

Robin's Story from the Ballads

INTRODUCTION

"You moan from morning till night," said Robin to his stepfather. "If a job is worth doing, it needs to be perfect," said the old man. "I have never seen a 'perfect' field, shouted Robin, this field is steep and strewn with boulders." "Mr Ibbotson likes straight furrows," repeated his stepfather, "Mr Ibbotson is a farmer himself, and he knows a plough has to go round boulders. Now give me a hand and stop grumbling." "Only when you stop shouting," said his stepfather. "Straight furrows are impossible here unless you can show me how to do the impossible," said Robin with a wry smile. "That will not happen," said his stepfather. "I know that," interrupted Robin, "you are young, and I am old," continued his stepfather. "You forgot to say lazy as well, commented Robin." "I'm here, aren't I?" "Yes, with your hands in your pockets, grumbling the entire time. A dumpling on a dinner plate does more for me than you." Ouch, you hit me," said Robin. "You will get more than that if you keep being cheeky." With that, Robin walked up to him, his fists in the air. Sir Thomas stepped back and tripped on a rock. He fell backwards and whacked his head on a boulder never to move again. Robin stood stock still; petrified. His stepfather was dead, Robin unhitched the horse and lifted the aged knight on its back. I need to tell mum; his family will be after my blood."

ROBIN FLEES TO KIRKLEES PRIORY

"Now you are in trouble," said his mother. "You will get the blame because nobody else was there. Go to your tree-house in Bower Wood and hide there while I tell Sir Wadsley. I will bring food later and decide what to do." "I could go to Aunt Margaret at Kirklees Priory," said Robin. "When the hue and cry ends, maybe my sister in York will have you," said his mum. "But before you go, I will get Aldwyn to tell Margaret to expect you. He has to go to Wakefield, anyway." The next morning Robin ran over the rugged hills and wooded dales of West Yorkshire. Wharnccliffe deer park, Green Moor, Vicar and Banks Woods to Cannon Hall were soon behind him. Continuing through Deffer and Whitley Woods, he arrived at Kirklees Priory while the sun was still high in the sky.

"What have you gone and done, young Robin?" Said Margaret, the prioress. "I have heard about it. You can sleep in the hayloft, and then tomorrow you can help John with the milking. Do not tell anyone your name and keep away from the nuns. They are notorious for their tittle-tattle. Remember, you are on the run, do not forget."

Robin had the best night's sleep ever in the deep hay. His palliasse at home was

hard by comparison. He woke up bright and refreshed in the morning. Bored, he went exploring. As the sun rose, cows meandered over to a gate in a hedgerow. A figure walked along the path and sat on a nearby tree stump. Robin guessed they were similar ages. Not one for holding back, Robin walked over to him. "What is your business here," the man asked? "I'm seeking a place to settle," said Robin. "Do you live here?" "I have lived here my entire life, said the man. My mother was a kitchen maid to a Scottish Earl. She got pregnant by him, so she came back here to her parents. Mr Naylor married mum and adopted me. I go back to Scotland for the Highland Games. I see my birth father at the same time. He is a good man." "What is your sport," asked Robin? "Wrestling mainly, and I toss the caber." "I bet I can beat you at wrestling," said Robin, "let's see who the best man is." "You have no chance," said John, "I'm taller than you." "Makes no difference," Robin replied. "The way I fight, speed is best. You know what they say; "the bigger they are, the harder they fall."

"Do your worst then," said Little John, towering over Robin. Quick as lightning, Robin bent down and head-butted John in the stomach. His breath knocked out of him; Little John doubled up. With Little John spread-eagled on his back, Robin stood up, and Little John hit the ground at Robin's heels. "That wasn't fair," said John, "I wasn't ready." "Well, be ready now, because the Kirklees Games have just begun!" With that, Robin grabbed Little John's left arm and turned his back on him. Holding John's arm tight, Robin quickly bent down low, and Little John flew straight over Robin's head. He landed in a heap on the ground. Getting slowly up, Little John rubbed his elbow and slapped Robin on the back, "Robin," he said, "if we fought you all day, I would never win. You are too quick for me."

