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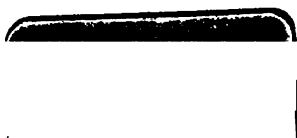
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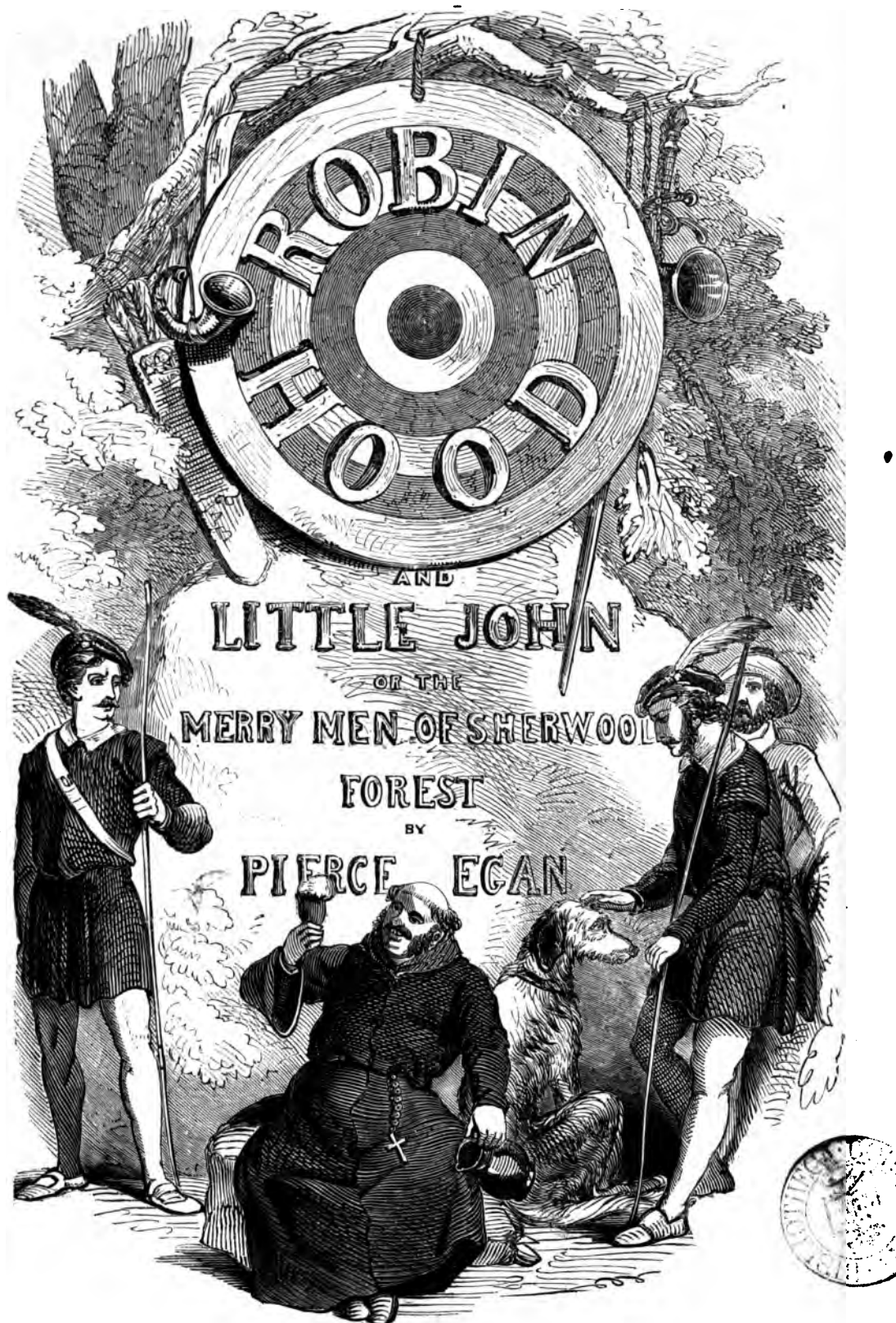
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Perceval



EDITOR OF "THE HOME CIRCLE," AND AUTHOR OF "WAT TYLER," "QUINTIN MATSYS,"
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AS

A SLIGHT TOKEN

OF ESTEEM AND GRATITUDE

FOR MANY KIND AND AFFECTIONATE SERVICES,

THE ACCOMPANYING HUMBLE PRODUCTION,

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TO

BENJAMIN WEBSTER, Esq.,

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BY

HIS HIGHLY OBLIGED AND ATTACHED FRIEND,

PIERCE EGAN.

OCTOBER, 1850.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS,

DRAWN EXPRESSLY FOR THIS WORK BY MR. W. H. THWAITES, AND ENGRAVED BY MR. JOHN WALL.

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P R E F A C E.

THE materials for a Life of ROBIN HOOD are but scanty; for, although his fame is universal, the existing details of his life are but few, and so surrounded by the mists and obscurity of age, that but little certain can be gathered. Many traditions have been handed down respecting him, bearing some stamp of authority if it be only in the fact that the feats narrated are within the bounds of credibility, while they illustrate the customs and manners of the period; yet, on the other hand, there are many which are quite beyond the pale of human belief, and must be discarded accordingly. Among his Biographers, some have contended for the nobility of his birth; others have repudiated it: the latter have labored hard to support the proofs they have advanced, but they have little foundation in fact, and, in truth, tend more to mystify than to enlighten the enquirer on this subject. The view taken by one writer on this question, though not original, is, perhaps, nearer the truth than any other speculation concerning the famous hero which has yet been formed. It is, that he was the last Saxon who made a positive stand against the dominancy of the Normans; that, in fact, his predatory attacks upon them were but the national efforts of one who endeavoured to remove the proud foot of a conqueror from the neck of his countrymen.

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

But this, though probable and feasible, is, after all, only a speculation; there is no positive evidence to prove it, although the collateral proofs are very powerful. His popularity among the common people was universal, and has come down to us as fresh and untarnished as it must have been in his own day. There is not an authority but has a good word for him. Fordun, a writer and a priest in the fourteenth century, calls him "*ille famosissimus siccarius*," that most celebrated robber. Major styles him "the most humane and the prince of all robbers." He was compared by the author of a curious Latin poem, dated *Julii* 1304, to WILLIAM WALLACE, the hero of Scotland. The renowned Camden speaks of him as "the gentlest of thieves." Shakspeare, in *As You Like It*, in his description of the Duke's mode of life, in allusion to its happiness, says "He is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him, and there they live like the OLD ROBIN HOOD of England * * * and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the Golden World." Drayton, a charming poet, in his *Polybion*, a work of extraordinary ability, thus characterises him:—

"What often times he took, he shared amongst the poor.
* * * * *

The widow in distress he graciously reliev'd,
And remedied the wrongs of many a virgin griev'd:
He from the husband's bed no married woman wan,
But to his mistress dear, his loved Marian,
Was ever constant known."

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

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

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

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

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

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



[THE AUTHOR'S OWN EDITION.]



AND
LITTLE JOHN:
Or, The Merry Men of Sherwood Forest.
BY
PIERCE EGAN THE YOUNGER.

Robin Hood

AND

LITTLE JOHN;

OR,

THE MERRY MEN OF SHERWOOD FOREST.

Book I.

"COME LITHE AND LYSTEN GENTLEMEN
THAT BEE OF FREEBORN BLOOD,
I SHALL TELL YE OF A GOOD YEMAN—
HYS NAME WAS ROBYN HODE."

Old Ballad

CHAPTER I.

"In silence then they took the way,
Beneath the forest's solitude.
It was a vast and antique wood,
Thro' which they took their way;
And the grey shades of evening,
O'er that green wilderness did fling
Still deeper solitude."—SHELLEY.

IN the year of Grace, 1161, during the reign of the second Henry, two travellers, travel-stained and mounted upon jaded steeds, wended their way through the intricacies of the vast forest of Shire Wood or Sherwood, situated in Nottinghamshire. It was an evening in March, chill and cold; the wind came in sharp fitful gusts, whistling now, and anon sighing through the young green leaves and old boughs of the huge trees. The sun was fast declining, and was setting with a wild aspect, deep red clouds clustered gloomily about him, and as he sunk behind the trees, long streams of grey mist rapidly uprose, giving dreary evidence of a stormy night.

The travellers were sufficiently weather-wise to recognise in these indications an imperious necessity for a speedy arrival at their journey's end, or, failing in that, to obtain the nearest shelter. One of them, who rode in advance, and appeared the superior, as well as the elder of the two, drew his mantle, in which he was enveloped, closer around him, and called to his companion to quicken his speed; the other obeyed the command with such right good will that he brought himself in a few minutes to a level with his fellow traveller; for a short time they continued their journey in silence, at length the elder traveller broke it by observing—

"The wind is increasing; I expect it will be a wild night—what think you, Ritson?"

"It looks threatening, my Lord," replied Ritson; "I would our steeds were not so miserably fagged, for it will be somewhat serious to be benighted in this forest."

"I trust you have no cause to expect an occurrence so unpleasant," returned his companion quickly; "I imagined our journey was nearly at its close; you are the guide—you have not lost your road, I hope?"

"Oh, no!" answered Ritson, "but if we do not make better progress before the sun sinks down and the storm comes up, I shall be likely to miss my road in the darkness: as it is, I have nothing but a quick

eye and an imperfect recollection to guide me. As yet we have journeyed in the right path, and with good steeds a short hour's ride would bring us to Head's Cottage."

"See if you cannot lash that lazy beast of thine into something like a pace," exclaimed his companion, spurring his horse sharply; "my steed, although tired, lags not as does thine."

Ritson complied with his master's request, and the tired beast, under the influence of whip and spur, cantered but wearily along. The wind had risen considerably; it howled and moaned like the wall of unquiet spirits; the sun had nearly vanished, and the darkness had increased apace, while the vast trees, which even in the broad daylight shed a sombre hue around, now added to the gloom, and made the twilight almost night; heavy drops of hail began to fall, and the indications of foul weather were being now rapidly realised.

"Are we near the dwelling of this yeoman yet?" asked the elder traveller.

"We are, my Lord, replied his man; "a quarter of an hour will bring us there."

"It is well," muttered the noble. "This man—this Head, is one on whom I may depend?"

"You may, my Lord; particularly when he believes the tale which your Lordship has coined so admirably," replied Ritson: "he is a rough, frank, honest fellow, who has not two ideas of one thing; he believes right ought to be might, and does his best to make it so—Wheugh! there was a blast," he cried, as a gust of wind of tremendous force came tearing through the forest, followed by a vivid flash of lightning and a loud clap of thunder.

"There it is, my Lord, there it is!" cried Ritson, with a joyful burst, when the long peal of thunder had ceased; "you see that light twinkling through the trees; that comes from Head's house; it's now eight years since I saw that glimmering light from this spot. Ah! many a merry night have I passed with Gilbert Head."

"You have the brat safe?" interrogated the Lord.

"I have, my Lord," was the reply: "he is fast asleep. I cannot see, my Lord, why you should take all this trouble; if this boy is in your way, the quietest and most certain way to remove him would be to give him two inches of cold steel; it is a good time now, it will not take me a minute, and your Lordship will thank me, and remember me in your will, for the deed."

"No, no," returned his Lordship, hurriedly; "although he is in my way, and did he reach man's estate, knowing his birthright, it would bring ruin on me, yet I would not imbrue my hands in his blood: no, 'tis better as it is. I shall rid myself of him without being guilty of so foul a crime as murder; and if he never becomes aware of his right of title to the earldom—and he never can unless you disclose it, which it shall be my peculiar care to prevent—brought up to a yeoman's life, he will never miss it; I shall enjoy that which I need, and he will not be the worse for losing that which he never needed."

"Be it as you will, my Lord," returned Ritson coolly; "but for my part, I think a brat's life not worth a journey from Huntingdonshire to Nottinghamshire. This is the house, my Lord," he concluded, as they arrived in front of a well-built cottage standing on the borders of the forest.

It was a welcome sight to both, for their journey had been a long and weary one. It was therefore with a feeling of satisfaction that both dismounted, and Ritson knocked loudly for admittance, accompanying his blows by a series of shouts, which would, he anticipated, gain for them instant ingress.

