

Robin Hood and the Monk

Translated into Modern English by Rusty W.
Spell.

A note on the translation: As much as possible, I tried to do a word-for-word translation, but often this isn't possible or -- if it is -- it's not understandable or clear, so I made appropriate choices there. I also wanted to maintain the ABCB rhyme scheme, which sometimes forced me to take a few liberties, but not anything drastic.

The best preserved manuscript of this ballad is the Cambridge manuscript dating from some time after AD 1461. We know, however, that some version of this ballad existed at least a hundred years earlier as William Langland (AD 1332 – 1386) made reference to it in the 1370s.

As with most ballads, it was written
anonymously.

—

In summer, when the woods are shining,
And leaves are large and long,
It is very merry in the fair forest
To hear the birdies' song,

To see the deer draw to the dale,
And leave the high hills free,
And shadow themselves in the green leaves,
Under the green wood tree.

It befell on Whitson
Early in a May morning,
The sun up fair did shine,
And the merry birds did sing.

"This is a merry morning," said Little John,
"By Him that died on the tree;
A more merry man than I am one
Lives not in Christianity.

"Pluck up thy heart, my dear master,"
Little John did say,
"And think that it is a very fair time
In a morning of May."

"Yet one thing grieves me," said Robin,
"And does my heart much woe:
That I may not on solemn days
To mass or matins go.

"It is a fortnight and more," said he,
"Since I my Savoir see;
Today will I go to Nottingham," said Robyn,
"With the might of mild Mary."

Then spoke Much, the miller's son,
Evermore good to him betide!
"Take twelve of your strong yeomen,
Well-weaponed, by thy side.
Such a one who would thyself slay,
That twelve dare not abide."

"All of my merry men," said Robin,
"By my faith, I will not have go,
But Little John shall bear my weapon,
Till I wish to draw my bow."

"Thou shall bear thine own," said Little John,
"Master, and I will bear mine.
And we will shoot, betting a penny," said Little
John,

"Under the green wood line."
"I will not bet a penny," said Robin Hood,
"In faith, Little John, with thee,
But for every one as thou do shoot," said Robin,
"In faith, I'll bet you three."

Thus shot they forth, these yeomen two,
Both at bush and shrub, win or lose,
Till Little John won of his master
Five shillings for socks and shoes.

A fiery strife fell between them,

As they went by the way;
Little John said he had won five shillings,
And Robin Hood said, shortly, "Nay."

With that Robin Hood called Little John a liar,
And smote him with his hand;
Little John waxed wroth therewith,
And pulled out his bright brand.

"Were thou not my master," said Little John,
"Thou should pay for it for sure;
Get thee a man, whoever thou will,
For thou get me no more."

Then Robin goes to Nottingham,
Himself mourning alone,
And Little John to merry Sherwood,
The paths he knew, every one.

When Robin came to Nottingham,
Certainly and without lie,
He prayed to God and mild
Mary To bring him out safe one more time.

He went in to Saint Mary's church
And kneeled down before the cross or rood;
All that were inside the church
Beheld well Robin Hood.

Beside him stood a great-headed monk,
I pray to God woe unto he!
For he recognized good Robin,
As soon as him he did see.

Out of the door he ran,
At once he did run;
All the gates of Nottingham
He made to be barred, every one.

"Rise up," he said, "thou proud sheriff,
Hurry up now, with a bound.
I have spied the king's felon.
Forsooth, he is in this town.

"I have spied the false felon
As he stands at his mass;
It is all your fault," said the monk,
"If from us he does pass.

"This traitor's name is Robin Hood,
Under the green wood lined;
He robbed me once of a hundred pounds.
It is never out of my mind."

Up then rose this proud sheriff,
And quickly he prepared;
Many was the mother's son
To the church with him did fare.

In at the doors they thoroughly thrust,
With staves for every one;
"Alas, alas!" said Robin Hood,
"Now miss I Little John."

But Robin took out a two-hand sword,
That hanged down to his knee;
There where the sheriff and his men stood
thickest,
Toward them then went he.

Thrice through at them then he ran,
Forsooth to you I say,
And wounded many a mother's son,
And twelve he slew that day.

His sword upon the sheriff's head
Certainly he broke in two;
"The smith that made this," said Robin,
"I pray to God give him woe!"

"For now am I weaponless," said Robin,
"Alas! Against my will;
Unless I flee these traitors now,
I know they will me kill."

[There is a gap in the text here which
apparently tells that Robin was captured and
that his men heard the bad news.]

Some fell in swooning as if they were dead
And lay still as any stone;
None of them kept their heads
Except for Little John.

"Stop your wailing," said Little John,
"For His love that died on the tree,
Ye that should be doughty men;
It is a great shame to see.

"Our master has been hard beset before
And yet escaped away;
Pluck up your hearts, and leave this lament,
And listen to what I shall say.

"He has served Our Lady many a day,
And very well, surely;
Therefore I trust in her especially.
No wicked death shall die he.

"Therefore be glad," said Little John,
"And let this morning be;
And I shall be the monk's downfall,
With the might of mild Mary.
And if I meet him," said Little John,
"It will be him versus me."

"Look that ye keep yourselves over by the
meeting tree,
Under the small leaves, well,
And spare none of the venison,
That goes in this vale."

Forth then went these yeomen two,
Little John and Much together,
And stayed at Much's uncle's house;
The highway was near as ever.

Little John stood at a window in the morning
And looked forth from an upstairs room;
He saw where the monk came riding,
And with him a little page too.

"By my faith," said little John to Much,
"I can tell thee of tidings good;
I see where the monk comes riding,
I know him by his wide hood."

They went in to the way, these yeomen both,
As courteous and gracious men;
They asked news of the monk,
As if they were his friends.

"From whence come ye?" said Little John.
"Tell us tidings, I you pray,
Of a false outlaw, [called Robin Hood]
Was taken yesterday.

"He robbed me and my fellows both
Of twenty marks and seven;
If that false outlaw be taken,
Forsooth, that would be heaven."

"So did he me," said the monk,
"Of a hundred pounds and more;
I was the first to get my hands on him.
You may thank me therefore."

"I pray God thank you," said Little John,
"And we will when we may;
We will go with you, with your leave,
And bring you on your way.

"For Robin Hood has many a wild fellow,
I tell you in certain;
If he knew ye rode this way,
In faith ye should be slain."

As they went talking by the way,
The monk and Little John,
John took the monk's horse by the head,
At once and anon.

John took the monk's horse by the head,
Forsooth to you I say;
So did Much the little page,
For he should not escape away.

By the throat-piece of the hood
John pulled the monk down;
John was not afraid of him.
He let him fall on his crown.

Little John was so angry
And drew out his sword so fast;
The monk saw he should be dead,
"Lord mercy" did he gasp.

"He was my master," said Little John,
"That thou has chosen to fell;
Shall thou never come at our king,
For to tell his tale."

John smote off the monk's head,
No longer would he dwell;
So did Much the little page,
For fear lest he would tell.

There they buried them both,
In neither bog nor heath,
And Little John and Much together
Bear the letters to our king.

Little John came in unto the king.
He knelt down upon his knee:
"God save you, my liege lord.
Jesus watch over thee!

"God save you, my liege king!"
To speak John was truly bold;
He gave him the letters in his hand,
The king did them unfold.

The king read the letters immediately
And said, "I say to thee,
There was never yeoman in merry England
I longed so sore to see.

"Where is the monk that these should have
brought?"
Our king did say.

"By my truth," said Little John,
"He died along the way."

The king gave Much and Little John
Twenty pounds in certain,
And made them yeomen of the crown,
And bade them go again.

He gave John the seal in hand,
To place in the sheriff's palm,
To bring Robin to him,
And no man do him harm.

John took his leave from our king,
Forsooth to you I say;
The nearest way to Nottingham
To take, he went that way.

When John came to Nottingham
The gates were all barred tight;
John called up the porter,
He answered him all right.

"What is the cause," said Little John,
"Thou shut these gates so fast?"
"Because of Robin Hood," said the porter,
"In deep prison he is cast."

"John and Much and Will Scarlett,
Forsooth to you I say,
They slew our men upon our walls,
And assault us every day."

Little John asked after the sheriff,
And found him very soon;
He opened the king's privy seal,
And placed in his hands the boon.

When the sheriff saw the king's seal,
He took off his hood anon.
"Where is the monk that bore the letters?"
He said to Little John.

"He is so pleased with him," said Little John,
"Forsooth to you I say,
He has made him abbot of Westminster,
A lord of that abbey."

The sheriff made John good cheer,
And gave him wine of the best;
At night they went to their beds,
And every man to his rest.

When the sheriff was asleep,
Drunken of wine and ale,
Little John and Much, forsooth,
Took their way unto the jail.

Little John called up the jailer
And bade him rise anon;
He saw Robin Hood had broken the prison,
And out of it was gone.

The porter rose anon for sure,
As soon as he heard John call;
Little John was ready with a sword,
And stabbed him through to the wall.

"Now will I be jailer," said Little John,
And took the keys in hand;
He found the way to Robin Hood,
And soon had him unbound.

He gave him a good sword in his hand,
To protect his body and crown,
And there where the walls were lowest
Anon they did jump down.

By then the cock began to crow,
The day began to spring;
The sheriff found the jailer dead.
The town bell did he ring.

He made a cry throughout the town:
Whether he be yeoman or knave,
Whoever could bring him Robin Hood,
A reward he should have.

"For I dare never," said the sheriff,
"Before the king do come;
For if I do, I know for certain
Forsooth he will have me hung."

The sheriff made to search Nottingham,
Both the street and alley,
And Robin was in merry Sherwood,
As light as leaf on tree.

Then bespake good Little John,
To Robin Hood did he say,
"I have done thee a good turn for an ill.
Repay me when thou may."

"I have done thee a good turn," said Little John,
"Forsooth to thee say;
I have brought thee under the green wood line;
Farewell, and have a good day."

"Nay, by my truth," said Robin,
"So shall it never be;
I make you the master," said Robin,
"Of all my men and me."

"Nay, by my truth," said Little John,
"So shall it never be;
But let me be your fellow," said Little John,
"Nothing else do I care to be."

Thus John got Robin Hood out of prison,
Certainly without lie he had;
When his men saw him whole and sound,
Forsooth they were very glad.

They filled up on wine and made him glad
Under the leaves so small in the vale,
And ate pasties of venison
That was very good with ale.

Then word came to our king
How Robin Hood was gone,
And how the sheriff of Nottingham

Does never look him upon.