The next day Little John brought his bow, and they shot together. Then he brought his sword and one of his father's swords for Robin. They practised until the sun went down. Come summer, while Little John trained for the Highland Games, he asked, "do you want to come with me, Robin? Mother milks the cows when I am away, so if you want you can come. Robin jumped at the chance. As they walked along Earls Way to York, they had to fight their way past a motley crew of sturdy robbing beggars. The unemployed, the unemployable, professional poachers, murderers, and the dispossessed. All were desperate men. After the games, Little John went back to Kirklees, and Robin went to York where his aunt lived. Her husband was a miller called Johannes Hood.

ROBIN GOES TO THE HOOD FAMILY IN YORK

"I must be near York by now," thought Robin to himself. "Yes, I can see the city wall. I wonder if my aunt will recognise me, I was only about five years old when she saw me last. I do not have a clue where they live. Johannus is a baker, so I assume Baker Street is where all the baker's shops are. Anyway, I need to get into the town first, and then I can ask. Excuse me, please, where is Baker Street? Ah, I see it. Hello, does anyone know where Mr Hood the baker lives?" "Over there, the third shop along" came back the reply. If you have any wheat, he does a grand job grinding it into flour and then baking it." "Thank you," responded Robin, I'm only visiting."

"So, young Robin, we heard what you did to your stepfather in Loxley. You ran away, and now you want to live with us." "I had no choice. His sons are Knights of the Garter, and they will be after my blood. Mum said it would be all right to come to you, she told me it was all arranged." "No doubt you will be a nuisance here in York as well." "No aunt, it was an accident. He fell over and banged his head on a rock." "Well, you can live here for now, but if you think we will feed you for free, you need to think again. There are no free meals here," said his aunt. "I always kept the three of us in venison with the deer from Loxley Chase. Their numbers made it easy. I suppose I was fortunate because Rad de Wadsley and I were best friends. His father was the lord of the manor, and I think he must have turned a blind eye. So, if I do the same for you, will that be alright? Galtres Forest is just through the city gate." "You cannot do that here. People would see you, and the punishment for poaching is horrendous. You do not want that. Here comes Johannus now, let us hear what he has to say." "So you are the culprit. You can sleep in Robert's bed tonight. He buys wine in France and sells it here in the local markets. Tomorrow you can start looking for work."

ROBIN BECOMES A FORESTER

The days passed with Robin doing a few odd jobs here and there until one evening Adam (Much the miller's son) came home from working for Gisborne. He had news. "While mucking out the stables, someone was complaining about the woods being full of robbers. It turns out he owns a lot of land around here. The problem is so severe he has to take armed men with him for fear of being attacked and robbed. He is furious and wants to put foresters in the woods. They need bringing before the courts, or at the very least, cleared off his land. The work is unpaid, but if we take the job, there is a rent-free cottage provided. We can live off the land and any money we recover, we can keep, that way we get paid by results. We will be agents of the court having authority to seize stolen goods. On the spot, fines are more effective than anything the courts can do weeks or months later. What do you think, Robin? Do you fancy a forester's job?" "You realise your life will be at risk, don't you, interrupted Johannus?" "I like it," said Robin, "but it would need more men. Those robbers and cut-throats go round in gangs." If we all work together, we can look out for one another," said Much. "I am sure Little John would like to join with us," said Robin, "he got bored at Kirklees, nothing ever happened." "I hate working for Gisborne," said Much. "Never mind the danger, and we can easily get more men if we share the money we recover from the robbinhods." "Do you know how much land he owns," asked Robin? One of my mates told me that apart from the King, he is the largest landowner in all England." "Then if we are to keep peace on his demesne, we shall need many more men, said Robin."

From being a fugitive, Robin now lives in a forester's cottage. Geoffrey Chaucer described the yeomen of the forest as armed with bow, sword, dagger, and buckler (small round shield). Local noblemen maintained foresters for various tasks, including policing, collecting pavage tax, and administrative duties. Their responsibilities included patrolling the woodlands and capturing or dispersing criminals. They lived in a forester's lodge, often fortified, wore Lincoln Green and

were equal to a sheriff or a law enforcer acting as barristers or mediators. In wartime, they spied on enemy troop movements as they manoeuvred into their battle positions. While the lord of the land made the arrangements, Robin amused himself by tormenting the Sheriff of Nottingham, among others.

ROBIN ROBS THE SHERIFF

Come, all you brave gallants in the glade within; listen awhile, of Robin Hood, that archer good. A song I intend to sing. Upon a time it chanced, bold Robin in the forest saw a jolly butcher with a bonny fine mare, his meat to the market bound. "Good morrow, good fellow," said jolly Robin, "what is your trade and where do you dwell, I like thy company well." The butcher answered jolly Robin: "no matter where I dwell; a butcher I am, and to Nottingham I go, my meat to sell."