"What ho! neighbour Head; Goodman Head!" he roared. "Gilbert Head! a kinsman knocks; the blazing logs are on thy hearth, and the outside of thy door is to my front; a shelter—a shelter for the benighted!"

His appeal was answered by the deep-mouthed baying of hounds, who, on the instant he had struck the door, had rushed to it and poured forth a fierce clamour. A voice was soon heard quieting them, and then inquiring "Who knocks?"

"Thy kinsman, Roland Ritson," was the reply. "Open quickly, good Gilbert. I have a companion with me; we are wet to the skin; quick, quick!"

"What, Roland Ritson, of Mansfield?" asked the voice.

"Aye, aye, the same—at least I was of Mansfield," returned Ritson, impatiently. "You forget, good Gilbert, the rain is coming down in torrents; hear ye not the wind?"

"No, I do not forget that 'tis a rough night, neither forget I that you played me a scurvy trick at our last meeting, Master Roland," said the voice. "But as you have one with you, and the night is not over pleasant, why, my hospitality shall not be questioned; else beshrew me, but I would let you thump till your arm ached, and shout till you were hoarse, ere I would let door of mine fly back at your command." Saying which, the speaker unbound the door, and admitted the travellers.

"Give me thy hand, Gilbert," said Ritson, with an appearance of frank cordiality. "I acknowledge my offence, and am heartily ashamed of it; I freely ask thy pardon, and beg of thee to remember I was some eight years younger than I stand now before you, and that much wilder; besides, good Gilbert, you had your revenge of me."

"And so I had!" replied Gilbert, laughing, "it's ill sport to draw a shaft on a dead buck, and so there's my hand. A welcome to my humble roof, sir stranger," he added, turning to Ritson's companion. "Judge not harshly of my good will, that an oaken door stood some time between you and my hearth after you had asked for admittance; but some rude neighbours in the forest here, who would be hand-and-glove with whatever they can lay claw on, without consulting the inclination of the owner, make it needful to trust to bars and bolts for a security which is denied to a strong arm and stout heart, when opposed to numbers; and a difference between me and my kinsman there, which occurred some years since, made me

tardy in bidding ye welcome, which I now do heartily and truly. Ah! you have steeds with you; we must see to their comfort. Ho! Lincoln!" he shouted, and a stout serving man, in the garb of a forester, made his appearance; "here, lead these steeds to the shed, and see them well served," he cried. The man obeyed without uttering a word, or scarcely glancing at the new comers. Gilbert Head led the travellers to the fire, and a female about thirty, with pretty features, and altogether of a pleasing exterior, met them and bade them welcome. This was the wife of Gilbert Head, and Ritson's sister.

"Why, Margaret!" cried her brother, "eight years have not added much weight to thy brow; thy forehead is as clear and thine eye as bright as when Gilbert came a-wooing."

"I have been well and very happy," she replied, bestowing a glance of affection upon her husband, who returned it with a hearty kiss.

"You may say *we*, Maggie girl, for we have been very happy," cried the honest yeoman, his eyes dwelling upon the pleasing face of his wife with a look of intense satisfaction; "and thanks to thy sweet temper, there has been no sullen looks nor rough words to mar our peace. But come, kinsman, doff your cloak; and you, sir, the rain hangs upon thy cloth like dew on the leaves. Bustle, Margaret; make the fag-gots blaze; a hot supper shall soon drive out the cold which the rain has worked in."

The worthy couple moved themselves with a good will, and hastened to place materials for a hearty supper upon the table. While thus employed, Ritson took the opportunity of throwing his cloak from his shoulders, and discovered a sleeping child resting upon his arm, wrapped in a cloak of fine blue cloth; the face of the infant was of great beauty, round and well formed, and the clear skin, ruby lips, and red cheeks exhibited the appearance of extreme health. When Ritson had quite disengaged himself from his mantle, and disposed the child to as much advantage as circumstances would allow, he turned to his sister, and assuming a tone of voice which would best answer his purpose, said—

"Margaret, come hither, I have a present for thee; you shall not say that I returned after eight years' absence empty handed. See what I have brought thee."

"Holy Mary!" ejaculated the astonished Margaret as she saw the child, "a child! why, Roland, where got you this, is it thine? What an angel! oh, Gilbert, look at this sweet child."

"Why, what now?" exclaimed Gilbert Head, as he looked upon the child with almost as much amazement as his wife. "A sleeping babe! What, Roland, at your old tricks again, eh?—or have you turned nurse in your reformed state?—it's strange for you to be scouring the country on stormy nights with an infant in your arms. What's in the wind, lad? Out with it; I know thee, Roland. Now, I've seen this babe, I am well assured it was not a mere matter of being benighted that brought you hither. Out with it, Ritson, let's have the worst and best."

"You shall have all I know, in good truth," replied Roland. "This child is none of mine—nor of any one's, now; it is an orphan, but this friend of mine is the present owner; he knew the family and the whole story, which he shall tell you. But if you have Christian charity, you will spread the supper table and say 'sit ye down and eat and drink your fill, and to what there is ye are kindly welcome.' Here, Margaret, take the boy; my arm has been his cradle these two days—hours I mean—and my arm aches."

"The sweet innocent shall not stay thy stomach from its feast," said Margaret, taking the child from her brother's arms, while an expression of pleasure

passed over her features as she received him and gazed on the sweet calm features reposing in gentle slumber. She carried him gently up a flight of stairs which led from the room they were in to her bed room; she placed the sleeping infant upon the bed, and covering him with her own scarlet mantle which decorated her fair person when she went to mass or to holiday treats, returned to the room she had previously quitted. She found her husband bantering her brother and the stranger alternately, upon the possession of the child; which the former took in good part, but the latter rather stiffly, although he strove to conceal the dislike he felt to the honest yeoman's freedom of speech.

The supper passed away without an occurrence worthy of remark, and with little conversation, save a few questions from Gilbert and Margaret to her brother, which he saw fit to answer only as it would serve his present purpose. At length, when Gilbert began to entertain serious notions of retiring for the night, and to think in what way he could dispose of his guests to their satisfaction, the noble broke the silence which had reigned for a short time, by remarking to his host.—

"You were making some observations respecting the infant which your relative brought hither to-night and consigned to the custody of your wife. I am in a position to satisfy your curiosity, and as I have a proposition to make which will affect his future welfare, I wish to put you in possession of all matters connected with him.

"His father was a soldier, of good family, a most dear and intimate friend of mine, and a comrade in arms. We served for some time together in France under the present King Henry, in Normandy, Aquitaine, Poitou, and many other places, and again, a few years since, in Wales. While in Normandy, he contracted an intimacy with a young girl, a native of Auvergne; they were married; he brought her to England with him, but he could not acknowledge her as his wife, on account of the prejudices of his family, who were high, proud, and valued themselves upon their pure descent from a Saxon monarch. The poor girl died in giving birth to the child, and my friend lost his life, about ten months since, in the war on the frontiers of Normandy. I was by his side when he received his death wound, and his last thoughts were upon his child; he gave me the name and address of the female to whose charge he had committed it ere he quitted England, and begged me, by the remembrance of our old friendship, for his sake to foster and cherish it. I promised to do so; but, good yeoman, I am a rough soldier, without kith or kin, passing a chequered life in the camp and field. What, then, am I to do with a tender babe, e'en though I passed a soldier's word for its health and safety? In this strait I advised with thy kinsman, and he bethought him of thee; he said thou hadst a young wife, had no family of thine own, were trustworthy, honest folk, and would do kindly by the boy, if, on a promise of being well paid, you consented to take charge of him until he is of an age to follow me, should I be spared, to the field, and emulate the deeds of his brave sire. What say you, honest friend, shall it be as I wish? my pay and my share of spoil hath made my income good; I can spare a round sum from it yearly to pay for his keep. What say you, pretty dame, you will not say me nay to nurture a fair child, albeit it is none of thine?"

"A pretty plaything for thee, Margaret, by St. Peter! and pin money to boot; think of that, kinswoman," chimed in Roland Ritson.

Margaret looked at her husband, and he looked at her, but neither spoke.

"You hesitate," said the noble, a frown gathering on his brow; "my proposition likes you not."

"In good truth," said the yeoman quickly, "it likes me well, for since it hath not pleased the Holy Mother to grant us bantlings, I should be well pleased to fondle one, to bring him up to good thoughts and honest deeds, though he be not son of mine; but it rests with Maggie; if it likes her we will cry a bargain, sir stranger. What say you, girl?"

"I am well content the child stay with us, Gilbert; for, as this good soldier truly says, what should he do with a young and tender babe, being kinless and passing his life in the rough scenes of war? It is a sweet child, and pity indeed 'twould be that harm should come to it. Let him be as though he were our own, until you, sir, shall think it time he change a forest home for one of thy choosing."

"Our thoughts and wishes jump together in this, as they do in all things, dear Maggie," said her husband affectionately to her. Then turning to the traveller, he continued—"Well, sir soldier, it is a bargain; we keep the boy until he is of an age to give you no trouble, and when that time arrives you will see we have dealt honestly by him, to which I pledge my faith, and there's my glove on it," he concluded, drawing one of his gauntlets from his belt, and throwing it on the table.

"I accept the token," returned the traveller, taking up the glove, and giving one of his own in exchange. He then drew a small bag from a pocket in his doublet, adding, "Here is a sum in gold pieces, which each year I will transmit to you, be it at what quarter of the globe I may, for his support and clothing."

This proposition met with strong opposition on the part of the good yeoman, who stoutly refused to receive a fraction of it; but the friendly altercation was at length terminated by a proposal from Margaret to receive the sum and put it by each year, until the boy quitted them; it would then make a pretty purse to begin the world with. This was agreed to, a few arrangements were made and the parties separated for the night.

When Gilbert Head rose next morning, his first act was to visit the shed, to see that his visitors' steeds had met with good treatment. He found them well groomed, but still labouring under the effects of long and hard riding; they were noble steeds, of high breeding and excellent value. Gilbert Head possessed two horses, and it was with something like a smile he turned to compare these high-bred cattle with his own forest nags. To his surprise he missed them; they were absent from the stable, and as he knew none connected with his establishment (for he was a keeper of the forest) dare take either or both without his permission, as he kept them for his own especial riding, his mind misgave him that his guests had not stayed for leave-taking. He sought the chamber in which he led them to repose, and found it empty: they had gone ere day-break.

"There is something afloat that should not be," he muttered, "or they would not have left in this strange manner. At least they have not been dishonest, everything is as I left it; and so far from robbing me, they have given me a bag of gold, exchanged two blood horses for a pair of sturdy forest nags, but common brutes in comparison with those I have in exchange, and I have a pretty boy thrown into the bargain. No, no, 'tis no picking and stealing they have been after; there is something in which this child is concerned, of some particular importance, that has made them journey long and wearily to seek me out. Well, be it what it may, I will do my best by

* A custom of the time, being a species of guarantee of good faith.

the boy, and turn him out something like what a man should be, if wicked blood be not in his veins; and if it be, the fiend himself wouldn't make a stout yew bow out of a broken reed."

He returned to the room below, and found his wife seated by the fire nursing the little stranger. He communicated to her the unceremonious departure of their guests, and she, who had no very high opinion of her brother's principles, could give no explanation of their singular conduct; it served them for some speculative conversation.

"It is very odd," concluded Margaret, after a speech of some length, "that this stranger and my brother should have quitted the house without e'en letting us know where to find them, in case we need their presence, or even by what name we should call this little dear child."

"I have thought so too," answered Gilbert; "but since we know not whether he has had a name given to him by his godfathers and godmothers, we will even stand sponsors to him ourselves, and call him by the name of my dear brother whom I loved so well, he who died some years since, even Robert—Robyn, as I used to call him, Heaven rest his soul!"

And so the child was named Robyn Hood; or as in after times it became corrupted, ROBIN HOOD.

CHAPTER II.

"—See a youth of clene compacted lim,
Who, with a comely grace, in his left hand
Holding his bow, did take his steadfast stand,
Setting his left leg somewhat forth before,
His arrow with his right hand nocking sure,
Not stooping, nor yet standing straight upright,
Then with his left hand little 'bove his sight
Stretching his left arm out, with an easie strength
To draw an arrow of a yard in length."