Then bespake our comely king,
In an anger high to see:
"Little John has beguiled the sheriff,
In faith so has he me."

"Little John has beguiled us both,
And that full well I see;
Or else the sheriff of Nottingham
High-hanged should he be."

"I made him yeoman of the crown,
And gave him money with my hand;
I gave him security," said our king,
"Throughout all merry England.

"I gave them security," then said our king;
"I say this all to thee,
Forsooth such a yeoman as he is one
In all England are not three."

"He is true to his master," said our king; "I say,
by sweet Saint John, He loves better Robin
Hood Than he does each of us upon.

"Robin Hood is ever bound to him, Both in
street and in stable or stall; Speak no more of
this matter," said our king, "But John has
beguiled us all."

Thus ends the tale of the monk And Robin
Hood, or I'm amiss; God, that is ever a crowned
king, Bring us all to His bliss!

Robin Hood and the Potter

Translated by Alexander L. Stockdale
Edited by Stephen Knight, Thomas H. Ohlgren,
and Alexander L. Stockdale

The only surviving copy of this ballad exists in a Cambridge collection of popular moral poems. This collection was compiled around AD 1500.

Although this identifies this ballad as being significantly popular during this time, it doesn't give us an indication of the date of the original text. It is likely to be an older ballad as Nottingham is featured instead of Barnesdale, though this could be a result of a later modification.

Another ballad, called Robin Hood and the Butcher, was closely based on this ballad, once again indicating its popularity.

Fitt 1

In summer, when the leaves spring,
The blossoms on every bough,
So merrily do the birds sing
Full merry now.

Harkens, good yeomen,
Comely, courtly, and good,
One of the best that ever was born,
His name was Robin Hood.

Robin Hood was the yeoman's name,
That was both courtly and freehanded;
For the love of our Lady,
All women honored he.

But as the good yeoman stood on a day,
Among his merry men,
He was aware of a proud potter,
Came hastening over the land.

"Yonder comes a proud potter," said Robin,
"That long hast passed this way;
He was never so courtly a man
One penny of passage to pay."

"I met him at Wentbridge," said Little John,
"And therefore may evil may he thrive!
Such three strokes he me gave,
The blows still split my sides.

I wager forty shillings," said Little John,
"To pay it the same day,
There is not a man among us all
Who shall force a tax on him."

"Here is forty shillings," said Robin,
"If thou dare gamble,
That I shall make that proud potter,
shall force a tax on him."

There this money they laid out,
They gave it a yeoman to keep;
Robin before the potter he jumped,
And bade him stand still.

Hands upon his horse he laid,
And bade the potter stand full still;
The potter shortly to him said,
"Fellow, what is thy will?"

"All these three year, and more, potter," he
said,
"Thou hast passed this way,
Yet were you never so courtly a man
One penny of passage to pay."

"What is thy name," said the potter,
"For passage thou ask of me?"
"Robin Hood is my name,
A tax shall thou leave me."

"A tax I shall not leave," said the potter,
"Nor passage will I not pay;

Away thy hound from my horse!
I will do thee evil otherwise, by my faith."

The potter to his cart he went,
He did not hide;
A good two-handed staff he took out,
Before Robin he leaped.

Robin pulled out a sword,
A buckler in his hand;
The potter to Robin he went,
And said, "Fellow, let my horse go."

Together then went these two yeomen,
That was a good sight to see;
Therefore laughed did Robin's men,
Where they stood under a tree.

Little John to his fellow he said,
"Yond potter well staunchly stand."
The potter, with a back-handed stroke,
Smote the buckler out of his hand.

And ere Robin might get it again
His buckler at his feet,
The potter on the neck him struck,
To the ground anon he fell.

That saw Robin's men,
As they stood under a bough;
"Let us help our master," said Little John,
"Yonder potter," said he, "else will him slay."

These strong yeomen with a rush,
To this master they came.
Little John to his master said,
"Who hast the wager won?"

"Shall I have your forty shillings," said Little John,
"Or ye, master, shall have mine?"
"If they were a hundred," said Robin,
"In faith, they are all thine."

"It is full little courtesy," said the potter,
"As I have heard wise men say,
If a poor yeoman come driving over the way,
To hinder him of his journey."

"By my faith, thou speak truth," said Robin,
"Thou speaks good yeomanry;
And thou drive forth every day,
Thou shalt never be hindered by me."

"I will pray thee, good potter,
A fellowship will thou have?
Give me thy clothing, and thou shalt have mine;
I will go to Nottingham."

"I grant thereto," said the potter,
"Thou shalt find me a fellow good;
Unless thou can sell my pots well,
Come again as thou went."

"Nay, be my truth," said Robin,
"And then I curse myself,
If I bring any pots again,
If any wife will them buy."

Then spoke Little John,
And all his fellow friends,
"Master, be well wary of the sheriff of Nottingham,
For he is little our friend."

"With the help of our Lady,
Fellows, let me alone.
Get war out (Giddy up)!" said Robin,
"To Nottingham will I go."

Robin went to Nottingham,
These pots to sell;
The potter abode with Robin's men,
There he fared not evil.

Robin hastened on his way,
So merry over the land:
Here is more, and after is to say,

The best is yet to come.

Fitt 2

When Robin came to Nottingham,
If I were to tell the truth,
He set up his horse anon,
And gave him oats and hay.

In the midst of the town,
There he showed his wares;
"Pots! pots!" he began to cry full soon,
"Have a present the more you buy!"

Full even against the sheriff's gate
Showed he his wares;
Wives and widows about him drew,
And bought fast of his ware.

Yet "Pots, great bargain!" cried Robyn,
"I hate to leave these to stand."
And all that saw him sell
Said he had been not potter long.

The pots that were worth pence five,
He sold them for pence three;
Privately said man and wife,
"Yonder potter shall never profit."

Thus Robin sold full fast,
Till he had pots but five;
Up he them took off his cart,
And sent them to the sheriff's wife.

Therefore she was full glad,
"Gramercy," said she, "sir, thank you,
When ye come to these parts again,
I shall buy of your pots, so I may prosper."

"Ye shall have of the best," said Robin,
And swear by the Trinity."
Full courteously she gave him call,
"Come dine with the sheriff and me."

"Gramercy," said Robin,
"Your bidding shall be done."
A maiden bore in the pots,
Robin and the sheriff's wife followed anon.

When Robin in to the hall came,
The sheriff soon he met;
The potter bowed courteously,
And soon the sheriff he greeted.

"Lo, sir, what this potter hast given you and me,
Five pots small and great!"
"He is full welcome," said the sheriff,
"Let us wash, and to our meal."

As they sat at her meal,
With a noble chair,
Two of the sheriff's men began to speak
Of a great wager,

Of a shooting match, was good and fine,
Was made the other day,
Of forty shillings, the truth to tell,
Who should this wager win.

Silent then sat this proud potter,
Thus then thought he,
"As I am a true Christian man,
This shooting will I see.

When they had dined of the best,
With bread and ale and wine,
To the targets they made them press,
With bows and bolts full fine.

The sheriff's men shot full fast,
As archers with prowess,
There came none nearer the mark
By half a good archer's bow.

Still then stood the proud potter,
Thus then said he;
"If I had a bow, by the Cross,

One shot should you see."

"Thou shall have a bow," said the sheriff,
"The best that thou will choose of three;
Thou seem stalwart and strong,
Tested shall thou be."

The sheriff commanded a yeoman that stood
them by
After bows to wend;
The best bow that the yeoman brought
Robin set on a string.

"Now shall I know if thou be good,
And pull he up to thy ear."
"So God me help," said the proud potter,
"This is but right weak gear."

To a quiver Robin went,
A good bolt he took out;
So near on to the mark he went,
He failed not by a foot.

All they shot a bow again,
The sheriff's men and he;
Off the mark he would not fail,
He cleft the peg in three.

The sheriff's men felt great shame
The potter the mastery won;
The sheriff laughed and made good game,
And said, "Potter, thou art a man.
Thou art worthy to bear a bow
In what place that thou goes."

"In my cart I have a bow,
In truth," he said, "and that a good one;
In my cart is the bow
Given me by Robin Hood."

"Knowest thou Robin Hood?" said the sheriff,
"Potter, I pray thee tell thou me."
"A hundred bouts I have shot with him,
Under his trysting tree."

"Rather than having a hundred pounds," said
the sheriff,
And swore by the Trinity,
"I would that that false outlaw stood before
me."

"If ye will do as I say," said the potter,
"And boldly go with me,
And tomorrow, before we eat bread,
Robin Hood will we see."

"I will reward thee," said the sheriff,
"And swear by God almighty."
Shooting they left, and home they went,
Their supper was ready for them.

Fitt 3

Upon the morrow, when it was day,
He began him forth to ride;
The potter his cart forth he got ready,
And would not leave it behind.

He took leave of the sheriff's wife,
And thanked her for all things:
"Dame, for my love if ye will this wear,
I give you here a gold ring."

"Gramercy," said the wife,
"Sir, God reward thee."
The sheriff's heart was never so light,
The fair forest to see.

And when he came in to the forest,
Under the leaves green,
Birds there sang on boughs there,
It was great joy to see.

"Here it is merry to be," said Robin,
"For a man that had anything to spend;
By my horn ye shall discover
If Robin Hood be here."

Robin set his horn to his mouth,
And blow a blast that was full good;
That heard his men that there stood,
For down in the wood.
"I hear my master blow," said Little John,
They ran as if they were crazy.

When they to their master came,
Little John would not spare;
"Master, how have you fared in Nottingham?
How have you sold your wares?"

"Ye, by my truth, Little John,
Look thou take no care;
I have brought the sheriff of Nottingham,
For all our affairs."

"He is full welcome," said Little John,
"These tidings are full good."
The sheriff had rather a hundred pounds
He had never seen Robin Hood.

"Had I known that before,
At Nottingham when we were,
Thou should not come in fair forest
Of all these thousand years."

"That know I well," said Robin,
"I thank God that ye be here;
Therefore shall ye leave your horse with us,
And all your other gear."

"That may God forbid," said the sheriff,
"So to lose my goods."
"Hither ye came on horse full high,
And home shall ye go on foot;
And greet well thy wife at home,
The woman is full good.

"I shall her send a white palfrey,
It trots as the wind,
Were it not for the love of your wife,
Of more sorrow should you sing."

Thus parted Robin Hood and the sheriff;
To Nottingham he took the way;
His wife fair welcomed him home,
And to him she did say:

"Sire, how have you fared in the green forest?
Have ye brought Robin home?"
"Dame, the devil take him, both body and soul;
I have had a full great harm.