"What price is your meat?" Asked jolly Robin. "Tell it to me, and the price of your mare, for a butcher I would love to be." "The price of my meat," the butcher replied, "with my bonny mare they are not dear, four marks thou must give unto me." "Four marks I will give thee, four marks shall be your fee; your money come, and count, let me mount. As a butcher, I'm glad to be."

Now, Robin is to Nottingham gone, his butcher's trade to begin. With good intent, he sought the sheriff, a stall for his meat to have. When other butchers sold their meat, Robin realised he knew not how, for a butcher, he was but young. He sold more meat for one penny than others could sell for three. He sold his meat so fast, no butcher could thrive, he sold more meat for one penny than others did for five. This made the butchers of Nottingham study as they stood, saying he was some prodigal who had sold his father's land. They stepped to jolly Robin. Acquainted with him, they wanted to be; "Come, brother, we are all one trade, come you to dine with us?" "Accursed of his heart," said jolly Robin "that a butcher says no; I will go with you, my brethren true, as fast as I can go." But when they came to the sheriff's house, to dinner they hastened apace, and Robin, it was he, before them all to say the grace. "Pray God to bless us all," said Robin, and our meat within this place; a cup of wine so good will nourish our blood, and so I end my grace."

"Come, fill us with more wine," said Robin, "Let us merry be. For wine and good cheer, be it never so dear, I vow the reckoning I will pay. Come, brothers, be merry," said jolly Robin, "Let us drink, and do not stop; for the wine, I will pay, before I go my way if it costs me five pounds and more." "This is a mad young man," the butchers then said. "Says the sheriff, he is some prodigal, that some land he has sold, for silver and gold, and now he means to spend it all."

"Have you any horn beasts," the sheriff inquired, "good fellow, to sell unto me?" "Yes, that I have, good Master Sheriff, I have hundreds, two or three. And a hundred acres of good free land, if you please, it to see, and I will make you as good assurance of it as ever my father made me." The sheriff saddled a good palfrey, with three hundred pounds in gold. He left with Robin Hood bold, his

horned beasts to behold. Away then the sheriff and Robin rode to the forest of merry Sherwood. Then the sheriff said, "God save us this day from a man they call Robin Hood!"

Further on, Robin chanced to spy a hundred head of good red deer as they came tripping by. "How do you like my horned beasts, good master sheriff; they are fat and fair to see?" "I tell thee, good fellow, I would be gone, for I like not thy company." Then, Robin set his horn to his mouth and blew but blasts three.

Quickly anon there came Little John and all his company. "What is your will?" Said Little John, "Good master, tell it to me;" "I have hither brought the sheriff of Nottingham, this day to dine with thee." "He is welcome to me," said Little John, "I hope he will pay; I know he has the gold. If it is well told, it will serve us to drink an entire day." Then Robin took the mantle from off his back and laid it upon the ground. Out of the sheriff's portmanteau, he took three hundred pounds.

Then, Robin, he brought the sheriff through the wood and set him on his dapple Grey: "Give my compliments to your wife at home he said, laughing all day long." (Child ballad 122) Robin gained the sheriff's good palfrey and £300.

ROBIN IS JAILED

"Little John," said Robin, "We are going to the church of Saint Mary in Nottingham today. It has been two weeks since I was last there." "Then you had better take twenty yeomen with you for protection," said Much, the miller's son. "There is no need," said Robin, "besides it is the Sabbath, and the men are off duty." On their journey, they had a bet to see who was the best archer. "I can bag more squirrels than you," said Robin. "I bet you can't," challenged Little John. "Right," said Robin, "five shillings I can get more squirrels than you before we get to yon hill." "See," said Little John later "I got six squirrels, and you only have five you owe me five shillings." "No way," said Robin, "you know I'm the best archer in the world." "Not today you aren't," said Little John, "you lose I win." "Sorry," said Robin, "you will have to whistle for it." "In that case, you can go to Nottingham on your own. I'm going back to Barnsdale." Thereupon, Little John wheeled his horse around and headed back. Robin continued to Nottingham alone.