RICHARD NICHOLS, 1616.

FIFTEEN years after the events related in the preceding chapter, upon a beautiful morning near the end of May, Gilbert Head rode through Sherwood Forest, with the purpose of visiting the pretty little village of Mansfeldwoodhaus, to obtain some articles for housekeeping. The morning was bright and clear; the trees were clothed in their new bright vestments of green; the grass, sparkling with dew, seemed spotted here and there with small flowers, like a mosaic pavement inlaid with millions of diamonds; the wild ivy clambered up the twisted trunks of the huge oaks, and the sweet flowers which grew in profusion followed them, caressing twiningly alike the ivy and the trees; singing birds thronged the oaks, the beech, the elms, and the heavens, making the air redolent with melody; ever and anon a buck, startled by the sound of the horse's footsteps, would start from its resting place, bound across the path, and in an instant be lost in some thicket which stood friendly near. Gilbert felt the influence of the bright morning upon him, and in the fulness of his lightheartedness contributed his share to the harmony which reigned around, by chanting portions of Saxon ballads, which it is to be regretted, from their quaint humour, have not been handed down to us; he was busily engaged in shouting forth one which told of the marvellous re-appearance of good King Harold, after his supposed death at the battle of Hastings, to William Rufus, at the moment he was shot in the New Forest by Sir Walter de Poix or Tyrrel, and how it was the Evil One, in the shape of a hart, who had caused the horrid catastrophe,

His bow-string had broken, the hart seem'd lame,
"Shoot, Walter, shoot! in the devil's name!"
He cried to the knight, who drew to the head
His shaft, loosed it, and the king fell dead.

At that instant an arrow whistled by his ear, and stood quivering in the trunk of an oak near him.

"And the king fell dead,"

he repeated in rather a startled tone; he drew up his nag; another moment, and a second arrow flew by him with no better aim. Close enough it was to make him start, for he felt the wind of it as it swept by his cheek; ere a third shaft could follow its predecessor, he dismounted, sprung behind an oak, and lost not a second in bending his bow, which he had kept unstrung, as he was upon a peaceful mission, and did not wish even a pleasant opportunity of sport to interfere with what he considered domestic duties. He drew an arrow from his quiver, and placing it to his bow, drew it ready to discharge the first moment he caught a glimpse of his unseen enemy. He looked earnestly in the direction from which the arrows had proceeded, but saw not the slightest appearance which could betoken the presence of aught human; his horse stood perfectly still, and he imagined that while there it remained it would be a kind of finger-post to indicate to his hidden foe where to send his arrows. As he had no particular fancy to make his body a target to the archer who had been pleasant enough to make an effort for his removal from this state to another, it struck him that the best thing he could do would be to send on the nag and await the issue, trusting to a bountiful Providence for an opportunity of repaying the favours he had received in the same coin. When he arrived at this conclusion, he gave a particular sound with his tongue, with which the beast was well acquainted, and accordingly so soon as he heard it, he pricked up his ears and jogged on. Gilbert waited patiently a short time, but nothing appeared; nor sight nor sound met his eyes or ears, save the blue sky, the green trees, the flowers, the warbling of the birds, and the gentle rustling which the cool breeze stirred among the leaves; he loosed his arrow from the bow, and it went whistling to the spot where he imagined his foe lay concealed; he looked hard and closely where it disappeared, but all was still. He tried another ruse, he took a shaft from his quiver, and putting a gauntlet upon it, placed it against the trunk of the tree, in order, should it attract attention and be shot at, he might see from whence the shaft came. It had scarce glanced in the sunlight, ere an arrow pinned it to the tree; so quick, so speedy had been the act, that he remained as ignorant as ever from whence the arrow proceeded; but he looked at the shaft, and, as it had flown straight, he well knew that its heel pointed to the spot from whence it had been discharged. Taking a deliberate aim at the part where he deemed it most probable the unseen archer lay, he fancied he saw something glitter; he let fly his shaft on the instant, and heard a clear laugh ring in the air nearly as soon as the bow-string twanged, and a rich voice, almost like a woman's, sing—

There are deer in the woods, there are flow'rs in the lea;
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!
But think not of these, love, come thou hither to me:
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!

Though 'tis merry to shoot in the bonny green wood,
With the deer in the glade, and thy yew bow so good;
Yet leave them for me, love, my own dear Robin Hood.
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!

"It's Robin—young, saucy, merry Robin, as I am a sinful man!" cried Gilbert, advancing from behind the tree and calling out lustily, "Ho! come forth, young hide-and-seek. Is this thy sport to level thy shafts at thy father? By the mass! but I thought I had the arrow of an outlaw picking acquaintance with my skull. Have you no more reverence for my grey locks than to see if thine arrow will turn them

as 'twould the hair upon a deer's hide. Ho! come out, lad—what ho! Robin! The lad's in one of his freakish fits; ah! these humours will some day lead him into wild scrapes. Here he comes, a merry rogue, singing the song, too, which I made for Mary Gray to sing to my poor brother Robin."

"What ho! goodman Hood, blithe father of mine," shouted the voice, the person still in concealment, "hath my whistling bolt made an ache or a tickle in thine ear?"

"There's no cloud o'er the moon, there's no sound in the dell;
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!
There's no voice in the air from the convent's soft bell;
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!"

"Wilt thou wander with me in the merrie Shire Wood,
To the green trystring tree, 'neath whose deep shade we stood;
When you stole my fond heart, my own love, Robin Hood;
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!"

As the burden of this little ditty was yet being echoed by the hollow places in the greenwood, there emerged from the thicket into which Gilbert had fired, a youth. He approached the keeper, and, when within a few feet, he stopped, and, leaning upon his bow, looked him hard in the face, indulging in another long, clear-toned laugh. He was barely sixteen years old, yet looked eighteen, for he was tall for his age, and exposure to the weather had deeply browned a skin once exquisitely fair; his frame was slight, but well formed; his limbs, though slender, had that easy set—that freedom of action, which, in youth, indicates coming strength; his chest was open even to an unusual breadth, his uprightness of bearing giving it an expanse in appearance which it perhaps did not really possess; his head and face were round, and well set upon his shoulders; his eyes were a deep hazel, large, full, and bright to a degree; there was a clearness and an expression in them which would tell the beholder the tenor of the thought passing in their possessor's mind ere his lip could give it utterance—they laughed at the witty thought, looked tristful and full of sympathy at aught sad, and round and flashing if his ire was raised; his nose was straight, his lips handsomely shaped, and his teeth looked as he laughed like a row of pearls; his hair was a deep brown, and hung, as was the custom of the period, in rich luxuriance around his shoulders; upon his head was a small cap of bright green cloth, decorated with a heron's feather; a doublet of green—the far-famed Lincoln green—adorned his body; his legs were encased in long hose of fine buckskin reaching to the waist, called "Chaussés;" his feet were encased in a sort of slipper, something between the buskin and shoe, bearing the Saxon name of "*unhege sose*," it came tight round the foot, reaching up behind, so as to cover the ankle, but open on the instep, it was secured by a thong passing over the instep from one side to the other; this article was also made of buckskin, but of much stouter material than the hose; a baldric, studded with bright steel points, crossed his shoulder, and passed beneath his arm; his sheaf was buckled to it behind, and at his belt hung a small horn. Thus equipped, a laughing, merry, careless youth of sixteen, stood he who was in future years to make such a figure in the history of his times.

"Made an ache or a tickle in mine ear?" cried Gilbert, reiterating his words, and affecting a sternness which he felt not. "By'r Lady, but that sort of tickling had like to take away all aching."

"Nay," said Robin, "I did not hit you; I did not intend."

"In good sooth," answered Gilbert, "I am much bound to thee. I am happy to say thou didst not hit me; and give thee the credit of fully believing thou didst not intend to do so; but thou might'st,

Robin, thou might'st! A turn, a sudden jerk, or halt in the pace of my nag, and by this time I might have been introducing myself to the notice of my ancestors, who, Heaven rest their souls! have quitted the world long ago."

"But as you see you are *not*," laughed Robin, "my good father, don't show me a stern brow for a boyish trick—a sport."

"Yes; but consider, Robin," said the good forester, mildly, "as *Æsop* hath it what may be sport to thee, is death to me."

"Nay," returned Robin, a shade passing over his brow at the continued gravity of his foster-father, "never heed it; I will not offend thee again by such a trick. But thou said'st this morning, at breakfast, that I was not archer good enough yet to rustle the hair on a deer's ear, by way of startling him, without hitting him. I saw thee jogging quietly along on old Gip, and I had a mind to show thee that I could."

"A pleasant way of satisfying me, truly! but let it pass, Robin, I am not angry with thee; not I," said Gilbert, patting him on the shoulder. "I have but to say, try not thy skill again in the same way."

"Thou need'st not fear; for careless, thoughtless fellow though I be, I would not hurt a hair of thy head, father, or give thee an instant's pain for this green wood and all its joy," said Robin, with warmth, stretching out his hand, which Gilbert took, grasped warmly, and said earnestly—

"I know thou would'st not, my boy. Bless thee! I know thou would'st not! It is now fifteen years, Robin, since thou wert brought, an infant, to my humble home; from that time until now I have felt for thee an affection, which, wert thou my own offspring, could not be warmer, truer, or more sincere. Thou hast always been an honest, open-hearted lad, wearing thy heart outside thy doublet, that those who knew thee once, might know thee always; thou hast never given me one moment's pain; for an' thou wert a little wayward and wilful, thou wert never wicked. Marry! 'tis what I would see in a boy. I would not have the young hardy tree grow up clogged and fettered by your trailing, creeping things, handsome though they be to gaze upon! And while thou art with me, and act as thou hast done, I will be unto thee a father and a friend."

"As you have ever been, dear Gilbert!" exclaimed Robin, with fervour. "And may my right arm lose its strength, and every shaft I loose miss its aim, if ever I forget it. But tell me, father, have you not heard from the friend who brought me to you?"

"I have never seen him since," replied Gilbert, "and only heard once; and that was by a scroll delivered to me about a year after I had received you. It was deciphered to me by my confessor, and ran thus—'*Gilbert Head or Hood, I placed twelve months since an infant boy in thy charge; I agreed to pay thee a yearly sum for his support, which I enclose. As I am leaving England for France, and my stay or return is uncertain, I have made arrangements for thee to receive yearly a like sum, upon application to the sheriff of Nottingham; the money is placed in thy name, and can only be received by thee. Bring up the boy as though he were thine own son, and on my return to this land I will claim him. Signed, Hubert Stanley.*' There was neither date nor name of place from whence it was sent; and with the story which I related to you as told me by him who brought you to me, you know as much concerning your birth and parentage as I do. If he never returns, there is always the same home for you as you have ever known; and when the green turf is growing over me, Robin,—for you know, boy, the sturdiest oak must fall when its time arrives—why there will still be the cottage, and the bit of stook it

contains, to make up for the loss of those who once sat round the hearth, and they will, perhaps, serve to keep those who have gone in thy memory."

The tear glistened in Robin's eye as Gilbert gave utterance to his kindly feelings, and hastily dashing his glove across his eyelid to brush away the large drop which stood there, he said—

"Let's talk no more of it; it's a dull subject, and when you say such monstrous kind things you always give me a watery eyelid and an aching throat, and that's not manly, but weak and girlish; such must not be the character of Robin Hood. I shall know, I dare say, some day, who I am and what I am, and if I don't, well, what listeth. I have not a doubt that I shall sleep just as light and wake as merrily as I do now. I know not who I am, but I will tell you what I mean to be—that is, the bonniest archer that ever drew bow in Sherwood Forest; I can bring down a flying bird or a fleeing buck now; but that's not half enough,—tell me something to hit, Gilbert; you are a good shot; show me something you deem too hard even for you to accomplish, and I will succeed in it, or you shall say I am no marksman."

"You're the best for your age in this country, and no lie told," said Gilbert proudly, "and I taught you. I used to do a thing, Robin, when many years younger than I deemed the topping of all archery, for I knew none but myself that could do it."