"Of all the good that I had taken to the green
wood,
He has taken it from me;
All but this fair palfrey,
That he has sent to thee."

With that she took up a loud laugh,
And swore by Him that died on a tree,
"Now have you paid for all the pots
That Robin gave to me.

"Now ye be come home to Nottingham.
Ye shall have good enough."
Now speak we of Robin Hood,
And of the potter under the green bough.

"Potter, what was thy pot's worth
To Nottingham that I took with me?"
"They were worth two nobles," said he,
"So may I thrive or prosper;
So could I have had for them,
If I had be there."

"Thou shalt have ten pounds," said Robin,
"Of money fair and free;
And ever when thou comes to the green wood,
Welcome, potter, to me."

Thus parted Robin, the sheriff, and the potter,
Underneath the green wood tree;
God have mercy on Robin Hood's soul,
And save all good yeomanry!

THE GESTE OF ROBIN HOOD

Verse Translation by
Robert Landis Frank

The intention here is to have a version of the *Geste of Robin Hood* that the modern reader can enjoy without recourse to footnotes and a glossary. In ballad style, with all the medieval flavor of the original, this translation blends the old in with the new. The *Geste* was a folk song, or at least a live performance piece, so we can be sure it went through numerous changes before it became frozen in time as the poem we see in the Child Ballads. Names, places, audiences -- all probably changed from time to time to fit the occasion. Such is the living tradition that this song comes from, and it is in this spirit that it arose as it appears here.

This ballad is one of the largest and most popular sources of the Robin Hood legend.

Multiple copies have been found from the sixteen and seventeenth centuries, the earliest being from AD 1510.

All or some of the episodes within the ballad are believed to have been taken from older sources, possibly back as far as AD 1400 or even older. There is no scholarly consensus, but The

Gest of Robin Hood is often said to be the oldest surviving ballad within the Robin Hood legendarium.

Here Beginneth a Little Geste of Robin Hood

The First Fit

Stop and listen, everybody,
This story's pretty good.
It's all about a bold outlaw,
His name was Robin Hood.

Robin was a wise outlaw.
While he walked on ground,
So courteous an outlaw

Was seldom ever found.

Robin stood in the greenwood
And leaned against a tree,
And by him stood Little John,
A good yeoman was he.

And also did good Scarlett,
And Much, the miller's son.
Every inch of his body
Was worthy of a man.

Then spoke Little John
All unto Robin Hood,
"Master, if you would dine soon
It would do ye a lot of good."

Then spoke good Robin,
"To dine I have no wish,
Til I have some bold baron
Or some unknown guest.

"Til I have some wealthy abbot
That can pay for the best,
Or some knight or some squire
That lives here in the west."

Good habits then had Robin
In the land where he stayed.
Everyday before he ate
Three prayers would he say.

The one in the worship of the Father,
And another of the Holy Ghost,
The third of Our Dear Lady
That he loved the most.

Robin loved Our Dear Lady.
For fear of deadly sin,
He never would do company harm
That any woman was in.

"Master," then said Little John,
"If we're to spread the board,
Tell us where we shall go
And what we can afford.

"Where we shall take, where we shall leave,

Where we shall stay behind.
Where we shall rob, where we shall kill,
Where we shall beat and bind."

"Not so much force," said Robin.
"We'll get enough somehow.
But see that ye do no husband harm
That tills with his plough.

"Nor any good yeoman
That walks by greenwood hollow.
Nor any knight or squire
That will be a good fellow.

"These bishops and these archbishops,
Them shall ye beat and bind.
The high sheriff of Nottingham,
Him hold ye in your mind."

"This word shall hold," said Little John,
"And this lesson we shall remember.
It is late in the day, God send us a guest
So we can get to our dinner."

"Take thy good bow in thy hand," said Robin.
"Let Much go with thee.
And also William Scarlett,
And no man stay with me.

"And walk up to the Saylis
And down to Watling Street,
And wait for some unknown guest
That you may chance to meet.
"And be he earl or baron,
Abbot or knight or squire,
Bring him to me at the greenwood tree.
His dinner shall be on the fire."

They went up to the Saylis,
These yeomen all three.
They looked east, they looked west,
No man did they see.

But as they looked into the greenwood,
By a dark street,
There came a knight riding.
Him they soon did meet.

All dreary was his countenance,
And little was his pride.
His one foot in the stirrup stood,
The other hung beside.

His hood hung over his eyes.
He rode in simple array.
A sorrier man than he was
Rode never on summer day.

Little John was full courteous
And got down on his knee.
"Welcome be ye, gentle knight,
Welcome are ye to me.

"Welcome be thou to the greenwood,
Young fellow, knight and free.
My master waits for you fasting, sir,
All these hours three."

"Who is thy master?" said the knight.
John said, "Robin Hood."
"He is a good yeoman," said the knight.
"Of him I have heard much good.

"I grant," said he, "to go with you,
My brothers, all together.
Though I had planned to dine today
At Blythe or Duncaster."

Forth then went this gentle knight
In a sorrowful state.
The tears ran out of his eyes
And fell down by his face.

They brought him to the greenwood door.
When Robin he did see,
Full courteously he took off his hood
And got down on his knee.

"Welcome, sir knight," said Robin.
"Welcome art thou to me.
I have waited for you fasting, sir,
All these hours three."

Then answered the gentle knight
With words fair and free,
"God save thee, good Robin,

And all thy merry company."

They washed together and wiped off
And sat down to their dinner.
Bread and wine they had plenty of,
And the best parts of the deer.

Swans and pheasants they had full good
And fowls of the river.
They didn't leave out any little bird
That ever was bred on briar.

"Eat up, sir knight," said Robin.
"Thank you, sir," said he.
"I haven't had such a dinner
In all these weeks three.

"If I ever come again, Robin,
Here by this country,
As good a dinner I'll make for thee
As thou hast made for me."

"Thank you, knight," said Robin,
"For my dinner, whenever I have it.
I was never so greedy, by dear worthy God.
Food, I can take it or leave it.

"But pay ere ye go," said Robin.
"I think it is good and right.
It was never the manner, by dear worthy God,
A yeoman to pay for a knight."

"I have nothing in my trunk," said the knight,
"That I may offer, for shame."
"Little John, go look," said Robin.
"And don't leave out anything."

"Tell me the truth," said Robin,
"So God will have pity on thee."
"I have no more than ten shillings," said the
knight.
"So God have pity on me."

"If thou hast no more," said Robin,
"I will not touch one penny.
And if you have need of any more,
More shall I lend thee.
"Go forth now, Little John,

And bring the truth to me.
If there be no more than ten shillings,
Not a penny shall I see."

Little John spread his mantle out
Full fair upon the ground,
And there he found in the knight's trunk
Only half a pound.

Little John let it lie full still
And went to his master low.
"What tidings, John?" said Robin.
"Sir, the knight is true enough."

"Pour out the best wine," said Robin.
"The knight shall begin.
No wonder, it seems to me,
Thy clothing is so thin.

"Tell me one word," said Robin.
"It will go no further than me.
I think you were made a knight of nothing,
Or else of yeomanry.

"Or else you have been a sorry husband
And lived in trouble and strife.
A usurer or a lecher," said Robin.
With wrong you've led your life."

"I am none of those, by God that made me,"
Said this gentle knight.
"A hundred winters here before
My ancestors have been knights.

"But often it has happened, Robin,
A man had been disgraced.
But God that sits in Heaven above
May amend his state.

"Within these two years, Robin," he said,
"My neighbors know it well,
Four hundred pounds of good money I spent,
Not all of it on myself.

"Now I have no goods," said the knight.
"God has so arranged it.
Just my children and my wife,

Til God decides to change it."

"In what manner," then said Robin,
"Have you lost your riches?"
"For my great folly," he said,
"And my little kindnesses.

"I had a son, Robin,
That should have been my heir.
When he was twenty winters old
In field he would joust full fair.

"He slew a knight of Lancaster
And a squire bold,
So to save him in his right,
My goods I gathered and sold.

"My lands I mortgaged, Robin,
Until a certain day,
To a rich abbot who lives near here
In Saint Mary's Abbey."

"What is the sum?" said Robin.
"How much do you owe?"
"Sir," he said, "four hundred pounds.
The abbot wants his loan."

"And if you lose your land," said Robin,
"What will happen to thee?"
"Hastily I will take me," said the knight,
"Over the salty sea,

"And see where Christ lived and died
On the mount of Calvary.
Farewell, friend, and have a good day.
It may no better be."

Tears fell out of his eyes,
He would have gone his way.
"Farewell, friend, and have a good day,
I have no more to pay."

"Where are your friends?" said Robin.
"Sir, not one of them knows me now.
When I was rich enough at home,
Great boasts to me they'd vow.

"And now they run away from me

Like beasts in a row.
They take no more heed of me,
As if they didn't know."

For sorrow then wept Little John,
Scarlett and Much together.
"Pour out the best wine," said Robin,
"For here is a poor fellow.

"Hast thou any friend," said Robin,
"That would thy sponsor be?"
"I have none," then said the knight,
"But God that died on a tree."

"Do away with thy jokes," said Robin.
"There I'll find me none.
Who should I have God borrow it from,
Peter, Paul, or John?"

"Nay, by Him that made me
And shaped both sun and moon,
Find me a better sponsor," said Robin,
"Or money get thou none."

"I have no other," said the knight,
"The truth for to say,
Unless it be Our Dear Lady.
She never failed me to this day."

"By dear worthy God," said Robin,
"To search all England over,
I never found for my money
A much better sponsor.

"Come forth now, Little John,
And go to my treasure
And bring me four hundred pounds.
And see that it's well-measured."

Forth then went Little John,
And Scarlett went before.
He counted out four hundred pounds,
About eight and twenty score.

"Is this well-measured?" said Much.
John said, "What grieveth thee?
It's all to help that gentle knight

That fell into poverty.

"Master," then said Little John,
"His clothing is very thin.
You must give the knight some good clothes
To wrap his body in.

"For you have scarlet and green, master,
And many a rich array.
There is no merchant in merry England
So rich, I dare well say."

"Take him three yards of every color,
And see that you measure it true."
Little John took no other measure
But his long bow of yew.

At every handful that he met,
He counted it a yard.
"What sort of a cloth measurer," said Much,
"Do you think you are?"

Scarlett stood still and laughed
And said, "By God almighty,
John may give him good measure
For it costs him but lightly."

"Master," then said Little John
To gentle Robin Hood,
"You must give the knight a horse
To carry home these goods."