As soon as Robin walked through the door of St. Mary's, a great headed monk recognised him. "Hey you, I want a word with you for tricking me out of £400." Everyone looked. One monk raised the alarm, and others ran to shut the heavy town gate. Another fetched the sheriff, and someone else sounded the alarm bell. The sheriff's men charged into the church to arrest Robin. He unsheathed his two-handed, long sword and dispatched twelve of them before they could overpower him. Surrounded by a circle of steel swords, Robin walked jauntily through the city as the sheriff's men escorted him to the jail. Back in Saint Mary's, the monks were busy writing letters of complaint to the king detailing his offences.

A merchant on his way to York told Robin's men of his imprisonment. "Come with me Much," said Little John, now I have good reason to be Nottingham bound." With that, Little John and Much, the miller's son set off to find the monk on his way to the king. They caught up with the clerics and without further ado, Little John killed the monk and seized the letters from the dead man's coat. Much killed the page, for he could identify them. In London, they took the letters of complaint to the king, telling him the monk had died on the way. After perusing the manuscripts, the king exclaimed! "There is no other yeoman; I would love to meet more in all of Merry England than Robin Hood. I shall give you twenty pounds each for expenses and promote you both to Yeoman of the Crown. To you, John, I give you my seal. If anyone asks, say the king commands it. You are to tell the Sheriff of Nottingham the king wishes to speak with Robin Hood."

In Nottingham, the sheriff received them courteously while they stated their business. "Where is the monk and his page," asked the sheriff? "Such was the king's pleasure: the monk is now the abbot and lord of Westminster Abbey, and the page is his assistant." On hearing that, the sheriff offered both men hospitality. After they had drunk their fill, the sheriff fell into a drunken stupor. Come on, now is our chance to free Robin. "Wake up jailer, shouted Little John, Robin has got away, you silly fool; you should have kept guard over him instead of falling asleep." He took the bait and admitted them into the jail. As soon as they were in, Little John killed the jailer and seized his keys. Robin was free. The three men made haste and climbed over the city wall and into the dark recesses of Sherwood.

When the king heard of Robin's escape, he remembered the hospitality and the money he had given them, even making them Yeomen of the Crown. They tricked me, the king said to himself. Impressed by the loyalty of Robin's men, and his loyalty to them, the king's admiration for Robin and his company knew no bounds. Sensibly, he drew a veil over the whole affair. Otherwise, everyone would know Robin had made a fool of him. (Child ballad 119)

ROBIN RECRUITS MORE MEN

Wanting only the best swordsmen and archers, Robin checked their prowess by challenging likely candidates to a fight. One man who passed the test with flying colours was the Curtal Friar.

One day in June, the merriest month of the year, Robin and his friends were shooting. They often passed the time by competing against each other. Some would do the high jump, others raced, and still more competed at archery. Will Scarlet killed a buck. Midge (Much) killed a doe, and Little John killed a fat hart five hundred feet distant. "God's blessing on your hart," said Robin Hood, "I would ride my horse a hundred miles to find one who could match with thee." Will Scarlet gave a mighty laugh. "There lives a Curtal friar in Fountains Abbey, who will beat you both. He draws a mighty bow and will beat you without a doubt." "Are you sure? Said Robin to Scarlet, "I shall not eat or drink until this

friar I have seen.”

When Robin came to Fountains Abbey, he said to that friar who defended the gate, “gatekeeper; I am wet and weary, as you can see; will you carry me over this wild water for sweet Saint Charity?” The friar remembered Robin, a good deed he did him a long time ago. He took Robin on his back and carried him over the water. When he reached the other bank, he drew his long sword saying, “now bold outlaw, you take me back, or thou shall have plenty of this.” So, Robin took the friar on his back, and neither spoke a word. Robin’s bright green tights were dripping wet a hand-span above his knee. “Bear me over again, thou Curtal Friar, for it will breed goodwill.” The friar took Robin Hood on his back again and threw Good Robin in the middle. “Choose you, fine fellow, whether you drown or swim.”

Robin swam to a bush of broom, the friar to a willow tree. He took his bow and an arrow from under his belt, and to the friar he let fly. The Curtal friar, with his steel shield, put that arrow aside. “Shoot on, shoot on, thou excellent fellow on this summer’s day. Thy target I am not, and neither will I hide from thy shot.” None of Robin’s powerful shots hit their mark, and when his arrows had gone; they took to their swords and shields, fighting with might and main. From ten o’clock till four in the afternoon, they fought.

