ruby lips many a time and oft.”

As he concluded, he drew from beneath his gown a silver flagon. He disengaged the massive silver chain by which it was attached to his body, and held it up close before the eyes of Will Scarlet – so close as to make him retreat a step or two backwards. His chuckling, merry laugh was echoed by both Maude and Will, and the latter, seizing the flagon from the hands of the jolly Friar, cried mirthfully–

“I acknowledge my error, I confess my sins, good Friar Tuck. I have kissed these lips many a time and oft, right honestly do I confess it. But, oh! father, right reverend lover of so free and bright a damsel, never abused her favours, and she has never played me false; and now, in the presence of my own dearly beloved little wife, will I kiss the ripe ruby lips again, and she, my own fairy, will not quarrel with me for it.”

“Not unless thou dost too freely kiss the tempting lips; and shouldst thou, Will, thou knowest that thou wilt suffer accordingly.”

“Said I not that I would not abuse her favours, neither will I, but on her lips, dear Maude, will Í fervently pray happiness to us both while God grants us the sweet joy of walking on this earth together.”

“Amen! *Benedicité*! Amen!” cried Tuck, and added with much heartiness of manner – “Nay, I will press her lips to mine, while I give breath to that toast, and hug her, hug her, my boy, while her spirit flies through her lips to my heart.”

And he did drink the toast right heartily, draining the flagon in his enthusiasm; and then, pressing the hands of his friends with true sincerity, he wished them earnestly the happiest term possible on earth.

It would have mightily suited his feelings, and the fervour which he felt, to have sealed his good wishes upon the lips of the fair Maude, but there rose up many little remembrances to prevent his even offering such a token of his good will, and so with a jolly wave of the hand, he suffered them to pass on, and himself plunged with a better spirit into another part of the wood to mix with the many blythe spirits there assembled.

And truly he had not gone far before he was encountered by a band of merry youths and maidens. Before he even surmised their intention, they formed a circle round him, clasped firmly hold of hands, and whirled round him until the sight of their rapidly passing figures made him grow so giddy that he suddenly and plumply found a seat upon the green turf, amid the ringing laughter of the merry foresters and the lively maidens.

Thus seated he was not quietly suffered to remain, but lifted by the strong-armed to his feet. He was beset with questions. One handsome forester, mated with a pretty blue-eyed lass, his arm very tenderly bound round her waist, brought her prominently into notice by telling the friar that she wanted to confess, that she was dying to unburthen her soul to him.

Friar Tuck glanced at the sweet smiling face beaming upon him, wreathed with fair flowing hair, and very much approving of its contour, of the very, very charming eyes that, like stars in a clear, soft sky, glittered deliciously upon him, he at once acknowledged his readiness to receive her confession.

The young maid laughed, and shook her head, and vowed there was no truth in the assertion. But the nut-brown forester persisted in his story, and Friar Tuck affecting to believe him, said, with an unmistakeably wicked look twinkling in his eyes, “Nay, sweet one, be not afraid, I am ready to receive thy confession; remember, what thou hast to say will be said to me alone – it is not for the ears of the sinful – there is a copse hard by —” “No! no! no!”cried the laughing youths, with a shout of glee, “No! here on this spot; no, no, good father, no secret confessions in a copse; here she must confess before us all.”

“No,” cried the maiden, “How foolish! I have nothing to confess.”

“Aha!”cried her swain, “Mere timidity; you must confess.”

“What?” asked she, in affected ignorance.

“What!” he iterated, “Why, have not I been making a clean breast to thee, have I not been shrived by thee?”

“By me! No.”

“Ah, – shamelessly uttered, by the Mass! Have I not been confessing to thee that I love thee better than all the world, ever since I have known thee, which is full two hours agone!”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the merry group.

“And now it is only fair,” continued the forester, as soon as he could obtain a hearing, “that thou shouldst confess my love is returned to the full, heartily, truly, and completely. Is not this fair, good father. Is not this a true confession to be demanded?”

“Well,” exclaimed Tuck, with a shake of the head, “I admit that the confession may be demanded. But it rests with the maiden to say if thy ravishing charms hath had the same effect upon her which hers have had upon thee. Mark me, worthy youth, her eyes are blue and beautiful, her skin fair, her cheeks rosebuds, her features lovely and her lips – possibly paradise – I cannot, however, pass that judgment positively unless I were to taste them.”