"And what was that?" impatiently asked Robin.

"You see yonder leaf hanging by its thin stalk to that bough?" he answered, pointing to the straggling branch of an oak which stood opposite to them.

"I do," was the reply.

"Well, I could cut that leaf from the branch with one shaft, place a second in the branch on the same spot from which I had cut the leaf, and split that arrow with a third ere the first had reached the ground!" concluded Gilbert, with a satisfied nod of the head.

"That's worth trying for; I'll see what I can do," cried Robin, his eyes sparkling with the idea of accomplishing that which appeared almost an impossibility. He drew three arrows from his sheaf, and put two of them loosely in his belt, so as to draw them quickly from it; he then stood to take his aim, and a more graceful figure or attitude could not well be imagined; his legs were but a short distance apart, the left a little in advance of the right; his body inclining a little to the out-stretched left arm which held the bow, as it was a peculiar art to throw the weight of the body to the horns of the bow, thus saving a necessity for great muscular power in drawing the string, enabling the archer to take a steadier and surer aim. As he stood motionless, Gilbert eyed him with a proud satisfaction—in his eyes, a youth of nobler bearing never stood in the green wood.

"Keep your eye on the leaf, boy," he cried; "wag not an eyelid—budge not the millionth part of an inch until the first shaft has left your bow."

Robin followed his advice, and when the twang of the bow discharging the first arrow caught Gilbert's ear, he held his breath as if it would influence Robin's success; the first arrow tore the leaf away, the second stood quivering in the branch almost as soon as the first had left the bow, but the barb of the third shaft, as he drew it quickly from his belt, caught, and thus prevented him being successful. An exclamation of impatience burst from him, but Gilbert checked him, and putting his hand upon his shoulder, exclaimed—

"'Twas well tried for—a good shot, Robin; why your best foresters, in their prime of shooting, could not have done more; 'twas well done."

"No, it was not done, father; but it shall be ere I stir out of the wood," was Robin's rejoinder, as he

took three more shafts from his sheath to make a second essay. Gilbert was about to give him minute directions for the furtherance of his object, when a loud neigh rung in the air.

"Gip, as I live," he cried laughingly; "the old dame is tired of her own company. By the rood! I must away to Mansfieldwoodhaus, or Margaret will be giving me the length of her tongue—and where's the shaft that will measure with it? On with thy trial, boy; when I return I shall perhaps find that thy skill in the use of the long bow equals Gilbert Hood's in his best days." So saying, hallooing to his nag, he disappeared among the vast trees, leaving Robin to his task, alone.

For some time Robin continued his efforts, and his perseverance met with a tolerable return. He found the greatest difficulty in displacing his second shaft with the third, but his determined and continuous efforts were at length crowned with complete success; the leaf was borne away by his first shaft, his second entered the branch from which the leaf had been displaced, and the third clove in twain the second arrow ere the first had reached the ground. He felt an inward pride heave his chest as he gazed upon the evidence of his success, and he thought how gratified his foster-father would be to find that he had accomplished a feat which rivalled the best efforts of the most famous archers known.

He was startled from a reverie into which he had fallen, by a buck suddenly bursting through the thicket from which he had himself made his appearance to Gilbert Hood; it dashed down the broad glade, and disappeared in the intricacies of the forest. He followed it with his eyes until it was lost to his sight, and on turning them again to the spot from whence the buck had broken, he was surprised by the hasty appearance of a man attired in the garb of a forester. The stranger crouched watchingly, as if expecting the coming of some one from whom he wished to keep concealed. His back was turned to Robin. After retiring a few paces, he knelt down on one knee, and putting a shaft to his bow took a steadfast aim, and discharged it. By a sudden exclamation of disappointment, Robin supposed him to have missed his object. He looked in the direction in which the fellow shot, to ascertain at what he was aiming; but a second arrow departed on its errand without his discovering the object at which it was loosed. The stranger watched the tract of his shaft, but again gave utterance to his disappointment in the shape of a round oath, which Robin distinctly heard. He drew a third arrow, and with an expression of the utmost anxiety, aimed, and again missed, as well as Robin could judge from an extravagant utterance of rage falling from his lips. There was a small opening between two bulky beech trees, commanding a view of a small portion of the glade, or, as it might have been termed, the pathway, leading to and past the spot on which Robin stood. As the man's movements had created an interest in him, he kept his eyes fixed in the direction in which he shot, and this opening just described lying a little to his left hand, as he gazed at the other point, enabled him to see who or whatever passed; he was, therefore, much surprised on perceiving a couple of forest nags, bearing a female and one habited in the costume of a knight or cavalier, appear and pass slowly on. The female seemed alarmed, and the cavalier's head was moving and turning in every direction, evidently endeavouring to discover that with which Robin was already acquainted, *viz.*, from whence the arrows, which ever and anon flew around him, were proceeding. Robin presently observed the lady start; he heard a scream, and saw an arrow sticking

through the pommel of her saddle. There was no time to lose, and taking advantage of the same means which the fellow who was discharging his shafts at the coming strangers had used, he got behind a tree, and fixing an arrow to his bow, he determined to make the forester remember as long as he lived shooting thus iniquitously at unprotected people. It is needless to say that Robin was in good practice, and when the outstretched left arm of the man told that he was again drawing his bow in base attack upon the strangers, ere his shaft quitted the bow-string, Robin's arrow transfixed his left hand to his bow. With a roar of mingled anguish and rage, he turned his eyes to the place which concealed our hero, but without avail, the small figure of the youth being effectually concealed by the broad trunk of an oak. Robin could not help laughing with the heartiest glee, to see the futile efforts the man made to withdraw the arrow which fastened his hand so firmly to the yew bow.

The shaft which Robin had discharged was, like all he carried, made by himself, with the exception of the barbed heads, and for the construction of those he was indebted to the skill of Gilbert Hood, himself an admirable bowman. They were formed of the best steel, were long, thin, and tapered to a fine point, enabling a good archer to hit the smallest mark with unerring precision. With one of these had Robin pinned the strange forester's hand to his bow, with a firmness which would prevent their speedy separation. The idea of killing the man never entered his imagination; but he had not done with him yet; and, levelling a second shaft, whipped the fellow's cap from his head, to his great alarm. Being at a loss to discover by whom he was attacked, he looked around him in the greatest trepidation, and ejaculating loudly "The foul fiend!" turned and fled. With a loud laugh Robin discharged an arrow, to assist him on his flight. It overtook him; and, although it did no great damage, still, from its receipt, he would for some time find it more easy than agreeable to take a seat anywhere. As the arrow entered, he gave a leap, and, at the same time, a frantic yell. With a desperate effort he seized and drew the arrow out, redoubling his speed; leaving his blood to track his footsteps, he dashed through the foliage, and was soon out of sight. Indulging in a laugh that made his sides ache, Robin then prepared to meet the strangers, knowing that a few moments would bring them to the place where he stood. Leaving the shadow of the tree, he carelessly leaned against the part facing the path-way, and awaited the coming lady and cavalier. Round they came at full trot; and the instant the cavalier observed Robin leaning composedly against the tree, he made a fierce exclamation, drew his sword, and dashed up to him. It did not take a second for Robin to discover that he was mistaken for the assassin who had fled; but there was no time for explanation, and, exerting his agility, he bounded from the tree to a short distance; he drew his bow, and, with an arrow ready to discharge, he called a parley.

"Hold thy hand, I prithee, sir knight," he cried. "I am not he whom thou takest me for; he that attacked you has fled."

"Fled!" echoed the stranger. And then hastily interrogating Robin, continued. "How know you who attacked me? Where is the ruffian? Art thou one of the gang? Speak! ere I cut you down."

"Had I twenty tongues, I might answer your questions at once," coolly retorted Robin. "And as for cutting me down, ere you could raise your weapon to put your threat into execution, this arrow which is now extended towards you, would be quivering through your heart. However, as neither acts would serve an honest purpose, I will answer your questions

as well as I can, in the order presented me, and briefly too. I stood here—I saw a man break the covert, and send shafts at some object hidden to me by the thick trees. Yon opening showed me yourself and that gentle lady were the butts at which his shafts were levelled; and calling upon our Holy Mother, I put a stop to his devilish purpose by pinning his hand to his long bow. He did not see me, and I fancy he believed the Evil One was at his shoulder, for he called out his name aloud, and dashed through yonder thicket, but not until I put an arrow into his doublet to quicken his speed." Here Robin laughed heartily again. "Where the ruffian has fled I know not, but wherever he may be he can't be very happy; and as to being one of the gang, do I look like one?"

The stranger gazed at him earnestly while he spoke, to see if he could read aught in the shape of falsehood; but the frank manner in which he related his story, his clear and open brow, which seemed the abode of truth itself, and his extreme youth, quite removed him beyond doubt. When Robin concluded, the stranger exclaimed—

"No, thou dost not look like a rogue! thy youth and honest bearing remove thee from such thoughts; return thine arrow to its sheath; come hither, and receive my thanks for thy timely aid;" and he drew a small bag of gold coin from his belt. "Tell me who thou art, and, if thou canst, guide me to some place where I can refresh these exhausted nags, this lady, and myself, for we are right weary."

"Keep your gold, fair sir," returned Robin; "I neither want nor wish it; my name is Robin Hood; I dwell with my father and mother a short two miles from hence on the borders of the forest. If you will follow me I will promise you rest and refreshment, in all sincerity and true heartiness of spirit."

The lady had now arrived, and Robin saw from beneath a black hood a pair of sparkling dark eyes, brilliant and beautiful; making her a courteous bow, he gazed his full at them with rather more of admiration than politeness.

"May we put faith in thee?" said the cavalier, interrupting his agreeable gaze.

Robin threw up his head proudly in answer to the question, and saying, "Else is there no faith on earth," led the way to the cottage of Gilbert Hood.

CHAPTER III.

"A sweet disorder in the dress
(A happy kind of carelessness);
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Intrails the crimson stomacher;
A cap neglectful, and thereby
Ribands that flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility."

ROBERT HEERICK, 1623.

HAD a mood half mirthful, half thoughtful, Robin Hood preceded the stranger and the lady. He had mixed with no society above the class in which Gilbert Hood was placed, and therefore knew little of the courtesy due to a rank considerably above what was apparently his own. There was a certain deference which he knew was paid to the lords of the soil; but he had yet to learn that the male stranger, though habited in the garb which betokened gentility of birth, was one of these. He did not choose, therefore, to humble himself to one to whom he had just rendered a service, and was now favouring by

leading him to a place of rest and shelter—one who might be no better than himself, and, to sum up all, was at present his debtor. These ideas, united with the freedom of speech and manners which a society of foresters, and a forest life gave, produced a roughness in his bearing that was, in truth, unnatural. It was his ambition to be a skilful archer, and a bold, daring forester. Although the slightness of his frame and the want of physical strength rendered the attainment of the latter somewhat improbable, yet he affected what he wished to be, rather than appearing what nature had really made him.

Gilbert Head, who had united to his other qualities the one of ballad-making, had taught him a collection of ditties which would have filled a stout volume, one which would have been valuable had it been preserved to the present day: when in mirthful or reckless humour, he sung some one of these, maugre where or in whose company he might happen to be. On the present occasion he felt a marvellous propensity to carol one, but every time it rose to his lips, the thoughts of the lady who was following restrained him, and it died away in a murmur. He had only seen her eyes—but how bright they were! yet why should he have a dare to restrain his joyousness

because he had seen a pair of bright eyes beneath a hood? Any eyes would look bright beneath a hood; perhaps her face was not so handsome as her eyes; her person probably less agreeable than her face, and manners than both. Why should he feel as if



encircled with a modest bracelet, while the small white taper-fingered hand—the softest of the soft, displayed a few rings of value, borrowing fresh lustre from the hand that bore them. The dress, which was made of fine fawn-coloured woollen cloth, was trimmed here and there with a crimson riband, and over and anon a wave

"In the tempestuous petticoat"

exhibited a small foot peeping out, encased in a laced slipper of fine buckskin. Her hair, which we have not forgotten, but left to the last to do due honour unto, was of the very darkest shade of brown, and shone as brightly as her marvellous eyes. It descended in long ringlets, whose graceful curves—whose exquisite silkiness of texture tore the admiration from heart and eyes ere lips could utter them. There was a beauteous profusion, languishing and luxuriating, over the neck and shoulders, and there was a small crimson velvet band passing round the head, fastened by a golden clasp, whose adornment was a large diamond, which found its home on her fair expanse of forehead. Her age was tender, albeit her appearance, language, and manners betokened a maturer age.