“What is thy will thou yeoman?” The friar asked, “Cease your talk and tell me.” “If you join with us in the merry greenwood,” said Robin, “then every holy day throughout the year, a new garment you shall have. If you go to Saint Mary’s in Nottingham with me and support me, a noble (valuable gold coin) you will have for your service in my retinue.” This curtail friar had been the gatekeeper in Fountains Dale for seven long years or more, and no other knight lord or earl before could ever tempt him away except Robin Hood, who called him Friar Tuck. (Child ballad 123)

THE PINDER OF WAKEFIELD JOINS ROBIN’S BAND OF MERRY MEN

There is neither knight, nor squire, nor baron that is so bold, dare trespasses in old Wakefield and annoy the keeper, of the pinfold after what happened to three fine young men, Robin Hood, Scarlet and John when they met the jolly pinder, sitting under a thorn-bush.

“Turn around, turn again,” said the pinder. “For a wrong way, have you gone; you have left the king’s highway and made a path through the corn.” “Well, that was a great shame,” said Robin Hood, “we are three and thou but one.” The pinder leapt back, then three good feet, and one. He leaned his back fast unto the thorn-bush, with his foot on a stone, and there he and Robin fought a long summer’s day, till that their swords, on their broad bucklers, broke fast in their hands. “Hold thy hand, hold thy hand,” cried Robin Hood, “and my merry men everyone. For this is one of the best pinders I ever saw.” “Will you leave your pinder job and live in the greenwood with me? On Michaelmas day my covenant I pay, when every man gathers his fee.” “I will take my blade,” the pinder said,

“in my hand and live in the greenwood with thee.” (Child Ballad 124)

ROBIN AND THE POTTER

“Robin, come here a second. I remember this potter from last year; he refused to pay pavage tax then, and he won’t pay it now. He attacked me last year with his quarterstaff. See if you can sort him out, I bet you forty shillings you cannot.” “I recognise you,” said Robin. “You have not paid your taxes for the last three years.” “I will not pay this year either,” said the potter. He dismounted from his horse and grabbed his quarterstaff from the cart and smashed Robin’s buckler clean out of his hand. Then, on the follow-through, hit Robin in the neck. Robin had an idea. “I shall tell you how you can get out of paying tax. We will become business partners. You can make the pots. I will sell them. I will pay the tax, and we will split the profits.” (He offered the potter a fellowship as a business associate, line 94.)

They exchanged clothes, and Robin set off to Nottingham, where he sold the pots at a reduced price. They were soon gone. The sheriff’s wife bought the last five and taking a liking to him invited Robin to dine with her and her husband. Not knowing who the potter was, (sheriffs moved on after a year or two) Robin and the sheriff chatted together while they ate. The meal over, the sheriff challenged Robin to a shooting match. Robin won without trying, even though, as he said, “they gave him a weak bow compared to the one Robin Hood gave him.” “Do you know Robin Hood?” The sheriff asked. “Yes, I know him well,” the ‘potter’ replied. “I often shoot with him. I will take you to meet him tomorrow.”

Robin presented the sheriff’s wife with a gold ring and thanking her for the hospitality the two men rode into the sunlit forest. Robin sounded his horn, and before the sheriff knew what was happening, he found himself surrounded by Robin’s men. There is no knowing what merriment Robin might have had at his expense, but thanks to his lovely wife’s hospitality, Robin contented himself with keeping his horse and his boots. The sheriff had no choice but to walk home barefoot. As he began his walk home, Robin promised to send his wife, a white Palfrey, on the morrow.

After the sheriff told his wife, she laughed aloud. “By him, that died on a tree. He made a fool of you, and it cost you, your horse that is worth far more than the pots I bought.” Being the gentleman he was, Robin paid the potter for his earthenware pots after deducting three years’ pavage taxes. He won Little John’s bet by collecting the money from the potter, and he gained the sheriff’s horse. All together Robin came out of it a richer man and was happy to have beaten the sheriff of Nottingham. (Child ballad 121)