He was interrupted by a shout of laughter, and the finger of the forester was raised warningly, and he cried lustily –

“Forbidden fruit, O friar! Forbidden fruit!”

Tuck bowed his head, and crossed his hands over his breast with affected humility.

“Granted, O son! granted – at least to me,” he said; and then added quickly, “That is, I am to presume so – however to my argument: this maiden hath charms of feature and beauty of form, making her certainly a little fairy-like mortal, not only to be admired, but to be loved. While thou, master forester, for face hath –”

“Hold thy hand, good father,” interrupted the forester, with a laugh, “I admit thy skill in painting the maiden, but I doubt the truth of thy limner-like abilities, when at work upon me.”

“Proceed, and spare him not,” cried the maiden, with a merry laugh.

“Spare him not – spare him not!” cried many voices.

“Well, thou hast a head,” proceeded the friar, “and so had the beast which bore Balaam.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the merry group.

“Thou hast in it eyes tolerable, when they look not two ways at once, a nose that thou canst easily find in the dark, and, in hot weather, could well support thy cap, if hung upon it, a mouth, which if closed small enough to salute a maiden, can yet gape wide enough to swallow her. Thy legs, too, – why a deer hath trim limbs, but thou –”

He was interrupted by shouts of laughter; and the forester vainly endeavoured to make himself heard.

“Therefore,” continued Tuck, as soon as he obtained a little silence, “I well may ask, though thou dost confess to her, why she should confess to thee? Now, in my vocation, I am specially ordained to receive confessions of all kinds; and if the maiden will trust herself with me alone –”

“No, no, thank you, father,” cried the forester, with a merry laugh, “She will away with me as thou seest.”

He caught her round the waist, and ran off with her, followed by the rest, shouting in the wildest delight, leaving Tuck alone. He quaffed a draught from his flagon, and then sought out another group of revellers.

The gaiety and joy went on without the slightest check or drawback. Robin introduced Much to Barbara, and told her to make much of him, and whispered something about him being the husband he had promised her but she laughed, shook her head, and would not hear him. Little John, who was not formed for merry tricks, came quite out on this day in his exhibition of sprightliness.

But he engrossed the company of Winifred Gamwell all to himself, which, when it was noticed, drew forth sundry important yet smirking nods and significant winks.

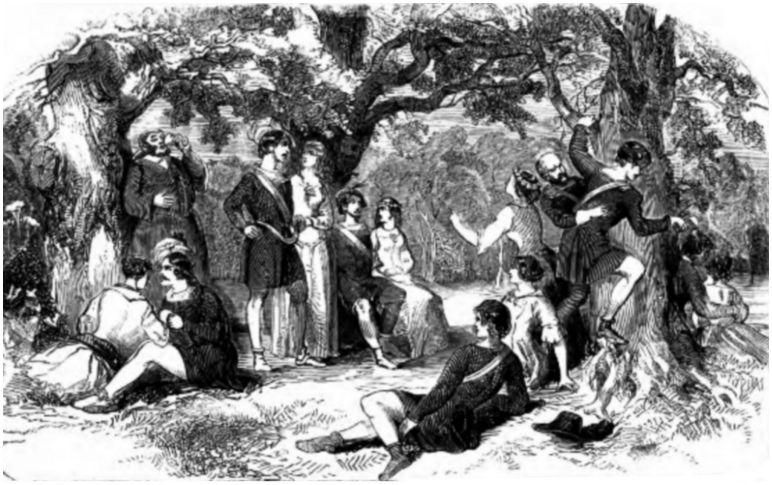
To Allan and Christabel this was a day of joy – the more so as they had waded to it through years of disappointment and wearying hope deferred. But the debility produced by her mental agony prevented her joining the sports as the rest did, but she sat like a fairy queen presiding at a great festivity of her people among the trees and flowers.

“And is this the way you live in the green wood, dear Robin?” asked Marian.

“Even thus as you see,” returned he.

“Then will I take up my abode with you here, living as you live, until the unjust decree of the law is removed from you. And be the future good or evil – such as it now, or surrounded with toil and privation – I shall never seek to change, or repine at my situation, so that thou’rt with me; and here we will live together, while life is ours, in joy and love, in calm content and happiness, until death shall separate us.”

“Bless thee, my sweet love, my dear wife!” said Robin, imprinting a passionate kiss upon her forehead.



Festivities in Sherwood Forest

It was a happy day, that wedding day of Robin Hood.

End of Book Two

Strawberry Mansion, Philadelphia