"Take him that grey packhorse," said Robin,
"And a saddle new.
He is Our Lady's messenger,
God grant that he be true."

"And a good war horse," said Much,
"To maintain him in his right."
"And a pair of boots," said Scarlett,
"For he is a gentle knight."

"What shall you give him, Little John?" said
Robin.
"Sir, a pair of gilded spurs,
To pray for all this company
And bring him out of hurt."

"When shall my day be?" said the knight.
"Sir, thy will shall be."
"This day, twelve months from now," said
Robin,
"Under this greenwood tree.

"It would be a great shame," said Robin,
"A knight alone to ride
Without squire, yeoman or page
To walk by his side.

"I shall lend thee Little John, my man,
And he shall be thy knave.
In a yeoman's stead he may thee stand
If ever you have great need."

The Second Fit

Now is the knight gone on his way.
This game he thought full good.
When he looked on the greenwood,
He blessed Robin Hood.

When he thought on the greenwood,
On Scarlett, Much and John,
He blessed them for the best company
He'd ever come upon.

Then spoke that gentle knight,
To Little John he did say,
"Tomorrow I must to Yorktown,
To Saint Mary's Abbey.

"And to the abbot of that place
Four hundred pounds deliver.
If I'm not there by tomorrow night
My land is lost forever."

The abbot said to his convent,
There he stood on ground,
"Twelve months ago a knight came here
And borrowed four hundred pounds.

"He borrowed four hundred pounds
Against all his land free.
If he doesn't come this very day,

Disinherited shall he be."

"It's too early," said the prior.

"The day is not far gone.

I'd rather pay a hundred pounds
And lie down soon.

"The knight is far beyond the sea,
In England is his right.
He suffers hunger and cold
And many a sorry night.

"It would be a great pity," said the prior,
"To have his land this way.
If ye be so light of your conscience
You'll do him wrong today."

"Thou art ever in my beard," said the abbot,
"By God and Saint Richard!"
With that came in a fat-headed monk,
The high steward.

"He is dead or hanged," said the monk,
"By God that bought me dear,
And we shall have to spend in this place
Four hundred pounds a year."

The abbot and the high steward
Started forth full bold.
The high justice of England
The abbot there did hold.

The high justice and many more
Had taken into their hands
All the knight's debt,
To have that knight's land.

They wouldn't give the knight a minute,
The abbot and his men.
"Unless he comes this very day,
He loses all his land."

"He won't come soon," said the justice.
"We have not long to wait."
But in sorrow time for them all
The knight came to the gate.

Then said that gentle knight,

To all his men said he,
"Now put on your simple clothes
That you brought from the sea."

They put on their simple clothes.
They came to the gates soon.
The porter was ready to let them in
And welcomed them everyone.

"Welcome, sir knight," said the porter.
"My lord to measure is he,
And so is many a gentleman,
For the love of thee."

The porter swore a full great oath,
"By God that made me,
Here is the best cursed horse
Ever I yet did see.

"Lead them to the stable," he said,
"So they can take their ease."
"They'll not go in there," said the knight,
"By God that died on a tree."

Lords have gone to measure
Inside that abbot's hall.
The knight went forth and kneeled
And saluted them great and small.

"How do you do, sir abbot," said the knight.
"I've come to hold my day."
The first word the abbot spoke,
"Have you brought my pay?"

"Not one penny," said the knight,
"By God that made me."
"You are a shrewd debtor," said the abbot.
"Sir justice, drink to me."

"What are you doing here," said the abbot,
"If you didn't bring your pay?"
"For God," then said the knight,
"To pray for a longer day."

"Your day is broke," said the justice.
"You can't pay what you owe."
"Now good sir justice, be my friend,

And defend me from my foes."

"I hold with the abbot," said the justice.

"He gave me some clothes and a fee."

"Now good sir sheriff, be my friend."

"No, by God," said he.

"Now good sir abbot, be my friend,
And show some courtesy,
And hold my lands in thy hand
Til we can all agree.

"And I will be your true servant
And serve you faithfully,
Until you have four hundred pounds
Of money, good and free."

The abbot swore a full great oath,
"By God that died on a tree,
Get the land where you may,
For you'll get none from me."

"By dear worthy God," then said the knight,
"That all this world wrought,
If ever I have my land again
Full dear it shall be bought.

"God that was of a maiden born,
Grant us all His help,
For it is good to help a friend
When he cannot help himself."

The abbot loathely on him looked
And names began to call.
"Out," he said, "you false knight,
Get out of my hall."

"You lie," then said the gentle knight,
"Abbot, in your hall.
False knight I never was,
By God that made us all."

Up then stood that gentle knight.
To the abbot said he,
"To suffer a knight to kneel so long,
You show no courtesy.

"In jousts and in tournaments

Full fair have I always been,
And put myself as thick in the fight
As any I've ever seen."

"How much will you give," said the justice,
"For the knight to make a release?
Or else I dare safely swear
You'll never hold your land in peace."

"A hundred pounds," said the abbot.
The justice said, "Give him two."
"No, by God," said the knight.
"You'll not get it so.

"Though you give me a thousand more,
Yet were you never the nearer.
You shall never be my heir,
Abbot, justice or friar."

He started for the board then,
To a table round,
And there he shook out of a bag
An even four hundred pounds.

"Here is your gold, sir abbot," said the knight,
"Which you loaned to me.
Had you been courteous at my coming,
Rewarded you would be."

The abbot sat still and said no more,
For all his royal fare.
He cast his head on his shoulders
And fast began to stare.

"Give me my gold," said the abbot,
"Sir justice, that I gave thee."
"Not a penny," said the justice,
"By God that died on a tree."

"Sir abbot and you men of law,
Now I have held my day.
Now I shall have my land again,
For all that you can say."

The knight walked out the door.
Gone was all his care.
He put on his good clothes,

The others he left there.

He went forth merrily singing
As men have told in tale.
His lady met him at the gate
At home in Verysdale.

"Welcome, my lord," said his lady.
"Have you lost your goods?"
"Be merry, dame," said the knight,
"And pray for Robin Hood,

"That ever his soul may be in bliss.
He's helped you and me.
Had it not been for his kindness,
Beggars we would be.

"The abbot and I are settled.
He's got all his pay.
The good yeoman loaned it to me
As I came by the way."

This knight then dwelled at home,
Doing what he could,
Til he had four hundred pounds
To pay back Robin Hood.

He bought a hundred bows,
The strings were furnished right.
A hundred sheaths of arrows gold,
The heads were burnished bright.

And every arrow an ell long
With peacock feathers bright,
Nocked all with white silver.
It was a handsome sight.

He got a hundred men
And decked them out alike,
And he dressed himself in the same suit
With cloth of red and white.

He held a lance in his hand,
Light glistened off his mail.
He rode with a light song
Along the greenwood trail.

But as he came to a bridge,

He stopped awhile to watch.
The best yeomen of the west were there
Having a wrestling match.

A full fair game it was.
A white bull was put up,
A great horse with saddle and bridle
And a bright gold stirrup.

A pair of gloves, a red gold ring,
A jug of wine -- the play:
The man that beareth himself the best
Shall bear the prize away.

There was a yeoman in that place
And the worthiest one was he.
But because he was a stranger there,
Slain he soon would be.

The knight had pity on this yeoman
In the place where he stood.
He said that yeoman should have no harm
For love of Robin Hood.

The knight pressed into the place,
A hundred followed him free,
With bows bent and arrows sharp
To part that company.

They shouldered all and made him room
To see what he would say.
He took the yeoman by the hand
And awarded him the play.

He gave him five marks for his wine,
There it lay on the ground,
And bad would it sit with anyone
Who tried to drink it now.

A long time tarried this gentle knight
Til that game was through.
So long waited Robin fasting
Three hours after the noon.

The Third Fit

Stay and listen, everyone,
All that still are here.

Of Little John, the knight's man,
Good mirth ye shall hear.

It was on a merry day
That young men would go shoot,
Little John strung his bow
And said he would go too.

Three times Little John shot about,
And each time he slit the wood.
The proud sheriff of Nottingham
By the target stood.

The sheriff swore a full great oath,
"By Him that died on a tree,
This man is the best archer
That ever I did see.

"Tell me now, strong young man,
What is thy name,
In what country were you born,
And where is your dwelling place?"

"In Holderness, sir, I was born.
That's where I live still.
Men call me Reynold Greenleaf
When I am in those hills."

"Tell me, Reynold Greenleaf,
Will you live with me?
And every year I will give you
Twenty marks for your fee."

"I have a master," said Little John,
"A courteous knight is he.
If you get leave of him,
The better may it be."

The sheriff got Little John
For twelve months from the knight,
And right away he gave him
A good strong horse to ride.

Now Little John is the sheriff's man,
God help us all.
But always thought Little John
To square the old account.

"Now God help me," said Little John,
"By my true loyalty,
I shall be the worst servant to him
That ever yet had he."

It fell upon a Wednesday,
The sheriff a'hunting was gone,
And Little John lay in his bed
And was forgotten at home.

There he was fasting
Til it was past the noon.
"Good sir steward, I pray thee,
Give me my dinner soon.

"It is long for Greenleaf
Fasting for to be.
Therefore, I pray thee, sir steward,
My dinner give to me."

"You will never eat nor drink," said the steward,
"Til my lord has come to town."
"I make my vow to God," said John,
"I'll sooner crack your crown."

The bottler was very uncourteous,
There he stood on the floor.
He started for the bottlery
And shut fast the door.

Little John gave the bottler such a tap
His back was nearly broke.
Though he lived a hundred years,
It's the worst he'd ever know.

Little John kicked the door with his foot.
It went open well and fine,
And there he found a large purveyance
Both of ale and wine.

"Since you won't dine with me," said Little John,
"I shall let you drink,
And though you live a hundred winters,
On Little John you shall think."

Little John ate and Little John drank

As much as he could hold.
The sheriff had in his kitchen a cook,
A stout man and bold.

"I make my vow to God," said the cook,
"You aren't worth a piss
To live in any house
And eat like this."

There he lent Little John
Good strokes three.
"I make my vow to God," said John,
"Those strokes really liked me.

"You are a bold, hearty man,
So it seems to me,
And before I leave this place
Better tried shall you be."

Little John drew a good long sword.
The cook took another in hand.
They did not think a thought to flee,
But stiffly for to stand.

There they fought together
Two miles across the floor.
Neither one could hurt the other
For at least an hour or more.

"I make my vow to God," said Little John,
"By my true loyalty,
You are one of the best swordsmen
That ever I yet did see.