ROBIN THE MERCHANT

“I wonder where all the robbinhoods are,” said Robin thoughtfully. “It has been a while since we saw any.” “Maybe they have moved elsewhere,” said Much. “I

heard they were raiding monasteries along the coast for their gold,” said John. “Well whatever the reason, they aren’t giving us much trouble here,” said Robin. The problem is, that while they are getting richer, we are getting poorer. I remember when I went to live with Mr and Mrs Hood in York, a tailor offered me an apprenticeship as a litster. My friend back home in Loxley Rad de Wadsley was an apprentice tailor to him. I wasn’t interested then, but if some of us had a trade, we could go round the markets like my cousin Robert Hoode who sells wine. You know Robert don’t you, he is the brother of Much sitting right here with us. Their father is the miller. Well anyway, he goes to all the markets selling his wine, and we could do the same, selling whatever we had. That way we could travel through the forests, trade in the markets, and do our forestry job at the same time. Putting words into action, Robin became an apprentice in 1354. He became a journeyman in 1361 and a freeman of York in 1365.

ROBIN HAS A PRICE ON HIS HEAD

Fast asleep, Robin dreamt he walked in a sunlit forest. The leaves were large and long, and birds sang in absolute delight. Into his dream entered two sturdy yeomen from behind the leaves of a lime tree. Robin dreamt they battered him, bound him, and took his bow. I will get my revenge, promised Robin as he wiped his brow. After he told his dream to Little John, they put on their green gowns and started out in search of the miscreants. The merry men stood by, ready, waiting in the glen where they were, while Robin and John walked into the greenwood they loved so well. There stood a sturdy yeoman leaning against a tree. Clad in horse skin, top, tail, and mane. A sword and a dagger by his side. “Stand still, master,” said Little John, “under this trysting tree while I go to the sturdy yeoman for his business to know.” “No, John said Robin, that is for me to do. I am the master, not you. Stay here and wait while I have finished.” Little John, not liking Robin’s words, turned on his heel and returned to Barnsdale, leaving Robin alone.

Back in Barnsdale, Little John stopped dead in his tracks. With a tremendous shout, he grabbed his bow. Two of his fellows lay dead on the ground while Scarlet ran for his life, sprinting over tree stumps and rocks as fast as he could go, the sheriff and seven score men in hot pursuit. John bent his bow with all his might. The arrow sped through the air and killed the sheriff’s man. Good William of Trent. It took six men to tie Little John to a tree. “A horse will drag you through bracken and over rocks,” said the sheriff, “and then you will be hanged high on a hill.” “However, you may fail,” said Little John. “If that is Christ’s own will.”

We leave Little John for now, while the sheriff’s men have him bound to a tree. Back with Robin, he and Guy were discussing the merchandise they made. During the conversation, Sir Guy admitted he was uncertain of his way. Robin said I will be your guide. “I seek an outlaw,” said Sir Guy. “Men call him Robin Hood; I need to find him, then I can claim the reward.” “If you meet Robin Hood, he will challenge you to an archery contest, said Robin. Let us see who is the best between us, and then they can challenge Robin Hood.” “Lead on, good fellow said Sir Guy.”

Robin's first shot missed the centre of the target by only an inch. Although Sir Guy was a proficient enough archer, he could not shoot as close. Next Sir Guy shot within the garland, but Robin Hood shot better as he clove the good prick wand. "God's blessing on your heart," said Guy. "You shoot well. If your heart is as good as your hand, you will be better than Robin Hood. Tell me your name; splendid fellow," said Guy, under the leaves of the tree.

"I will, by my faith," said Robin "when you have told me yours." "I dwell by dale and down," said Guy, "and I have done many cursed deeds. He who calls me by my right name calls me Guy of Good Gysborne." "My dwelling is in the woods," said Robin. "As I stand in front of you now, my name is Robin Hood of Barnesdale, the fellow you have long sought to kill." They fought for two hours on a summer's day. Neither Guy nor Robin Hood would run away. Robin stumbled over a boulder and Guy quickly hit him on the shoulder. Robin thought of Our Dear Lady, and with an awkward backhanded stroke, struck Sir Guy with all his strength. He died without even a croak. Seizing Sir Guy's head by the hair, Robin stuck it at the end of Sir Guy's bow. "You have been a traitor all your life, and that must have an end." Robin took his Irish knife (a curved blade, used for skinning animals), and made Sir Guy unrecognisable. Then, throwing his green gown over Sir Guy's body, Robin put on Guy's horse skin that clad him top to toe. Robin picked up Sir Guy's bow and arrows and, blowing Sir Guy's horn, he set off to Barnsdale, back to his men. The sheriff of Nottingham heard Guy's horn as he stood under a hill.