Of the few feelings to which Robin had turned a willing attention, that of a kindly one to the fair sex was one. From a child to the present time, when a visitant at neighbours' cottages, or mixing in the village sports at Mansfieldwoodhaus, his ambition and his pleasure had been to shine in the eyes of the gentle ones, and his success had been commensurate to his efforts. There were few female eyes that were not cast kindly on him—there were few soft hands hastily withdrawn, if he pressed them in his own—there were few ears turned away when he had something low and tender to murmur; and few lips snatched angrily from him if he imprinted a kiss upon them; but as the kindness he received had been general, so was his return—he loved them all—and all alike. There had been no one in particular to whom he had spoken, danced, laughed, or walked with, more often than another; and though occasionally he had been bantered that this or that little maiden was the chosen one of his heart, he knew that the charge was without foundation. But now he was as entirely a victim to the susceptibility of his nature as was mortal ever. He looked at the lady, and every look went straight from his eyes to his heart, like his own arrows at their object. His glances were sidelong glances, it is true, because the recollection of his outburst was not obliterated, but they drew in large draughts of an admiration which was fraught with the extremest danger to his peace. The lady's eye occasionally met his, much to his embarrassment, and he as speedily turned it on some other object, with an earnestness of manner which would have led an observer—if they had not been a woman—to have imagined that his whole thoughts and attention were fixed upon the object on which his eyes rested. There was a flush on his cheeks, and a pleasing sensation in his breast—one of those feelings which we have but once in our existence—that when faded never returns. Robin never felt so strangely before; he thought he should like to be away, walking alone in the broad wood, and yet he did not wish to leave the lady's company; he felt dull, and yet inclined to be joyous. He could not explain the cause of his being thus; he felt annoyed that he should appear sheepish, and yet he could not help himself. He felt a relief when he heard Gilbert, who had been conversing with his guests, exclaim—

"Robin, this good cavalier tells me you shot a fawn and a wild fowl; 'tis good news, for our larder

is at its last gasp, and our guests rest to-night with us. You know where the game lies; take old Lincoln with you, and bring them in."

Robin obeyed with a light step, and as the door closed behind him, they heard his voice sing—

Up! sluggards up! from your blazing logs.

Ay, sobo, hoo, tellal la!

Do ye not hear your loud baying dogs?

Ay, sobo, hoo, tellal la!

Through the bonnie old wood there flies a red deer,

As the horn of the huntsman breaks on his ear;

His speed's as the lightning, he trembles with fear.

Ay, sobo, hoo, tellal la!

The last words faded in the ears of the listeners, and Allan exclaimed—

"Are ye not fond of your son, good forester?"

"I am, sir; I am, indeed; he's a youth to be proud of. His skill in archery, sir, surpasses all I have ever witnessed, taking his youth into consideration. I am bold to say, that in the broad lands of merry England there dwells not a youth that can bend a bow at a mark with like skill. Ay, many of our best archers would boast proudly of feats I have seen him do easily. I am accounted a good shot myself, and therefore can judge these matters."

"'Tis to be hoped that his spirit and honesty equals his skill," suggested Marian.

"His spirit and honesty!" reiterated Gilbert, in a glow of enthusiasm. "He has the boldest, freest, gentlest spirit of any that ever placed foot on green turf; he's as true as Damascus steel, every inch of him; you read his character in his every act; he's as open as a clear sky; and I am free to say the bonniest, merriest, wittiest lad in Christendom."

"And the most affectionate," exclaimed Margaret, as a wind up.

Marian felt pleased that she had brought forth this eulogy on him.

"God bless him!" continued Margaret, "were he my own child, I could not love him more truly or tenderly than I do."

"Is he not your own child?" ejaculated Allan, with surprise.

"No," said Gilbert, "he is only ours by adoption; but he is unto us as our own offspring, and were his parents to claim him, 'twould be as sad a day to me as if it had pleased the Almighty to take him from us for ever."

"I feel quite interested in him," remarked Allan.

"If your story is not too long for your patience to relate, or if, indeed, there is any story at all, I shall be glad to hear it."

Gilbert, as he knew of no motive for concealment, readily related all he knew of the matter, and when he mentioned that the persons who had brought Robin had come from Huntingdon, Allan mentioned that himself and sister had just come from that town, which was his native place.

"There is more in this than meets the eye," he continued; "the story is plausible, but I doubt its truth; the child was the offspring, he told you, of a younger son of good family, who died in battle; it may be so, but without some strange motive, why was the infant brought the very long distance from Huntingdon to this place, for the mere purpose of placing him with one who should bring him up? You tell me a relation of your wife's proposed this to the person into whose charge the dying father consigned his child: still I am convinced that there is a mystery, which has some motive for his concealment more powerful than his well-being. Give me a description of the persons who brought him hither, and I will ascertain on my return to Huntingdon whether there was at the period you received him any child for

whose concealment there could be a motive, and I will forward to you the result of my investigation. I am well assured that he bears upon him the impress of noble blood; added to that, he has saved my sister's and my own life from the treacherous attack of a robber, and I owe him a good turn, which I will not be backward in doing, so soon as opportunity serves."

The afternoon passed away; Robin returned with his game, and being somewhat better acquainted with the strangers, recovered his sprightliness; by his remarks, his mirth, and wit, he fully bore out the character his foster-father had given him.

"I wish to visit Nottingham in the morning; would you like to accompany me, Robin?" enquired Allan; "I have some important business to transact. I will leave my sister for a day to recruit, and we will return ere the sun sets; it is not far from hence, is it?"

"About twelve miles from here," answered Gilbert; "it is called fourteen from Mansfield. I, myself, should wish to pay the sheriff a visit; I have not been there these two years, and I should like to hear if aught has transpired respecting Robin."

"We can journey together," suggested Robin.

"Do not leave us alone with that grim wounded man, Gilbert," said Margaret. "I do not like his looks; I am not easily alarmed, but there is something so ferocious in his demeanour that I do not like being left alone in the house with him."

"Pshaw!" laughed Gilbert; "there's old Lincoln; besides, girl, have you not the hounds to protect you? Why there's old Lance would tear out the heart of any one that dared to lay finger, in the way of outrage, upon you."

Margaret still hesitated, and she found an able seconder in Marian, who most resolutely declared that she would not stop alone; adding, that if they were all determined to go, she would make one of the party. This determination effectually decided the question, and Gilbert was therefore compelled to consent to stay behind; most reluctantly did he give way, for most gladly would he have gone. But who could withstand the opposition of two females? Mortal man, as was Gilbert, he found he could not.

The curfew had not long given forth its accustomed peal, when the supper table smoked with the proofs of Robin's skill, and a snug little party was there to partake of it. There was much laughing and merriment, much talking and no little eating; for it was the custom in those days to bring an appetite to the meal about to be partaken. The young people appeared very comfortable: Robin and the fair Marian getting on very good terms, and Allan listening with most earnest attention to Gilbert's stories of the greenwood. In the midst of their enjoyment they were startled by the sound of a loud whistle proceeding from an upper room; this, after the lapse of a minute, was answered from the wood. For a minute or so a pause took place in the conversation, but the sound was not repeated; the uneasy whine of a hound rose once on the air, but that also subsided and silence reigned; Gilbert broke it by observing—

"There's mischief brewing; Lance would not have sent forth that cry if all was as it should be. I fear there are those abroad in the forest that love to dip their claw into honest men's pouches, nill he, will he!"

"The first whistle came from the little chamber, over head," said Robin; "shall I steal softly up and see what the wounded man is dreaming about? I warrant me if he is at any tricks I will trick him!"

"No," interposed dame Margaret, "don't go, Robin; there is something in the man's appearance

that betoken's good to none; you would be but a reed to him, if he were wickedly inclined, and I would not have you hazard the danger."

"By'r lady," muttered Gilbert, clenching his fist, "an' he harmed a hair of Robin's head, the ungrateful hound should with a short shrift be slung up by the throat to an arm of the first oak, and that's not many yards from this door!"

"Have you aught to fear from attacks of lawless men?" enquired Allan; "would they not leave an honest yeoman's cottage free, and attack the more wealthy?"

"In good truth," replied Gilbert, "there are few to drink beer where wine is to be had, and the hungry man will eat meal in thankfulness when he cannot put meat into his mouth. Thus it is with your outlaws; when the rich man's bounty is not to be had, they thrust an ungodly claw upon a poor man's mite. They have several times attempted to share my humble pittance uninvitedly; but, thanks to a good bow, good dogs, and a stout heart, they have as yet been compelled to decamp with what they sought not—a stout arrow in their jerkin!"

"A forest life, then, has its dangers and inconveniences," suggested Marian, with a look of meaning at her brother.

"None that I ever heard of," exclaimed Robin, enthusiastically, "it's all pleasure. I have been for a whole day in the village, and have wondered how the folks can rest in their cots day after day, and not even see the rich glades of the merry old greenwood, glowing with the golden sunlight. If I were not to breathe its fresh air, hear the sweet singing birds, frolic among the flowers, or hunt down a fawn with old Lance to assist me, or be without the use of bow, I should die away like a sickly bird in a cage."

"Its charms to you, then," said Marian, "far eclipse those of a village or town life."

Robin's answer was disturbed by a loud thwack at the door, which raised the clamorous baying of two stout deer-hounds, who had been lying in luxurious ease before the large wood-fire that blazed upon the hearth. Marian echoed the knock with a faint scream, while Gilbert, Allen, and Robin, sprung to their feet. Ere a demand could be made as to who knocked, a second blow was given, with a sound and force that plainly told the arms were stalwart, and the staff stout that had performed it.

"Who beats thus loudly at my door-post?" inquired Gilbert, whose voice could be scarce heard, loudly as he shouted, above the baying of the hounds.

"Down, dogs!" cried Robin. "Down, Lance! silence, rogues."

Gilbert repeated his question, as a third blow descended upon the door, with such right earnestness that it shook on its hinges. A voice, deep and loud, answered—

"Two poor friars of the Benedictine Order, who crave the exercise of your Christian charity for a night's shelter and food."

"From what monastery, and whither bound?" inquired Gilbert.

"From the Abbey of Linton;—our destination, Mansfield. In the darkness of the night have we lost our path, and the sudden rain has compelled us to seek the shelter of thy friendly cot. In the name of our Holy Mother, deny us not, for we are faint and weary," concluded a voice in deep sonorous tones, more befitting a command than a prayer.

"Thy voice bears none of thy body's faintness," argued Gilbert, "and excuse me if I hesitate to open my doors, when wild folks are abroad to injure honest men. How should I know that you are holy friars?"

"By opening your door and looking upon us," returned the voice; "and be speedy, good yeoman, or I may endeavour to take by force, spite of my fatigue, the hospitality of which you are so niggard in the bestowal."

A second voice interposed, milder than the first, exclaiming—

"I swear by our holy patron, St. Benedict, it is as my brother has stated. Open thy doors, good yeoman, for the heavy rain hath no tenderness unto our thin clothing."

"It may be as they say, and if not, 'tis but a tussle," said Gilbert. "Robin, hold the hounds, and if our coming guests be not to our fancy, or attempt any sudden thievish tricks, give them a taste of Lance's fangs."

Robin held the dogs by the collar, and Gilbert unbarred the door—in those days of lawless strife and bloodshed, a necessary precaution. As the door opened, so entered a man, as though his nose had been affixed to it, and he had followed his nose. He was young, but tall and stout. He was habited in a loose black gown, with large wide sleeves; upon his head was a cowl, or capuche, terminating in a point behind; his waist was girt with a belt or rope of long grass, to which was affixed a rosary; he bore in his hand a stout crab staff, with which he had hammered at the door so lustily. He was closely followed by his companion, one considerably older than himself, but habited exactly similar; indeed, it was a rule of the order for them to go two and two together. The first comer made a slight acknowledgment to those present, and saying—

"Good yeoman, thy board is daintily served, and mine appetite hath a keener edge than thy poinard. If I wait thy bidding to partake of the table's bounty, I may possibly have a longer time to go fasting than I had to gain admission. I will, therefore, anticipate thy welcome, and with a blessing on what is spread before me, e'en fall to and help myself."