"If you can shoot a bow as well,
You should come with me to the woods,
And two times a year there
You can change your clothes.

"And every year, Robin Hood
Will give you twenty marks for your fee."
"Put up thy sword," said the cook,
"And fellows we will be."

Then he fed Little John
The best parts of the doe.
Good bread and full good wine

They ate and drank also.

And when they had drank well,
Their pledges together they pledged
That very same night they would be with Robin
Among the greenwood hedge.

They went to the treasure house
As fast as they could have gone.
The locks that were of full good steel,
They broke them everyone.

They took away the silver vessel
And all that they could get.
Cups, goblets, and spoons --
Nothing did they forget.

They also took the good money,
Three hundred pounds and more,
And went straight to Robin Hood,
Up to the greenwood door.

"God save thee, my dear master,
And Christ save thee, too."
And then said Robin to Little John,
"It's good to see thee, too.

"And also that stout yeoman
Ye've brought along with thee.
What tidings now from Nottingham,
Little John, tell me."

"Well, the proud sheriff is weeping
And sent these here by me:
His cook and all his silverware,
And three hundred pounds and three."

"I make my vow to God," said Robin,
"And to the Trinity,
It was never by his good will
These goods have come to me."

Little John then and there
Thought of a shrewd plan.
He gathered all his will,
And five miles into the forest he ran.

Then he met the proud sheriff

Hunting with hounds and horn.
Little John was full courteous
And knelt down before him.

"God save thee, my dear master,
And Christ save thee, too."
"Reynold Greenleaf," said the sheriff.
"What have you been up to?"

"I have been in this forest.
A fair sight I did see.
It was one of the fairest sights
That ever appeared to me.

"Yonder I saw a right fair hart,
His color is of green.
Seven score of deer in a herd
Follow where he leads.

"Their antlers are so sharp, master,
At least sixty or more,
That I dare not shoot at them
For fear I might be gored."

"I make my vow to God," said the sheriff,
"That sight I'd like to see."
"Get moving, my dear master,
Right now, and come with me."

The sheriff rode, and Little John,
On foot he was full smart.
And when they came before Robin,
"Lo, sir, here is the master hart."

Still stood the proud sheriff.
A sorry man was he.
"You aren't worth much, Reynold Greenleaf.
You have betrayed me."

"I make my vow to God," said Little John,
"Master, you are to blame.
I was kept from my dinner
When I was at your home."

Soon they sat down to supper,
Served on a silver plate.
When the sheriff saw his vessel,

For sorrow he could not eat.

"Cheer up," said Robin Hood,
"Sheriff, for charity
And for the love of Little John,
Thy life I grant to thee."

When they had eaten well,
The day was all but gone.
"Take off the sheriff's shoes and socks,"
Said Robin to Little John.

His shirt and his fur coat
They took from the sheriff then
And gave him a green mantle
To wrap his body in.

Robin commanded his strong young men
Under the greenwood tree
That they should sleep in the same clothes
So the sheriff could see.

All night lay the proud sheriff
In his undershirt.
No wonder it was in the greenwood
His sides began to hurt.

"Cheer up, sheriff," said Robin,
"For by God's charity,
This how we live
Under the greenwood tree."

"This is a harder way to live," said the sheriff,
"Than any hermit or friar.
For all the gold in merry England
I wouldn't stay in these briars."

"For the next twelve months," said Robin,
"You shall dwell here with me.
I shall teach you, proud sheriff,
An outlaw how to be."

"Ere I stay here another night," said the sheriff,
"Robin, I beg you,
Cut off my head instead tomorrow
And I will forgive you.

"Let me go," then said the sheriff,

"For saints' charity,
And I will be the best friend
You ever did see."

"You shall swear me an oath," said Robin,
"On my bright sword,
You will never wait to waylay me
By land nor by water."

"And if you find any of my men
By day or by night,
Upon thy oath, ye shall swear
To help them all you might."

Now the sheriff has sworn his oath
And homeward made his speed.
He was as full of the greenwood
As a berry is of seed.

The Fourth Fit

The sheriff sat in Nottingham.
He was glad to be home.
And Robin and his merry men
Were in the woods alone.

"Let's go eat," said Little John.
Robin Hood said, "Nay.
I'm afraid Our Lady is mad at me,
For she has not sent my pay."

"Have no doubt, master," said Little John,
"The sun is not at rest.
For I dare say and safely swear,
The knight is of the best."

"Take your bow in your hand," said Robin,
"Let Much go with thee,
And also William Scarlett,
And no man stay with me."

"And walk up to the Saylis
And down to Watling Street,
And wait for some unknown guest
That you may chance to meet."

"Whether he be a messenger

Or a man that tells good stories,
He shall have some of my goods
If he is poor and hungry."

Forth then went Little John,
Half in anger and grief,
And buckled on a full good sword
Under a mantle of green.

They went up to the Saylis,
These yeomen all three.
They looked east, they looked west,
No man did they see.

But as they looked into the greenwood
By the highway,
They were aware of two black monks
On good horses riding their way.

Then said Little John,
To Much he did say,
"I dare lay my life on the line,
These monks have brought our pay."

"Cheer up," said Little John,
"And string your bows of yew,
And see that your hearts are firm and staunch
And your strings are trusty and true."

"These monks have two and fifty men
And seven packhorses, too.
There rides no bishop in this land
So royally as they do."

"Brethren," said Little John,
"We are no more than three.
But if we don't bring them to our dinner,
Our dinner we may not see."

"Bend your bows," said Little John,
"Make the whole crowd stand.
The foremost monk, his life and his death
Are fastened in my hand."

"Stay, vulgar monk," said Little John.
"Go no further than you stand.
If you do, by dear worthy God,

Your death is in my hand.

"And bad luck to your head," said Little John,
"Right under your hatband.
For you have made our master angry,
He's been fasting so long."

"Who is your master?" said the monk.
Little John said, "Robin Hood."
"He is a strong thief," said the monk.
"Of him I have never heard good."

"You lie," then said Little John,
"And for that you will be sorry.
He is a yeoman of the forest
And has invited you to dinner."

Much was ready with an arrow
And right there on the spot,
He held it against the monk's breast
And off his horse he got.

Of two and fifty strong young yeomen
There remained not one,
Save a little page and a groom
To lead the packhorses with John.

They brought the monk to the greenwood door
Whether he liked it or not,
To speak with Robin Hood
And eat from Robin's pot.

Robin took off his hood
When he saw the monk.
The monk was not so courteous,
So he put his hood back on.

"He is a churl, master, by dear worthy God,"
Then said Little John.
"Well, don't force him," said Robin,
"For courtesy has he none."

"How many men," said Robin,
"Did this monk have, John?"
"Fifty and two when we met him,
But many of them are gone."

"Blow the horn," said Robin,

"So the fellowship may begin."
Seven score of strong young yeomen
Came running into the glen.

And each one had a good mantle
Of striped cloth and red.
They all came to good Robin
And listened to what he said.

They made the monk wash up
And sat him down to dinner.
Robin Hood and Little John,
They both served him together.

"Eat up, monk," said Robin.
"Thank you, sir," said he.
"Where is your abbey when you are at home,
And who is your patron saint?"

"Saint Mary's Abbey," said the monk,
"Though I don't have much power."
"In what office?" said Robin.
"Sir, the high steward."

"So much the better," said Robin.
"You're the man I wanted to see.
Pour out the best wine," said Robin.
"This monk shall drink to me."

"But it sure seems strange," said Robin,
"All this long day
I'm afraid Our Lady is mad at me,
She has not sent my pay."

"Have no doubt, master," said Little John,
"You don't need to worry.
This monk has brought it, I dare swear,
For he is from her abbey."

"And she was a sponsor," said Robin,
"Between a knight and me
Of a little money I loaned him
Under the greenwood tree."

"If you have brought that silver,
I pray thee, let me see,
And I will help you anytime"

If you have need of me."

The monk swore a full great oath
With a sorry face.

"The arrangement that you're talking about,
I never knew it took place."

"I make my vow to God," said Robin,
"Monk, you are to blame.
For God is always an honest Man,
And so is his Dame.

"You told me with your own tongue,
You may not say nay,
How you are Her servant
And serve Her everyday.

"And you've been made Her messenger
My money for to pay.
Therefore, I thank you all the more,
You've come on your day.

"What is in your trunks?" said Robin,
"Now tell me the truth."
"Sir," he said, "twenty marks.
I wouldn't lie to you"

"If there be no more," said Robin,
"I will not touch a penny,
And if you have need of any more,
More shall I lend thee.

"But if I find more," said Robin,
"Truly, it shall be gone.
For of thy spending silver, monk,
I will leave thee none.

"Go forth now, Little John,
And bring the truth to me.
If there be no more than twenty marks,
Not a penny will I see."

Little John spread his mantle down
As he had done before,
And he counted out of the monk's trunk
Eight hundred pounds and more.

Little John let it lie full still

And went to his master in haste.
"Sir," he said, "the monk is true enough.
Our Lady had doubled your pay."

"I make my vow to God," said Robin,
"Monk, what did I tell you?
Our Lady is the truest Woman
That I ever knew.

"By dear worthy God," said Robin,
"To search all England over,
Yet I never found for my money
A much better sponsor.

"Pour out the best wine and let him drink," said
Robin,
"And thank Our Lady, men.
If She ever has need of Robin Hood,
She will find in him a friend.

"And if She needs anymore silver,
Just come again to me,
And by this token She has sent
She shall have it free."

The monk was going to London
There to hold his court,
To bring that knight under foot
That rode so high on horse.

"Where are you going?" said Robin.
"Sir, to the court of this land,
To reckon with our bailiffs.
They're doing it wrong again."

"Come forth now, Little John,
And listen to this monk.
I don't know anyone better than you
To search a monk's trunk.

"How much is in that other trunk?" said Robin.
"The truth we must see."
"By Our Lady," said the monk,
"You're not very courteous to me.

"To ask a man to dinner
And then to rob him blind."
"It is our manner," said Robin,

"To leave but little behind."

The monk took to his horse with spur,
No longer would he stay.

"Ask us for a drink," said Robin,
"Before you ride away."

"Nay, for God," then said the monk.
"I'm sorry I came so near.
I might have eaten cheaper
At Blythe or Duncaster."

"Tell your abbot hello," said Robin,
"And your prior, too, I pray.
And ask them to send me such a monk
To dinner everyday."

Now we'll let that monk be still
And see about that knight.
He came to hold his day
While it was still light.

He went straight to the meeting place
Under the greenwood tree,
And there he found Robin Hood
And all his merry company.