That sturdy yeoman is coming right now, clad in horse skin. Come here, good Sir Guy, ask me what you will and what you want. "I don't want your gold," said Robin, "what I want now I have slain the master, is to strike his servant. That is all the reward I ask, no other will I have." "You are a madman," said the sheriff. "You should have a knight's fee, but seeing you hope to kill the servant, I will grant what you ask."

Little John, hearing his master's voice he knew so well, thought now Robin is here, he will set me free. Robin made haste to cut Little John's ropes, but the sheriff and all his company followed too. Stand back, stand back, said Robin. Why come so close, it is never the custom for others to hear one's confession. Then Robin pulled out his Irish knife and cut Little John loose from the tree. He put Sir Guy's bow into John's hand and said, "here, use it." When the sheriff saw Little John draw the bow, he turned and fled towards his house in Nottingham, (Derbyshire was classed as Nottingham.). So did all his men. He only took two strides when Little John's broad arrow split his heart in two. God rest his soul. (Child ballad 118)

THE KING CAPTURES ROBIN

Still alive and well, Robin announced a tournament against the sheriff's men. Robin and his men won. But during a fight, an arrow hit Little John in his knee. He could neither walk nor ride a horse. So, hoisting his friend on his back, Robin carried Little John to the safety of Sir Richard's castle. Sir Richard ushered them

in and then barred the gates and raised the drawbridge, thwarting the sheriff. Then he provided the merry men with food for several days, repaying Robin handsomely for the one meal he received at the Saylis.

"You are a traitor;" the sheriff told Sir Richard; "You defend the enemies of the king and break the law." "I will support everything I did. Now go away and do not come back until you know the king's will," replied Sir Richard. Straight away, the sheriff hastened to London Town to tell the king. There he described how the knight protected Robin Hood. "My king, the knight, said he supported everything he did to protect the outlaws. He makes you my king powerless in your northern kingdom." "Hurry back and find the best archers in England, and I will attend to it when I arrive," ordered the king.

King Edward fulfilled his promise and took the King of France along with his compatriots to Bestwood in Nottinghamshire on a lavish hunting trip. (Dobson and Taylor). Not a single deer did they see as the royal party travelled to Plumpton Park through the pass of Lancashire. Furious with Rufus De Strelley, the keeper of the forest, King Edward dismissed him for making fraudulent returns. (John Granby) Meanwhile, Robin herded and killed the deer at will. Determined to capture Robin, the king told Sir Richard at the Lea whoever cuts off the knight's head and brings it here, shall have his lands.

Despite searching for half a year Robin eluded the king's men until a proud forester told the king, "if you want to find good Robin follow me with five of your best knights disguised as monks, and I will lead you to him this side of Nottingham (i.e. Lancashire)." Thereupon, the king donned abbots clothing while the others wore monks' habits. (Edward III often wore a disguise.) As promised, the king met with Robin under a linden tree surrounded by archers bold. Thinking they were churchmen, Robin took the king's horse and beseeching him said, "Sir Abbot, please stay awhile. We, yeomen, are poor, yet you have churches, rents, and gold. Please help." Our comely king replied, "the king and I spent much in Nottingham and only £40.00 remains. If I had a hundred pounds, you could have half." "Thank you, sir," smiled Robin as he took the £40.00, saying while sharing it with his men, "you promised fifty. Forty will do for now until we meet again." "Thank you, retorted our king!"

After serving his guests a meal of venison, they shot arrows together. Robin twice split the wand, as did Good Gilbert with the white hand. When the outlaws discovered the abbot's actual identity, Robin and Sir Richard of the Lea looked into the King's face. "My Lord, the King of England," pleaded Robin, "I love you true of thy goodness and grace under your trysting tree, I beg for my men and me. Yes, for God, please God, he saves me. Mercy, I pray to my lord, the King of England, for the men I crave." (In June 1369, King Edward III granted a special pardon to all outlaws.)

The King spoke to Sir Richard at the Lee and returned his land, bidding him stay loyal. Robin, on bended knee, thanked his comely King, who commanded him to live in his court. On their way to London, they held archery competitions, including one in Nottingham. The battle of Auray was fought on the 29th of September. Fifteen months later, with Robin's money all gone from buying

favours in the King's court and Little John, with William Scathelock back in Barnsdale, and the King going senile, Robin made his mind up. He spoke to the King. "Sire, grant me, I pray! I made a beautiful chapel in Barnsdale to Mary Magdalene and need to go there barefoot wearing a hair shirt as a penance for my sins." "Then I will allow it, granted the King. Seven nights, I give you, no longer to leave me on my own." "Thank you, kind Sire" replied Robin on bended knee.