"The blessing of the Holy Virgin be upon thee and thy house," meekly exclaimed his companion to Gilbert, who, now that he had witnessed the shaven crowns, doubted not their honesty; he, therefore, requested their pardon for his tardiness in admitting them.

"Talk not of it, honest yeoman," said the stout friar, who was getting rid of his appetite and the food speedily. "Thy prudence is to be commended. By St. Julian, but there are as villainous a set of black-muzzled sinful rogues in this neighbourhood as ever were the chosen favourites of Satan. Not a very long distance from this spot, we were stopped by two knaves, who, notwithstanding our protestations to the contrary, insisted that we had filthy lucre upon our persons. Much as I am bound to peace and good-will, I should have certainly tried my crab-staff upon the knave's skull, had he proceeded to search me, as he intended, but a whistle from somewhere breaking on his ear stopped his wicked intent: he answered it, and, calling his companion, they left us alone. We pursued our way, the rain descended in torrents, and observing the light from your fire gleaming through the forest trees, we made towards it—and here we are," he concluded, washing down his speech with a draught of beer, which he took, he said, in a *mistake* for some water that had been placed near him, at the request of his brother friar, who had partaken frugally of the meal before him. They had not recovered the stir which the arrival of the friars had occasioned, when the dog Lance began snuffing, whining, and appeared altogether restless and uneasy. He pricked up his ears, and trotted from the fire, to which

he had returned after the Black Friars were seated, and, placing his nose to the door, he set up a cry, something between a bark and a howl. He then laid himself down by the door, and gave vent to a series of short growls, like a safety-valve throwing off waste steam.

"There's something afloat that's wrong, depend on't," said Gilbert. "I never saw old Lance so unruly before. I know the hound to a turn. There are those near the house to whom he shows his row of teeth whenever they cross his path. See how he lays grunting, and throwing his eyes at me and the door. What is't, Lance—eh, dog?" The dog, thus appealed to, as his master neared him, started to his feet, and stood at the door, ready to fly out, if it was opened for him.

"Get my bow, Robin. Whoever comes, be it for good purpose or for bad, we will be prepared for them."

"If you expect aught of foul play, I have a stout arm and a good cudgel at your service, bold yeoman, in return for thy dainty meal," said the young stalwart friar.

"Beshrew me, good father! though by thy looks I might call thee son, but I thank thee for thine offer," said Gilbert, with a laugh. "Yet I should have thought the cloth would have kept thee from such rough and ungodly work as cracking skulls, even though they be those of rogues."

"My office, my worthy host, so am I taught by my superior, and by the rules of my order, is to be charitable and kind to my fellow-creatures, to lend my assistance to the unprotected, and to wrestle with the unrighteous, spiritually and worldly, which latter I take to be the aid of a stout arm, stick, and heart—all of which, thanks to St. Benedict, I possess. If there are rogues coming, in the name of their lord and master, and that is Satan himself, let them come. Here are some, I'll be bound, to match them; you can draw a good bow, yeoman; I can wield a good quarter-staff; and yon two youths can do their share, with bow and blade, I doubt not. Open the door, Goodman host, and let the knaves come."

"Tarry awhile, good folks!" exclaimed the elder friar; "seek not for danger and violence; go not forth even unto the hands of wicked men, whose strength is in the copsewood, the thicket, and the covert. If they attack thine house, defend it; if not, defile not thine hands with them."

"You counsel well, father!" returned Gilbert; "it shall be as you advise. If they come for robbery and violence, they shall have the welcome of a true arrow and a stout staff; if they seek—"

He was interrupted by a slight scream from Margaret, who declared that she saw the white face of the wounded man, supposed to be in the apartment above, peeping from the stairs, his eyes glaring horribly on all who were present. No sooner had Robin heard the cause of his foster-mother's scream, than, without waiting for more, he lightly darted up the stairs, unheeding the call for his return, determining to ascertain if this fellow, whom he knew to be a rogue, was really brewing mischief. Noiselessly he reached the door of the room in which he had been placed, and found it partly open; the place was in profound darkness, he peeped in but could discover nothing; he heard, however, to his surprise, a mysterious whispering. He entered the room stealthily, and by the dim light from the window could just distinguish the wounded forester leaning out of it, holding a subdued conversation with some one beneath. Robin stole up to him, and heard him mutter—

"They are here; I have just seen them. I should have effectually obeyed my orders as they passed through the forest, had not the devil himself, I think, or some wood-demon in a prankish fit, wounded me severely."

"How are we to gain admittance; the door is strongly bound, and if forced, there are bounds to tear a man's throat; besides, in the confusion of a *mélée* our quarry may escape?"

"How many have you with you?"

"Six."

"That is well, we shall outnumber them. You can enter the hut by this window; I have bed-clothing here, which I will lower down to you. Affix it firmly somewhere, and you can climb up it; our object will then speedily be obtained."

"Will it!" shouted Robin.

Beneath the window there stood a huge butt or reservoir to catch the rain-water; there had been heavy rains of late, and this cistern, which was deep, was within an inch or so of being full. Robin recollected this, and as he shouted, he seized the unprepared rogue by his legs, and with great strength and dexterity, hurled him out of the window into the reservoir. He heard him shriek as he splashed into the water; with a quiet laugh, he closed the casement; the fellow who had been in conversation with the knave, who was now floundering about in a drowning state, was so startled by this sudden occurrence, that acting upon the impulse the shock occasioned, he turned and fled.

Robin barred the casement and descended the stairs. He found the party below in a state of commotion, they had heard the shriek and the splash, and eagerly looked to Robin for an explanation, which in a few brief words he gave.

It was now pretty evident that foul play was intended to the youth and his fair sister; and Gilbert inquired of him whether he had done aught to make an enemy so revengeful as to seek his life.

"I cannot deny that there is one who will pursue me to the death, and I well believe, would gladly hail the sun that shone upon my grave," returned Allan.

"What hast thou done, young man?" asked Gilbert, gravely, "that any one should harbour such a deadly determination against you?"

"Naught for which a man proud and tenacious of the spotlessness of his honour could feel a blush of shame," returned Allen, with a proud sparkling of his eyes. "I may not say by whom, or why, I am thus pursued so vengefully; but of this rest assured, I would not place one hair of your head in danger on my account, were it otherwise."

"I believe thee!" replied Gilbert; "I will take thy open countenance as a guarantee for thy truth."

During this brief colloquy, the man who had been holding secret conversation with the fellow now in the water-tub, finding all appeared quiet, called his men together and returned close up to the house.

"We must have this pair alive or dead," he exclaimed between his teeth. "Such were the baron's orders, and he is not the man to be trifled with. By the devil and his imp! I swear I would rather board a hungry wolf than return to him empty-handed. We must drag Taillefer out of his wet den, and then if they deny us admittance peaceably, we will batter the door down."

When his speech was ended, he cautiously—followed by his fellows—advanced to the butt, in which his friend Taillefer had been injected; they could just perceive his eyes above the top of the staves, and his fingers, clutching convulsively to it. As it stood

too high for one man to reach, one of the men mounted another's shoulders, and tried to drag the half-drowned wretch out. As soon as assistance was proffered, he left his hold of the edge, for the doublet of the man assisting him, and tried to scramble out. Then followed much dragging and hauling, until the one who bore the second on his shoulders began to entertain very serious doubts as to whether it would be possible to retain his situation. The question was speedily decided, inasmuch as Taillefer having got his knees placed against the top of the butt, gave a spring, and threw himself—soaked dress, water and all—into the arms of the man assisting him. The man who had shouldered his comrade to assist Taillefer, had from the struggling and tugging speculated upon the continuance of his power to do so; but upon this sudden addition of weight, he swayed to and fro, tottered; and ultimately deposited his burden and himself full length upon the ground. A laugh was raised among the surrounding men, but they pulled up their prostrate companions, and turned seriously to the accomplishment of their intention. Advancing to the door of the house they knocked loudly; there was instantly a furious barking from the dogs, and the voice of Gilbert, rising above their clamour, demanded the cause of their knocking.

The leader of this little troop answered in a coarse voice,—

"We come on a mission from the Baron Fitz Alwine, for the purpose of securing to justice two persons, now beneath your roof, who have been convicted of vile and wicked intents, militating against the peace, the well-being, and family honour of the said Baron Fitz Alwine; and do hereby charge and require you to deliver them up peaceably and with all content; at your peril contrary."

When Gilbert Hood heard this demand, he turned to Allan, and asked in a tone of voice which appealed at once to his honour—

"You have not deceived me, young sir? you have been guilty of no act unto this baron that should make an honest cheek burn with a blush of shame?"

"Of nothing, good yeoman, I swear by my mother's spotless name, but what I am prepared to defend with heart, hand, and untainted honour," replied Allan, with a glowing cheek.

"It is enough," returned Gilbert; "I am content. Robin, go you to the shed, and rouse old Lincoln. The old man has not youth on his side, but he's as tough as a ground ash, both wind and limb; he'll play a bout at quarter-staff, and make a fellow's head cry twang, with a ring that tells pretty plainly the lustiness of his muscles. Put him on a piece of ground and he'll keep it, unless knocked from it; and that any one ever accomplished that feat I never yet heard. Bid the old man come here; tell him we've some quarter-staff play for him. Then to the window above, and see what the knaves are about, while I keep them in play here."

Robin obeyed his foster-father's directions; and, while he ascended the stairs to reconnoitre, Lincoln, a tall, gaunt, athletic man, of about sixty, entered, bearing in his hand a staff near five feet in length, and about three inches in circumference. He advanced quietly to Gilbert, and said—

"You sent for me: I am here."

"Good," returned Gilbert. "There are some knaves about to force admittance into my cottage. I shall save them the trouble, by opening my door. If they attempt any violence, do thou, when I give the word, rattle thy staff about their pates, and show us and them that you have not forgotten the use of thy weapon."

Lincoln gave a grim smile and a nod of assent.

During this short colloquy, the troopers on the outside of the door had seen fit to grow impatient, for they had received no answer,—that affronted their dignity; also it rained in torrents, and there was every prospect of their becoming quite as drenched as their friend Taillefer, who had just been extricated from the water-vat, and who stood a shivering emblem of ghastly wretchedness, fluctuating between life and death. There was also another incentive which these questionable gentry had to gain an entrance—it was that they had not had their supper, and every fellow felt the appetite of a wolf gnawing his entrails. Now be it understood, their nostrils had been regaled with the savoury smoke proceeding from the supper-table. Their hunger grew fiercer, and each man inwardly determined to have a hearty meal, if he could get it; therefore, after several tremendous whacks upon the door, accompanied by a request to know if the inmates heard them—and the inmates must have been very deaf indeed if they had not—they resolved, not receiving any answer to their application, without further parley, should it even be requested, at once to batter the door down.

It is easy to resolve, but the job is to execute. This was a truism which forced itself upon the minds of the men who were belabouring the door. They were armed with spears, bows, and swords, and these weapons were all called into action for the destruction of the door. But the door was of oak, banded with iron, rudely but stoutly, had massive bolts, a huge lock, and a bar of tough oak placed diagonally from the one corner to the other, which completed the fastenings. It was therefore to no purpose that the besiegers dashed their spears and their swords against it: and they might, with about just as equal a possibility of success, have attempted to have effected a breach in a stone bastion with paper weapons. They raised a most dreadful din: they hammered, battered, clattered, until they shook the door; then they shouted, and were answered by a scornful laugh from the interior. Their ire was mounting, and this raised it three degrees. They all gave a dash together, but the door was immovable: this fact forced itself upon them with a slow conviction. Fatigued, breathless, and perspiring profusely, they ceased—to hear another laugh raised at their expense. Their leader vented his wrath in a volley of fierce oaths, and, determining not to be defeated, resolved to attempt some other method by which to carry his design into execution.