The knight lit down off his good horse
When Robin he did see.
So courteously he took off his hood
And got down on his knee.

"God save you, Robin Hood,
And all this company."
"Welcome, gentle knight,
Right welcome are ye to me."

Then said Robin Hood
To that knight so free,
"What need drove you to the greenwood?
I pray, sir knight, tell me."

And "Welcome back, gentle knight.
Why were you gone so long?"
"Because the abbot and the high justice
Would have done me wrong."

"Do you have your land again?" said Robin.

"Now tell me the truth."

"Yes, for God," said the knight,
"Thanks to God and you."

"But don't worry," said the knight,
"That I've been gone so long.
I helped a yeoman at a wrestling match.
The crowd would have done him wrong."

"Nay, for God," said Robin. "Sir knight,
For that, my thanks to thee.
The man that helps a good yeoman,
His friend will I be."

"Here, have four hundred pounds," then said
the knight,
"The which ye lent to me.
And here is also twenty marks,
For your courtesy."

"Nay, for God," then said Robin.
"You spend it some other way.
For Our Lady, by Her high steward,
Has already sent my pay."

"And if I took it twice,
A shame it were to me.
But truly, gentle knight,
You're a welcome sight to see."

When Robin had told his tale,
He laughed and had good cheer.
"By my faith," then said the knight,
"Your money is ready here."

"Spend it well," said Robin,
"You gentle knight so free.
And welcome be ye anytime
Under my greenwood tree."

"But what are these bows for?" said Robin.
"And these arrows feathered free?"
"For God," then said the knight,
"A poor present to thee."

"Come forth now, Little John,
And go to my treasure
And bring me four hundred pounds."

The monk has over-measured.

"Here, have four hundred pounds,
Thou gentle knight and true.
And buy a good horse and saddle
And gilt your spurs anew.

"And if you need any spending money,
Come to Robin Hood,
And by my faith, you shall not lack
While I have any goods.

"And spend well your four hundred pounds
Which I lent to thee.
And don't go around so bare,
Just between you and me."

Thus good Robin helped the knight
Out of all his care.
God that sits in Heaven high,
Grant us well to fare.

The Fifth Fit

Now the knight has said goodbye
And gone along his way.
Robin Hood and his merry men
Lived there many a day.

Stay and listen, everyone,
And pay attention to what I say,
How the proud sheriff of Nottingham
Called for a day of play.

That all the best archers of the north
Should come on a certain day,
And he that shoots the best
Shall bear the prize away.

He that shoots the best,
The furthest and the truest,
At a pair of good targets
Under the greenwood forest,

A right good arrow he shall have,
The shaft of white silver,
The head and feathers of rich red gold,

In England there is none finer.

Then good Robin heard about this
Under his greenwood tree.
"Get ye ready, my strong young men,
That shooting I will see.

"Come on, my merry young men.
You shall all go, too.
And I will test the sheriff's faith
And see if he is true."

When they had their bows strung
And their arrows feathered free,
Seven score of strong young men
Stood by Robin's knee.

When they came to Nottingham
The targets were good and long.
Many a bold archer was there
Whose bow was good and strong.

"Six of you shoot with me,
The others keep us covered,
And stand with good bows strung
In case we are discovered."

The fourth outlaw bent his bow,
And that was Robin Hood.
And the proud sheriff saw it all
As by the target he stood.

Three times Robin shot about,
And each time he slit the wand.
And so did good Gilbert
With the white hand.

Little John and good Scarlett
Were archers of the best.
Little Much and good Reynold
Were better than the rest.

When they had shot about,
These archers fair and good,
Every time the best one,
Indeed, was Robin Hood.

He was given the good arrow

For the worthiest was he.
He took the gift so courteously,
He would go to the greenwood tree.

They cried out on Robin Hood
And great horns began to blow.
"Woe to you, Treason," said Robin.
"Full evil are you to know.

"And woe to you, you proud sheriff,
Thus to have your jest.
You promised me differently
Back in the wild forest.

"But if I had you in the greenwood
Under my greenwood tree,
You would leave me a better pledge
Than your true loyalty."

Full many a bow there was bent
And arrows they let glide.
Many a jacket there was rent
And hurt many a side.

The outlaws' shot was so strong
No man could drive them off.
And the proud sheriff's men,
They fled away like chaff.

If Robin had known about this ambush,
In the greenwood he would be.
Many an arrow there was shot
Among that company.

Little John was hurt full sore
With an arrow through his knee.
That he could neither walk nor ride
Was a great pity to see.

"Master," then said Little John,
"If you ever loved me,
And for that same Lord's sake
That died upon a tree,

"And for all the good service
I gave you everyday,
Don't let the proud sheriff

Find me alive this way.

"But take out your bright sword
And cut off my head
And give me wounds deep and wide
And leave me here dead."

"I don't want that," said Robin,
"John, to have you slain.
Not for all the gold in merry England,
Though here in a pile it lay."

"God forbid," said little Much,
"That died on a tree,
That you, Little John,
Should part our company."

He took him up on his back
And carried him over a mile.
Many a time he laid him down
And shot a little while.

Then there was a fair castle
A little ways in the woods,
Double-ditched all about
And walled by the road.

And there lived that gentle knight,
Sir Richard at the Lea,
That Robin had lent his goods
Under the greenwood tree.

He took good Robin in
And all his company.
"Welcome, Robin Hood.
You're welcome here to me.

"And I want to thank you for your comfort
And for your courtesy
And for your great kindness
Under the greenwood tree.

"I love no man in all the world
So much as I do thee.
For all the proud sheriff of Nottingham,
Right here you shall be.

"Shut the gates and draw the bridge

And let no man come in.
And arm ye well and make ye ready
And to the walls ye win.

"For one thing, Robin, I promised you,
I swear by Saint Quentin.
For forty days you'll stay with me,
Eating and drinking."

Boards were laid and cloths were spread,
As quick as they could do it.
Robin Hood and his merry men
Have all fallen to it.

The Sixth Fit

Stay and listen, everybody,
And enjoy your song,
How the proud sheriff of Nottingham
Gathered an army strong.

Quickly came the high sheriff
Routing up the country,
And they attacked the knight's walls
All around his castle.

The proud sheriff loudly called,
"Knight, you're a traitor.
You're keeping the king's enemy here
Against the law and order."

"Sir, the deed that here was done,
I did it, you are right,
By all the land that I have,
As I am a true knight.

"Keep traveling, sirs, on your way
And do no more to me
Til you know our king's will
And what he will say to thee."

The sheriff had his answer.
Without slowing down,
Fourth he went to tell the king
Down in London town.

There he told him of that knight
And of Robin Hood

And also of the bold archers
That were so noble and good.

"He vows that he has done all this
To help the outlaw band.
He will be lord and set you at naught
In all the northern land."

"I will be at Nottingham," said the king,
"Within fourteen nights,
And I will take this Robin Hood,
And I will take that knight.

"Go home now, sheriff," said the king,
"And do as I bid thee,
And call in all the good archers
From all the wide country."

The sheriff has taken his leave
And gone along his way.
Robin Hood went back to the woods
Upon a certain day.

And Little John was healed of the arrow
That was shot in his knee,
And he went straight to Robin Hood
Under the greenwood tree.

Robin Hood walked in the forest
Under the green leaves.
The proud sheriff of Nottingham
Was stewing in his grief.

The sheriff had failed with Robin Hood.
He could not have his prey,
So he waited for this gentle knight
Both by night and day.

He waited for this gentle knight
By the riverside,
As Sir Richard went out hawking
And let his hawks fly.

There he took this gentle knight
With his armed band
And led him back to Nottingham
Bound foot and hand.

The sheriff swore a full great oath,
By Him that died on wood,
More than a hundred pounds
He wanted Robin Hood.

The knight's wife heard about this,
A lady fair and free.
She set herself on a good horse
And rode to the greenwood tree.

When she rode into the forest,
Into the greenwood glen,
There she found Robin Hood
And his fair men.

"God save thee, good Robin,
And all thy company.
For Our Dear Lady's sake
I ask a favor of thee.

"Don't let my wedded lord
Be shamefully slain, I pray.
He is bound fast to Nottingham
For the love of you this day."

Right away good Robin said
To that lady so free,
"What man has taken your lord away?"
"The high sheriff," said she.

"The high sheriff and all his men,
The truth as I here say.
He is not yet three miles
Passed along his way."

Then good Robin started up,
He didn't care what it cost.
"Get you ready, my merry men,
By Him that died on a cross.

"Whoever forsakes this sorrow,
By Him that died on a tree,
No longer in the greenwood
Will he ever dwell with me."

Soon there were good bows strung,
More than a hundred and forty.
Hedge nor ditch spared they none,

And everyone got dirty.

"I make my vow to God," said Robin,
"I'd like to see the sheriff now.
And if I could take him,
I would square the old account."

And when they came to Nottingham
They walked in the street.
And the proud sheriff, truly,
Soon they came to meet.

"Wait, you proud sheriff," he said,
"Stop and speak with me.
Of some tidings from our king
I'd love to hear from thee.

"For seven years, by dear worthy God,
I haven't gone this fast on foot.
I make my vow to God, you proud sheriff,
It is not for thy good."

Robin bent a full good bow,
An arrow he drove at will.
It hit the proud sheriff so,
On the ground he lay full still.

And before he could get up
Or rise upon his feet,
He cut off the sheriff's head
Right there in the street.

"Lie there, proud sheriff.
Evil, meet thy death.
No man could trust you
While you drew breath."

His men drew out their bright swords
That were so sharp and keen
And laid on the sheriff's men
And drove them down the street.

Robin started for that knight
And cut his bonds in two
And put a bow in his hand
And told him what to do.

"Leave your horse behind you

And learn how to run.
You shall come with me to the greenwood
Through mire, moss and fern.

"You shall come with me to the greenwood
Without slowing down,
Til I have got us the grace of the king
Down in London town."

The Seventh Fit

The king has come to Nottingham
With knights in great array
To take that gentle knight
And Robin Hood, if he may.

He asked men of that country
About Robin Hood
And about that gentle knight
That was so bold and good.

When they had told the king the case,
He began to understand
And seized in his hand
All that knight's land.

Throughout the pass of Lancashire
He went both far and near,
All the way to Plomton Park.
He missed many of his deer.

There the king was used to seeing
Herds with many a hart.
He couldn't find one deer
Whose horns were worth a fart.

The king was plenty mad at this
And swore by God on high,
"I'd like to see this Robin Hood
With my own two eyes.