Robin said goodbye and headed to the Greenwood. Birdsong filled the air as Robin arrived back home on a bright and sunny morning. He felt young again, "I missed this place, I love to shoot." He shot a full noble heart and then blew his horn. Knowing their master had returned all seven score men, (the number of soldiers in a company), came ready standing in a row. "Welcome," they greeted him, bending the knee; their hoods removed "our dear master under the greenwood tree.

ROBIN'S DEATH

I will never eat or drink' Robin Hood said, no meat will do me good until I have been to merry Churchlees my blood to be let.

'That I advise not,' said Will Scarllett, unless you take me and half a hundred bowmen with you.

'For a skilful yeoman lives nearby who will be sure to quarrel with you, and if you have need of us dear master you can be confident we shall not flee.

You are fearful for us William Scarlett, I understand you well.' 'If you are angry my dear master, I will say no more.'

'For there shall no man go with me Nor man with me ride. Little John shall be my man, and bear my bent bow by my side.

'You must bear your bow, master, your self, And shoot for a penny with me:' 'To that I do assent,' Robin Hood said, 'And so, John, let it be.'

Like two quarrelsome children they shot together, to place themselves in rank. Until they came to black water, over which was laid a plank.

Upon it there kneeled an old woman, who banned Robin Hoode. Why do you bann (announce as in marriage banns) Robin Hoode?' He asked.

'We have no venison To give to Robin Hoode; We weep for his dear body, That this day must be lett of blood.'

'The dame prior is my aunt's daughter, and close to my kith and kin. I know she would not harm me this day, for all the world to win.

Forth then sallied these argumentative two, and they did never stop, until they came to merry Churchlees, to merry Churchlee [s] within.

And when they came to merry Churchlees, They knocked upon a pin; up then rose the dame prioress, and let good Robin in.

Then Robin gave to dame prioress twenty pounds in gold, And bade her spend it while that would last, and she should have more when she would.

And down then came dame prioress, Down she came in that ilk, with a pair of blood-irons in her hands, wrapped all in silk.

‘She set a chafing-dish by the fire,’ and said strip thou up thy sleeve:’ I hold him but an unwise man will not believe the warnings.

She laid the blood-irons to Robin Hood’s vain, Alack, the more pity! And pierced the vain, and let out the blood, that full red was to see.

At first, it bled, the thick, thick blood, And afterwards the thin, And well then knew good Robin Hoode treason there was within.

‘What cheer my master?’ asked Little John; ‘In faith, John, little good;’

Part missing

‘I have on me a gown of green, cut short by my knee, And in my hand a bright brown sword, that will well bite off thee.’

But forth then of a hinged-window that good Robin Hood could get through; Red Roger, with a grinding sword, thrust him through the milk-white side.

But Robin was light and nimble on foot, and thought to abate his pride, for between his head and his shoulders he made a wound full wide.

Said Robin, Lie there, lie there, Red Roger, The dogs they must thee eat; ‘For I may have my last sacraments,’ he said, ‘For I must both go and speak.

‘Now give me courage,’ Robin said to Little John, ‘Give me courage with thy hand; I trust in God in heaven so will my sacraments still stand?’

‘Now give me leave, give me leave, master,’ John said, ‘For Christ’s love give leave to me, to set a fire within this hall, And to burn up all Churchlee.’

‘That I advise not,’ said Robin Hoode then, ‘Little John, for it may not be; If I should do any widow hurt, at my latter end, God,’ he said, ‘would blame me;

‘But take me upon thy back, Little John, And bear me to yonder place, And there make me a full fair grave of gravel and of green.

‘And set my bright brown sword at my head, mine arrows at my feet, And lay my Yew-bow by my side, My measuring rod wide. (Child ballad 120A)

1) Brown sword: (transitive) To give a bright brown colour to, as to gun barrels, by forming a thin coating of oxide on their surface. (Wordsense dictionary.)

After King Edward's death Robin took part in the Peasants Revolt at York, his cousin became the Prioress of Kirklees, and Robin died.

<https://robinhood-loxley.weebly.com/peasants-revolt.html>

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