The window was not so large but that two persons might have easily kept it free from intrusion. In most of the domestic buildings of this period, the ground-floor was lighted only by loopholes, was strongly barricaded, and chiefly used to secure the cattle at night, while the family resided in apartments above, almost as wretchedly lighted as those beneath; but this was a necessary precaution, from the incessant warfare between neighbouring barons, and the outrages and depredations committed by marauders, who, having broken from their vassalage, roamed at large, robbing and murdering all those too weak to resist. Gilbert Hood, a freeman and forest-keeper, had superintended the erection of his own cottage, and had built it for comfort, seeking his protection from stout fastenings rather than gloomy walls, depending upon his own skill in the use of the bow, his dogs, and his nerve to use them, should occasion require them; the staircase, which was in other buildings placed on the outside of the house, moveable, in cases of necessity, was inside in his; and indeed he had altogether made improvement upon the style of building the villas or farm buildings of that day. That the house was well protected in case of attack, was pretty evident to the

hitherto unsuccessful band; but the opposition they had met with had inflamed their passions, and they resolved, as they found their weapons of little service in effecting an entrance, to try what fire would do. The cottage was built all of timber, and they had little doubt would blaze bonnily. The fire, they fully expected, would make the inhabitants turn out, and, if so, they determined to unrelentingly massacre them. This, at least, was the plan which they formed; one which was concocted in a voice by no means so low but that Robin heard it while at the window from which he was watching their actions. Flint and steel were easily procured, for it formed one of the most important articles deemed necessary to carry on the person at a time when folks were obliged often to shoot and cook their dinner before they could eat it. A heap of dry leaves was made at the foot of a tree, and two of the party departed in search of a few pine trees, to cut branches for the bonfire that was to set the cottage in flames.

Robin patiently waited until he had heard the plan digested, and the means to put it into execution partly obtained. When he had learned sufficient to make sure what were their intentions, he descended the stairs, and communicated all he had overheard, adding, likewise, that he had counted seven stout fellows, beside the knave who had got the ducking. "But," said Robin, "he stands for nothing, for he is shivering and trembling like a decayed leaf hanging to an old bough in the wind."

"So they intend to burn us out," cried Gilbert. "We must not give them a chance of putting their threat into execution, for the timber is dry, and will blaze like pine-log. We must open the door and admit them."

"Admit them!" echoed Margaret and Marian, in a breath.

"Aye," replied Gilbert, "and give them a crab-staff and broken bones for supper. Margaret, do you take the lady up stairs, fasten the door on the inside, and keep yourselves quiet and free from alarm. We will do our best in the meanwhile to satisfy these importunate knaves without."

The females, with fear stamped upon their countenances, retired up stairs, and had scarce crossed the threshold of the sleeping-room, when Gilbert and his friends heard several boughs, lopped from pine trees, thrown down at the door. Assisted by Lincoln and the young friar, Gilbert removed the chairs and tables, in order to have a clear stage, for he intended to give the rascals battle in his kitchen, and not trust his party, the weakest, in the darkness prevailing outside. The floor was lighted by a good fire, kept blazing in despite of the curfew, which had given forth its peal some time since. "By its light," said Gilbert, "we can see where to put in a stiff blow. Now, Robin, lad, show thy learning; let us see that Lincoln has not wasted his time in teaching thee quarter-staff play."

"He'll play a bout with the best in Christendom, without knocking under ere he draws blood—whoever gainsays it, lies," ejaculated Lincoln, quietly.

"It's well to praise those whom you teach," said the young and stalwart black friar, "neither would I wish to gainsay what thou hast uttered; but methinks I could crack his master's skull ere I had dealt four blows."

"Monk or no monk, thou liest," spoke Lincoln, in the same quiet tone as before; "thou couldst not in a life-time."

"Tush! tush!" interposed Gilbert, "try thy skill on those without; trust me, we have need of it; the rogues are used to hard knocks, and know the use



of the staff well. Hark! by the cracking of the branches, they are assembling round the door. I will unbar it gently. When they enter, Lance will grip the first comer, Lincoln shall take the second; for the remainder, we will take them as they come, and as we can. Are ye all ready? Stand by—here goes."

A voice outside cried suddenly—"Now we shall see whether you will give us an answer! Now—" but the speaker was interrupted, to his surprise, by the door quietly opening. He waited not to recover, but calling to his fellows to follow, leaped over the branches they were proceeding to fire, and entered the cottage full speed. His haste was, however, checked by Lance, who, let slip by Robin, flew at his throat, pinned, and brought him to the ground. The

second who followed received so hearty a knock upon the head from Lincoln's staff, that he measured his length across his leader's body senseless; the other five rushed through in a body and were quickly engaged in rattling strife. The din—the clatter raised



immediately, as may be imagined, was fearful. The man who lay pinned to the earth by Lance, roared to some of his fellows to run the dog through; however, they were too much engaged to assist him. But Taillefer, who had crawled in the rear, took up the

spear from him who had been knocked down senseless, and was in the act of driving it through Lance's body, when he received such a rattling whack from the quarter-staff of Lincoln, that it placed him by the leader's side. The old man then continued coolly drubbing one of the party till he made him feel faint and sick, with an earnest desire to be away. Lance had learned to hold fast, and well did he honour his teaching. Three of the intruders' party were down, and five remained—all stout, sturdy villains, armed with spears, which they found of little use but to ward off the blows liberally and profusely bestowed by their antagonists.

It was a pleasant sight to see the friar play. He had tucked up his sleeves to his elbows, and the skirt of his gown as high as his knees. He flourished his staff as if it had been a thin cane. He held it at the quarters, diagonally one minute, and the next it was playing upon the head, shoulders, or shins of his enemy—a huge fellow, who not only grinned like a tiger at every hard knock he got, but foamed with rage at finding himself so occupied in guarding that he could not return one blow for the many he had received. Old Lincoln kept to his work as steady as if he had been a wooden cross on a highway. He played methodically but uncommonly well. His features bore the same undisturbed calmness as usual. It was only occasionally, when he gave his antagonist a rattling rap, that his features relaxed, and he showed his teeth in a satisfied grin. Gilbert did his work in a style which exhibited his thorough knowledge of the art, and having a nimble fellow opposed to him, who imagined he could avoid the blows by leaping, he kept him dancing like a monkey. Allan and Robin were also stoutly employed. Allan was fighting with his sword a fellow who opposed a good blade; but Allan was a perfect master of fence, and maintained his ground manfully, although his foe was his superior in height and strength. Robin had also engaged one vastly superior in height, length, and strength. He was but a boy, and with a kind of sneering laugh his antagonist attacked him fiercely, in order to crush him at once; he pressed forward and thrust fiercely with a hunting spear, but ere he had bestowed his fourth thrust, he had a gash in his cheek, a bruise on his shin, a bump on his forehead, and blows continued raining on him. Thus admonished he grew cooler—he found it necessary; he fought warily; still Robin rapped his knuckles, his sides, and his legs. Lincoln had succeeded in knocking the senses out of his opposer. He had worked quietly and steadily, following up every opportunity inch by inch, and not giving the hundredth part of one, until the fellow, with bleeding head, aching bones, and fingers terribly cut, cried for quarter. He granted it, but bound him firmly with some thongs of deer-hide, and then made his way to Robin's side to assist him, if necessary. He watched his pupil quietly but closely, occasionally giving a hint, which Robin made the most of. The man opposed to our youthful hero grew furious at seeing Lincoln standing unoccupied, for he knew that one of his party had fallen; he therefore redoubled his efforts to beat Robin down. His passion put his judgment to flight, and the consequence was, he received from Robin's staff a tremendous whack on the skull, which discovered every echo in the hut.

"ONE!" cried Lincoln, coolly.

The man gnashed his teeth as the knock was ringing on his head, and in spite of blows, administered with a rapidity quite astonishing on his ears and body, he dashed at Robin headlong. The latter, however, leaped lightly on one side, and dealt him

another blow on the scone, on the sore place, with terrific force."

"Two!!" uttered Lincoln, with a slight grin.

Maddened by the pain, and stung by the observation of the old man, he attacked Robin more furiously than ever. The youth had need of all his agility and all his coolness to keep him at bay. At length, the fellow, blinded with rage, dashed his spear wildly right and left, leaving himself open to Robin's staff. The opportunity no sooner offered than he took advantage of it, and let his staff fly with all the strength he could exert; it descended on the old spot with a force that did credit to Robin's muscle, and sounded twang with a vengeance.

"THERE!!!" cried Lincoln, and interposed his own staff. "Go to that youth, Robin," he added, "he has need of thy aid; I will finish this fellow;" and he commenced an attack upon him. Robin, freed from his opponent, turned to the assistance of Allan, who had not the same opportunity of defeating his enemy that Robin had; but although he had gained no advantage, he had lost none, and when Robin reached his side, he cried—"Fair play, Robin! do not interfere! I can cope with him!" But the words had barely left his lips, when, in parrying a thrust, his ankle turned, and striving to recover himself, he fell. His opponent rushed at him with a fierce oath to bury his sword in his breast, but ere he could accomplish his intention, Robin sent his staff full swing, and caught him a blow of such immense violence, that it sent him flying to the ground like a shot; at the same moment Lincoln dropped his antagonist heavily to the ground. He then advanced to Gilbert's assistance, accompanied by Robin and Allan. They seized the fellow whom he was encountering, and bound him, and turned to the black friar's aid; but he cried out for them to keep off, and let him have his bout out. His opponent was also furnished with a staff, an oaken one, which he managed with a skill equal to that with which the friar used his one of crab tree. They both played and fought fiercely, the blows rattling soundly on either side. At length, after some manœuvring, the affray was decided by the black friar letting his staff descend with a vigorous whirr upon the forehead of his antagonist. His skull rung again, and the blood spirted out.

"One!" called Lincoln, in the old tone.

"One!" shouted the friar, making himself up to deliver a second as near the same place as his dexterity would permit.

"Quarter!" cried the man, lowering his staff, and rubbing his head with a rueful expression.

"Granted," exclaimed the friar, brandishing his staff. "Who's ready for another bout?"

"That am I," said Lincoln, stepping quietly out, and elevating his quarter-staff.

"Come on, old Toughstaff," cried the friar, twirling his staff, and in the excitement quite forgetting his holy calling.

"Hold!" loudly uttered Gilbert, as the two prepared to combat. "This is folly—madness; we have had enough for one bout. In God's name, let's have no more on't, but see to our prisoners."

This was acceded to, and the vanquished intruders were now subjected to the investigation of their conquerors. Three of the eight were bound; the remaining five lay upon the ground senseless. One of them, the leader, upon whom Lance had fixed, was quite dead: the hound had fastened his teeth in his throat, and bit through the jugular vein; he had been assisted by the other hound, and the miserable wretch had perished, notwithstanding his desperate efforts to beat them off. The other four were recovered by the

efforts of Gilbert and his companions. They were all bound together, and Lincoln was to march them, accompanied by Lance, for a few miles through the forest, and then leave them to themselves. Ere they departed, a hasty grave was dug a short distance from the cottage, and the dead man, still warm, but deluged in blood, was placed in it. The elder friar repeated a few prayers for his soul's sake, and the mould was replaced over him who a short hour since was alive in health and blaspheming.

His fellows now prepared to depart; but he who bore the appellation of Taillefer—weak, haggard, and seeming to have but a few hours to live—called feebly to Gilbert, and begged to have a few minutes' conversation with him. Hood granted the request, but sent the others on their way.

"Now," he demanded, "what hast thou to say to me, thou ungrateful hound? 'Twould serve thee rightly were I to hang thee on the first tree."

"Gilbert," said the man feebly, and placed his hand restingly on his arm.

"Touch me not!" hastily uttered Gilbert, withdrawing his arm; but he repented the act, for the man fell to the ground. He immediately knelt and raised him on his knee.

"Gilbert," murmured the fellow hoarsely, "I have wronged you, but I yet may make atonement for what I have done."

"I need no atonement," returned Gilbert. "Away to your fellows, and let me see thy face no more."