"Whoever cuts off the knight's head
And brings it here to me,
He shall have the knight's land,
Sir Richard at the Lea.

"I give it to him with my charter
And seal it with my hand,

To have and hold for evermore
In all merry England."

Then spoke up a fair old knight
That was true in his faith,
"Ah, my liege lord the king,
One word to you I'll say.

"There is no man in this country
That can hold the knight's land
While Robin Hood can ride or walk
And hold a bow in his hand.

"Unless you want him to lose his head,
The best ball in his hood,
Don't give it to any man, my lord the king,
To whom you wish any good."

Half a year the comely king
Stayed in Nottingham town,
Hoping to hear of Robin Hood
And trying to track him down.

But always good Robin went
By hollow and by hill,
And always slew the king's deer
And disposed of them at will.

Then spoke up a proud forester
That stood by the king's knee,
"If you want to see good Robin,
You must come with me.

"Take five of the best knights
That are under your control
And walk down by that abbey
And get some monks' robes.

"And I will be your lead man
And lead you on your way,
And before you come to Nottingham,
My head I dare here lay,

"You shall meet with good Robin,
If he is still alive.
Before you come to Nottingham
You'll see him with your eyes."

Quickly then the king got ready,
And so did his five knights.
Each of them in monks' clothes,
They left that very night.

The king looked distinguished in his cowl.
With a broad hat on his crown,
As if he were an abbot,
They rode up into the town.

Stiff boots the king had on
On that pleasant day.
He rode singing to the greenwood.
The convent was clothed in grey.

His trunks and his great packhorse
Followed behind the king
Til they came to the greenwood,
A mile beyond the spring.

There they met with good Robin
Standing in the way,
And so was many a bold archer
On that pleasant day.

Robin took the king's horse.
He grabbed him by the rein,
And said, "Sir abbot, by your leave,
Awhile ye must remain.

"We be yeomen of this forest,
Under the greenwood tree.
We live by our king's deer,
No other shift have we.

"And you have churches and rents both,
And gold in great plenty.
Give us some of your spending money,
For saints' charity."

Then said our comely king,
Right away said he,
"I brought no more to the greenwood
But forty pounds with me.

"I have been at Nottingham
With our king for fourteen nights
And spent a lot of money there

On many a lord and knight.

"And I have but forty pounds,
No more you'll find on me,
But if I had a hundred pounds
I would trust it all with thee."

Robin took the forty pounds
And divided it in two.
Half he gave to his merry men
To do as they would do.

Full courteously Robin said, "Sir,
Have this for your spending.
We shall meet another day."
"Thank you," said the comely king.

"But our king sends you his greetings
And wants you to have his seal
And bids you come to Nottingham,
Both to meat and ale."

He took out the royal charter,
And soon he let him see.
Robin showed his courtesy
And got down on his knee.

"I love no man in all the world
So well as I do my king.
Welcome is my lord's seal,
And monk, for thy tiding,

"Sir abbot, for your good news,
Today you shall dine with me
For the love of my king,
Under my greenwood tree."

Forth he led the comely king
To where the food was shared.
Many a deer there was slain
And full fast prepared.

Robin took a full great horn
And loudly he did blow.
Seven score of strong young men
Came ready on a row.

All kneeled down on their knee

Right there in front of Robin.
The king was beside himself
And swore to Saint Austin.

"Here is a wondrously befitting sight,
Me thinketh, by God's pine.
His men are more at his bidding
Than my men are at mine."

Right away their dinner was served,
And that's where they have gone.
They served the king with all their might,
Both Robin and Little John.

Soon before the king was set
The fatted venison,
The good white bread, the good red wine,
And the ale fine and brown.

"Enjoy yourself," said Robin,
"Abbot, for charity,
And for this good news you have brought,
Blessed may ye be.

"Now you shall see what life we lead
Before you leave our glen,
So you can inform our king
When you're together again."

Up they started, all in haste,
Their bows were smartly bent.
The king was never so sore aghast,
He feared he might get rent.

Two targets there were set up,
And it's there that they have gone.
"By fifty paces," the king said,
"The distance is too long."

On either side, a rose garland
They shot at under the trees.
"Whoever misses the garland," said Robin,
"Shall bring his arrow to me.

"And give it to his master,
Be it ever so fine,
For no man will I spare

As I drink ale or wine,

"And bear a blow on his bare head
As hard as I can swing."
And all that fell in Robin's lot,
He let them feel his sting.

Twice Robin shot about,
Each time he split the wand.
And so did good Gilbert
With the white hand.

Little John and good Scarlett,
No one was spared,
When they missed the garland
The blow they had to bear.

At the last shot that Robin shot
For all his friends so fair,
He missed the rose garland
Three fingers and more.

Then spoke up good Gilbert,
To Robin he did say,
"Master," he said, "your arrow is lost.
Stand forth and take your pay."

"If it be so," said Robin,
"It may no better be.
Sir abbot, I deliver thee my arrow.
I pray thee, sir, serve me."

"It falleth not to my order," said the king,
"Robin, by your leave,
To smite any good yeoman
For fear I should make him grieve."

"Smite on boldly," said Robin.
"I give thee larger leave."
Right away the king, with that one word,
Folded up his sleeve.

And such a blow he gave Robin,
He almost knocked him down.
"I make my vow to God," said Robin,
"You are a stalwart friar.
"There is pith in thy arm," said Robin.
"I bet you can shoot pretty good."

Thus the king and Robin Hood
Met there in the woods.

Robin looked the comely king
Thoughtfully in the face,
And so did Richard at the Lea,
And kneeled down in that place.

And so did all the wild outlaws
When they saw them kneel.
"My lord, the king of England.
Now I know you well."

"Thank you, Robin," said the king,
"Under your greenwood tree,
For your goodness and your grace
Towards my men and me."

"Yes, for God," said Robin,
"And also God save me.
I ask mercy, my lord the king,
For my men and me."

"Yes, for God," then said the king,
"To that I will agree,
If you will leave the greenwood
With all your company
"And come home, sir, to my court
And there dwell with me."
"I make my vow to God," said Robin,
"Indeed, so shall it be.

"I will come to your court,
Your service for to see,
And bring with me of my men
Seven score and three.

"But if I don't like your service
I will come again full soon
And shoot at the dunny deer,
As I have always done."

The Eighth Fit

"Have you any green cloth," said the king,
"That you will sell to me?"
"Yes, for God," said Robin,

"Thirty yards and three."

"Robin," said the king,
"Now I ask of thee,
Sell me some of that cloth
For my men and me."

"Yes, for God," then said Robin,
"Or else I were a fool.
Another day ye will me clothe,
I trust, against the yule."

The king cast off his cowl then,
A green garment he put on.
And every knight, also,
Got a new green robe.

When they were clothed in Lincoln green
They cast away their grey.
"Now we shall go to Nottingham,"
Thus the king did say.

They strung their bows and forth they went,
Shooting side by side.
Towards the town of Nottingham
Like outlaws they did ride.

The king and Robin rode together
On that pleasant day,
And they traded blows whenever they missed
As they went by the way.

And many a blow the king won
Off Robin Hood that day,
And Robin never spared himself
To give the king his pay.

"So help me, God," said the king,
"I've learned this game right here.
I should not get the best of you
Though I shoot all this year."

All the people of Nottingham,
They stood and beheld.
They saw nothing but mantles of green
That covered all the field.

Then every man to the other did say,

"I fear our king is killed!"
"Robin Hood is coming to town!"
"He never left anyone alive!"

Full hastily they began to flee,
Yeomen, knaves, and merchants,
And old wives that could barely go,
They hopped on their crutches.

The king laughed heartily
And commanded them again.
When they saw the comely king,
Indeed, they were glad it was him.

They ate and drank and made them glad
And sang with notes of glee.
Then spoke the comely king
To Sir Richard at the Lea.

He gave him back his land again,
A good man he bid him be.
Robin thanked the comely king
And got down on his knee.

Robin had dwelled in the king's court
But twelve months and three,
And he had spent a hundred pounds
And all his men's fee.

In every place where Robin came,
The money he laid down
Both for knights and for squires,
To get him great renown.

By the time the year was spent
He only had two men --
Little John and good Scarlett.
All the rest had gone.

Robin saw the young men shoot
Full fair upon a day.
"Alas," then said good Robin,
"My wealth has slipped away.

"Once I was a good archer,
A stiff one and a strong one.
I was counted the best archer

That was in merry England.

"Alas," then said good Robin,
"Alas, and God help me.
If I dwell any longer with the king,
Sorrow will kill me."

Forth then went Robin Hood
Til he came to the king.
"My lord, the king of England,
Grant me this one thing.

"I made a chapel in the greenwood
That beautiful is to see.
It is of Mary Magdeline,
And there I long to be.

"I can never in these seven nights
Have time to sleep a wink,
Nor in all these seven days
Have either eat nor drink.

"I'm longing sore for Bernsdale,
I miss the greenwood so,
Barefoot, with wool against my skin,
I promised I would go."

"If it be so," then said the king,
"It may no better be.
Seven nights and no longer
I give thee leave of me."

"Thank you, lord," then said Robin
And got down on his knee.
He took his leave full courteously,
To the greenwood then went he.

When he came to the greenwood,
On a merry morning,
He heard the small notes
Of birds' merry singing.

"It's been a long time," said Robin,
"Since I was last here.
I'd like a little while to shoot
At the dunny deer."

Robin slew a full great hart.

His horn he then did blow,
For all the outlaws of that forest,
His horn they would know.

And they gathered themselves together
In a little throw.
Seven score of strong young men
Came ready on a row.

And they took off their hoods
And got down on their knee.
"Welcome," they said, "our dear master,
Under this greenwood tree."

Robin dwelled in the greenwood
Two and twenty years.
For all the dread of the king
He wouldn't go back there.

Yet he was beguiled, indeed,
Through a wicked woman's sin --
The prioress of Kirksley
That was not of his kin.

For the love of a knight,
Sir Roger of Duncaster
That was her own special --
In evil they met together.

They took together their counsel
Robin Hood for to slay,
And how they best might do that deed
And murder him that day.

Then said good Robin
In the place where he stood,
"Tomorrow I must to Kirksley
To be letting my blood."

Sir Roger of Duncaster,
By the prioress he lay,
And there they betrayed good Robin Hood
Through their false play.

Christ that died on the cross,
Have mercy on Robin Hood,
For he was a brave outlaw

And did poor men much good.

Here Endeth this Little Geste of Robin Hood.

Colophon: This ballad, originally published anonymously in Middle English, in the 16th century, was rendered into this version of contemporary English by Robert Landis Frank, in the year of Our Lord, 1974, in Oakland, California, across the street from Bushrod Park.

Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne

Translation by Jalen Thompson

The only surviving copy of this ballad comes from a collection of Robin Hood ballads compiled in the mid seventeenth century. Although the ballad is obviously older than the collection, there is no consensus on the age of this ballad.

A manuscript of a play with a similar plot was discovered from about AD 1475. Some scholars believe that this play was based on the ballad, thus implying it was written sometime before then.

Although nothing can be confirmed, scholars generally agree that this is one of the earlier ballads.

When the summer sun shines bright,
And the leaves on the trees are both large and long,
It is merry when walking in the fair forest,
To hear the small birds song.
The woodwall sang, and would not cease,
Among the leaves of the lime tree.
“And it is by two sturdy yeomen,
By dear God, that I mean.

“I dreamt that they beat and bound
And took my bow from me;
As long as I am alive and named Robin Hood,
I’ll get my revenge on both of these men!”

“Dreams are fleeting, master,” said John,
“As the wind that blows over a hill,
For it never be so loud this night,
Tomorrow it maybe still.”

Robin said, “Prepare you, get ready, my merry men all,
For John shall go with me,
For I’ll go seek yonder a study yeoman
In greenwood where he may be.”

They put on their green gowns,
And walked into the forest,
Until they come to the merry greenwood,
Where they were glad to be;
They saw a sturdy yeomen
With his body leaned on a tree.
The sword and a dagger he wore by his side,
Had been many a man’s murderer,
And he was clad in his horse-skin,
Top and tail and maine.

“Stand still, master,” said Little John,
“Under this trusty tree,
And I will go to the sturdy yeoman,
To know his meaning truly.”

“John, to me you have no chance,
And that’s an amazing thing;
How often have I sent my men before me,
And let myself stand behind?

“It takes no skill to know a knave,
And a man but hear him speak;
And if it were not for damaging my bow,
John, I would break your head.”

It was words that caused anger
That parted Robin and John;
John is gone to Barnsdale,
Where he knows the way.

And when he came to Barnsdale,
Great heaviness he had;
He found two of his own fellows
Were both in a forest glade,

And Scarlet was on foot flying
Over stumps and stone,
For the sheriff with seven score of men
Who was fast after him was gone.

“Yet one shot I’ll shoot,” says Little John,
“With Christ his might and mine;
I’ll make the fellow yonder that flies so fast
To be both glad and happy.”

John bent up a good bow,

And prepared to shoot;
The bow was made of a tender bow,
And fell down to his foot.

"Misery come to you, wicked wood," said Little John,
"That never you grew on a tree!
For this day has caused me trouble,
When I should be helped!"

This shot was let out inaccurately,
The arrow flew in vain,
And it met one of the sheriff's men;
Good William of Trent was slaine

It had been better for William of Trent
To hang upon a gallow
Then for to lie in the greenwood,
There slain with an arrow.

And it is said, when men meet,
Six can do more than three:
And they had firmly Little John,
And bound him fast to a tree.

"You shall be dragged by a horse,"
Said the sheriff,
And hanged high on a hill."
"But you may fail," said Little John,
"If it be Christ's own will."

But let us leave Little John,
For he is bound fast to a tree,
And talk of Guy and Robin Hood,
In the greenwood where they be.

How these two yeomen they meet,
Under the leaves of a tree,
To see what business they mean
Even at that same time.

"Good morrow, good fellow," said Sir Guy;
"Good morrow, good fellow," said Robin,
"I think that by that bow you bear in your hand,
You seem to be a good archer."

"I am uncertain of my way," said Sir Guy,
"And of my morning time."

"I'll lead you through the wood," said Robin,
"Good fellow, I'll be your guide."

"I seek an outlaw," said Sir Guy,
"Men call him Robin Hood;
I need to find him,
So that I can receive my payment."

"If you two met, it would be seen who was better,
But before you did go;
Let's find some other pastime,
Good fellow, I pray.

"Let us prove our archery skills,
And we will walk in the woods even;
We may by chance meet with Robin Hood
At some unexpected occasion."

They cut down some some bushes
Which grew both under a briar,
And set them 315 yards apart,
To shoot the prickes full near.

"Lead on, good fellow," said Sir Guy,
"Lead on, I do bid you."
"Ay, by my faith," said Robin Hood,
"I shall go first."

The first good shot that Robin led
Did not shoot an inch near the center of the target;
Guy was a good enough archer,
But he could not shoot near that shot.

Next, Sir Guy shot,
He shot within the garland;
But Robin Hood shot it better than him,
For he clove the good prick-wand.

"God's blessing on your heart!" said Guy,
"Good fellow, your shooting is good,
For if your heart be as good as your hand,
You'd be better than Robin Hood.

"Tell me your name, good fellow," said Guy,
"Under the leaves of this tree."
"I will, by my faith," said Robin,

“Until you have told me yours.”

“I dwell by dale and down,” said Guy,
“And I have done many a cursed deed;
And he that calls me by my right name
Calls me Guy of Good Gisborne.”

“My dwelling is in the wood,” says Robin,
“As I stand in front of you now,
My name is Robin Hood of Barnesdale,
The fellow you have long sought.”

He that had neither been friend or relatives
Might have seen a full fair sight,
To see how together these men went,
With blades both stained with blood.

To have seen how these men fought together,
Two hours of a summer’s day;
It was neither Guy nor Robin Hood
That prepared to fly away.

Robin did not notice a root beneath him,
And stumbled on it,
And Guy was quick and nimble
And hit him on the left side.

“Ah, dear Lady!” said Robin Hood,
“You are both mother and maiden!
It was never man’s destiny
To die before his day.”

Robin thought on Our Dear Lady,
And soon leapt up again,
And thus came with an awkward backhanded
stroke;
And Good Sir Guy was slain.

He took Sir Guy’s head by the hair,
And stuck it on the end of his bow:
“You have been a traitor all your life,
And that must have an end.”

Robin pulled forth an Irish knife,
And nicked Sir Guy in the face,
So that no one
Could tell who sir Guy was.

He said, “Lie there, lie there, good Sir Guy,
And do not be angry with me;
If you have had the worse strokes at my hand,
You should have the better clothes.”

Robin took off his green gown,
And threw it over Guy’s body;
And he put on Guy’s horse-skin,
That clad him top to toe.

“The bow, the arrows, and little horn,
And with me now I’ll bear;
For now I will go to Barnesdale,
To see how my men are doing.”

Robin put Guy’s horn to his mouth,
And let out a loud blow
That the sheriff of Nottingham heard,
As he stood under a hill.

“I heard yonder Sir Guy’s horn,
It blew so well in time,
For yonder come that sturdy yeomen,
Clad in his horse-skin.

“Come here, you good Sir Guy,
Ask of me what you will have.”
“I’ll have none of your gold,” says Robin Hood,
“Nor I’ll none of it have.

“But now I have slaine the master,” he said,
“Let me go strike the servant;
This is all the reward I ask,
Nor no other will I have.”

“You are a madman,” said the sheriff,
“You should have had a knight’s fee;
But seeing that you are adamant on striking the
servant
It shall be granted.

But Little John heard his master speak,
He knew well that was his voice;
“Now I shall be set loose,” said Little John,
“With Christ’s might in heaven.”

Robin quickly went to Little John,
He thought he would cut him loose at once,

But the sheriff and all his company
Soon came upon the scene.

“Stand back! Stand back!” said Robin;
“Why draw me so near?
It was never the use in our country
One’s confession another should hear.”

But Robin pulled forth an Irish knife,
And cut John loose from the tree,
And gave him Sir Guy’s bow in his hand,
And told him to use it.

John took Guy’s bow in his hand
His arrows were rusty with blood at their tips
The sheriff saw Little John draw a bow
And that he was prepared to shoot him.

Towards his house in Nottingham
He fled full fast away,
And so did all his company,
Not one stayed behind.
But the sheriff could not get away
Fast enough
For Little John, with an arrow broad,
Did shoot his heart in two.

Robin and Gandeley

The only surviving copy of this ballad comes from a repository of songs and carols dated around AD 1450. Unfortunately, there is no further clues to date this work.

Robin lies in [the] green wood bound.

1. I heard a song of a clerk
All at yon wood's end,
Of good Robin and Gandelyn
There was no other subject.
Robin lies in [the] green wood bound.

2. Active thieves those young men were not,
But bowmen good and noble;
They went to the wood to get some meat
If God would send it to them.

3. All day those two young men travelled
And meat found they none.
Until it was close to evening;
The young men wanted to go home.

4. Half a hundred of fallow deer
They came upon,
And all of them were fair and fat, I know,
But none of them were marked;
"By dear God," said good [Robin],
"Of these we shall have one."

5. Robin set his jolly bow,
Therein he set an arrow;
The fattest deer of all,
Its heart he cleft in two.

6. He had not flayed the deer
Not half out of its hide
[Before] there came an arrow out of the west
That felled Robert's pride.

7. Gandelyn looked east and west,
To every side,
"Who has my master slain?
Who has done this deed?"

I shall never from the greenwood go
Until I see his sides bleed.

8. Gandelyn looked east and looked west
And searched under the sun;
He saw a little boy,
He was named Wrennok of Donne.

9. A good bow in his hand,
A broad arrow therein,
And four and twenty good arrows
Bound up in a sheaf.
"You beware, you [be]ware, Gandelyn,
Or you'll get some of this.

10. "You beware, you [be]ware, Gandelyn,
You'll get plenty of this."
"I'm up for another [contest]," said Gandelyn;
"Misadventure to the one who flees!"

11. "Where shall our target be?"
Said Gandelyn.
"Each at the other's heart!"
Said Wrennock again.

12. "Who shall fire the first shot?"
Said Gandelyn.
"And I shall fire before,"
Said Wrennock again.

13. Wrennock shot a very good shot,
And didn't shoot very high;
[It went] through the fork of his breeches;
It touched neither thigh.

14. "Now have you fired the first [shot at] me";
Thus to Wrennock he spoke.
"And through the power of Our Lady
A better shot I shall fire at you."

15. Gandelyn bent his good bow
And set therein an arrow;
He shot through his green kirtle;
His heart he cleft in two.

16. "Now you shall never boast, Wrennock,
At ale or at wife,
That you have slayne good Robin

And his knave Gandelyn.

17. "Now you shall never boast, Wrennock,
At wine or at ale,
That you have slain good Robin
And Gandelyn his knave."

Robin lies in [the] green wood bound.