"I cannot," ejaculated the man, in a hollow voice; "I am dying. Look on me, Gilbert—dost thou not know me?"

"Well, I have seen you somewhere," replied he; "but I remember not where, and forsooth care not."

"I am Ritson, your wife's brother," was the reply, and in giving utterance to the words he fainted.

CHAPTER IV.

"When I beneath the cold red earth am sleeping,
Life's fever o'er,
Will there for me be any bright eye weeping
That I'm no more?
Will there be any heart still memory keeping
Of heretofore?"

"When the great winds through leafless forests rushing,
Like full hearts break;
When the swollen streams, o'er crag and gully gushing,
Sad music make;
Will there be one, whose heart despair is crushing,
Mourn for my sake?"

MOTHERWELL.

GREAT was the surprise of Gilbert at thus hearing that in the haggard wretch at his feet he saw the brother of his wife. The change in his lineaments, even to the characteristic expression Nature had originally stamped upon them, was so extraordinary, that there was but the faintest resemblance left by which he might recognise his disreputable relative; so great, indeed, had it been, that his own sister, Margaret, who had several times during the day waited upon him, had not discovered the affinity. He still lay in his swoon; and as Gilbert gazed upon his features, drawn into the semblance of death, he read a fearful catalogue of crime and suffering in the wrinkled brow, the hollow eye, the sunken cheek, and in the lines around the mouth, produced by strong passion and wild irregularities.

"Poor wretch!" he muttered, "he seems to have undergone hard fare—he looks very badly. Get some water."

Water was given, and the man revived, although there seemed but little life in him. His eyes glared wildly round, and he essayed to speak, but was too feeble for the effort. He was therefore carried up the

stairs, and placed upon the pallet he had previously occupied. The place was then cleared from all marks of affray. Lincoln sat up to watch, in case of any further attack; and the rest of the party, after having quite satisfied the two females that they were unhurt, and that there was very little probability of another attack that night, retired to repose.

The morning broke beautifully clear and sunny.

"Each bird was fondly kissing
The young buds of this spring time;
All kindly, kindly missing
The want of their coming prime:
The gentlest flowers were laughing
In their robes of white sunlight,
O'er the nectar they were quaffing,
Which the last sad sigh of night
Left in their cups of deepest blue and white."

At the morning's repast were assembled the party of the night before, and the battle was discussed with the eatables. There was many a laugh and lauding banded from one to the other upon their prowess, and upon the besiegers having obtained what they looked not for. Robin received especial praise, and a warm eulogy from Allan drew for our hero a reward from Marian, which to him at that particular moment was of a value beyond all price—a look, a smile, and a few words of earnest thanks delivered in a tone of voice which thrilled through every nerve, and—but imagination does its work better than the pen, therefore imagination must depict his feelings.

The breakfast was cleared away; Robin and Allan prepared for their journey; the friars, also, were about to leave; but as Ritson had grown worse, and there was little prospect of his living much longer, the elder friar was requested to remain to give him shrift and absolution, if it were necessary. To this he at once acquiesced, but his companion, the fighting friar, requested to make one in Allan and Robin's journey. They readily consented, and ere the sun was three hours old he saw them on their way to Nottingham.

Gilbert was not sorry that he had Ritson once more under his roof, for he now hoped to learn something more respecting the birth and parentage of Robin, and also to gather some intelligence of him who had placed the child in his keeping. Accordingly, when he ascertained from Margaret that her brother had awoke from an uneasy and restless sleep, he repaired to his pallet's side. He started as he gazed upon the wretched being. Haggard and careworn as his countenance had appeared, Gilbert was unprepared for the ghastly change they had undergone. Every prominent feature stood out fearfully sharp, while the eyes, supernaturally bright, were deeply sunk in their sockets. The black, matted, ragged beard which covered the lower part of his face, added to the marble hue of the complexion from its violent contrast. So horrible did he appear, that Gilbert shuddered as he looked upon him, and half turned away as he addressed him.

"How is it with you, Ritson?" he inquired in a low tone.

"Miserably, miserably," gasped Ritson. "The hand of Death is on me—I feel his cold iron grip about my heart—I am fast dying."

The tone of his voice was so abject, so utterly spiritless, that Gilbert, although he could plainly see his hour was nearly come, with that feeling which induces us to put hope into the bosoms of those whom we know to be past it, tried to cheer him.

"'Tis not so bad as that, man," he said; "you're grievously sick, 'tis true, but you'll get over it."

"Never—never!" muttered Ritson; "there is no hope for me, here or hereafter—none, none!" and he groaned bitterly.

Gilbert tried to soothe him, but he would listen to no consolation.

"You know not," he uttered feebly, "the foul crimes, the monstrous deeds, I have committed—things you would shudder to hear—mortal sins for which there is no redemption, for which my soul must be damned to all eternity. 'Tis useless to strive to make me think otherwise. I am lost for ever—for ever."

In this strain for some time he ran on ramblingly. At length, Gilbert succeeded in getting him to speak upon the subject of Robin's parents.

"It is a long story," said he, "and I feel too feeble to tell it now. Let me rest awhile, and you shall know all."

Gilbert complied with his request, and returned to the ground-floor, where he found the good father engaged in his devotion, which the black friars, by the rules of their order, were obliged to perform seven times a day. He waited until he had finished, and then discoursed upon the condition of the dying man. Margaret and Marian had gone for a quiet walk in the green shades of the old wood; when they returned, and the dinner had been eaten and cleared away, Gilbert again sought the chamber of his brother-in-law. He knew that his life hung upon a thread, and he felt that it was, therefore, necessary to obtain from him, as soon as possible, the information he so much desired. Ritson had been in a deep sleep for a few hours, and awoke considerably refreshed. He smiled faintly as he saw Gilbert, and motioned him to a seat at his bedside; he was obeyed, and in a voice low, and at times inarticulate, he commenced his story—

"I know," he began, "that you feel the greatest anxiety to ascertain all the information which I possess respecting the boy you call Robin. I know all, and what I know I will tell you—a poor return for the wrong I have done you.

"Twenty-three years since I quitted Mansfield, after I had made the place too hot to hold me, disgraced my family, and serving you, among the rest, shamefully—you, however, repaid me with your cudgel. Well, on quitting my native town, I crossed the country, caring little where my feet should let me rest. I stayed at Huntingdon for a short period, and by chance got into the service of Philip Fitzooth, Baron de Beaseant, an English knight, who had that title conferred upon him for some services rendered by him to Henry during the war in Normandy; he was a younger son of the old Earl of Huntingdon. At the time I entered his service, his father was no more, having died a few years previously; his brother, Robert Fitzooth—he had but one—was then earl. This brother had married before his father died, and his wife, in bringing into life her first child, lost her own. The infant, a boy, thrived but delicately and weakly; he was tended and fostered with the greatest care and affection by his father, who mourned his sad bereavement almost incessantly. At length, his constant melancholy preying upon a constitution naturally fragile, he sunk under it, and committing his boy to the guardianship of De Beaseant, died.

"It was then, Gilbert, that the guardian began to look with a greedy eye upon the earldom; a weak, puny boy alone stood in his path. He was not a man to suffer slight obstacles to impede his ambitious views, and would have at once removed this boy by death, had not the attention of too many been turned upon him. The late earl, his father, had compelled such attention, such care, such a compliance with his son's every wish, that he was too much in the eye of the servants and vassals to be removed without foul suspicion falling at once upon De Beaseant, whose best

hope, therefore, was, that he would speedily die. The weakness of his constitution much assisted this hope, and his uncle believed he should be hurrying him to an early grave if he withdrew from him the attention he had been accustomed to receive. He induced him to hunt in the woods, trusting the fatigues of the chase, the damps of the forest, would all lend a helping hand to further his design, and, possibly, the arrow of an outlaw would complete the work. But, as if it had been fated by Heaven, the boy, instead of wasting away, grew stronger, until, at length, the delicate youth became a robust young man. At this time, also, the presence of De Beaseant was required by King Henry in Normandy. Some services of a peculiar nature which I had rendered my master induced him to single me from his people, and place me at Kimbolton Castle, to watch the young earl's every act, and lend my assistance to send him to his grave. As I had a promise of a handsome reward, in case of his demise, I readily consented, and De Beaseant departed. I did my utmost to carry my lord's wishes into effect, but without success. We were abroad in the green woods when the sun rose, nor did we leave it until the mists of night enveloped us. Often were we drenched in the sudden showers while overhated in the pursuit of game; still he thrived under it.

"This was discouraging. I racked my brain to hit on some method by which I might destroy him, without actually using poison or knife. There was only one way, which was to seek out some of the outlaws infesting the forest, and get them to murder him while hunting. But then I should be exceeding my orders, besides placing us in the power of those who would not fail to make use of their knowledge in some way highly disadvantageous to De Beaseant. While these thoughts were possessing me—while I was endeavouring to accomplish his destruction, a change occurred, which roused new hopes in me.

"Of a sudden his demeanour was altered; he grew thoughtful and abstracted; his mirth, his cheerfulness all disappeared. We went into the woods as hitherto, but even when the dogs started the game, he showed not half the ardour in the pursuit he had done until now. Occasionally he would leave me to follow the deer, and wander alone, absorbed and oppressed by some secret feeling. Gladly as I hailed this change, still my curiosity was excited to discover the cause; but as I dared not challenge him with it, for his temper was hasty, I determined, when he should again leave, to follow him at a distance, and ascertain whither, and for what purpose he quitted me.

"One bright morning in June we went out together, as usual, for having exerted myself to gain his favour, and succeeded, I accompanied him always. We started a deer, which led us towards the borders of the forest. In the heat of the pursuit he suddenly stopped, and pointing out a large oak tree, he bade me meet him there when the sun had descended about two hours from the meridian. I bowed in acquiescence, and he disappeared among the trees. I determined to follow him. I noted the direction which he had taken, and called off the dogs. I fastened them to the tree, and then followed in his track, as swiftly as the rugged intricacies would permit. Quick as I had been, he had outstripped me so far, that I saw no glimpse of his person. I looked to the right and left, as well as the copsewood would allow, but saw him not. I, however, kept on the path I deemed him likely to pursue, and after half an hour's rapid chase, I reached the outskirts of the wood without having discovered him. Disappointed and chagrined at my failure, I turned back, with the intention of retracing my steps to the

oak where I had left the dogs and was to meet him, but discovered that, not having taken sufficient note of the way I had come, I should have considerable difficulty in returning to the spot I had quitted. I, however, started in the direction I fully believed to be the correct one, but had not proceeded far, when, by the difference of the trees and the narrowness of the glades, I saw that I had mistaken my way. I went on for a short time, but their changing character assured me still stronger that I was wrong. I hesitated for a moment, and during that hesitation the sound of voices fell upon my ear. The tone aroused my suspicions. I stole stealthily to the spot, and beheld the young earl encircling with one arm the waist of a beautiful young female. This was a sight for which I was unprepared, but which at once accounted for the change in his demeanour.

"Here was news for De Beaseant. He was in love! My next object was to find out with whom, and getting as near as I could without being discovered, I listened earnestly, in hopes to gather something which might satisfy me; but nothing transpired to tell me who was the lady. I heard her swear to be true to him, in thought, hopes, word, and deed, and he gave her an oath of a like nature. More I could not, at this interview, ascertain. He led her to the borders of the forest, almost to the very spot I had so recently quitted. There he parted with her, and gazing after her a short time, he turned to seek our appointed meeting place. I took him for my guide, and soon observed he knew the path well, for I began to remember places which I had passed in pursuit of him. When he had nearly reached, as I imagined, the old oak tree, I struck off to the right, and, taking a circuitous route, sought to gain the tree before him. I exerted all my speed, but when, as I supposed, I had reached the tree, I found myself mistaken. I had but one alternative, which was to cheer the dogs. I was immediately answered by a loud baying near me. I turned in the direction of the sound, and gained the old oak tree. I had barely released the hounds, who clamored immediately they saw me, when I perceived, by their pricking up their ears, and giving a short, low whine, that he was approaching. To lull any suspicion I fancied he might have at my cheer, I gave a long blast with my horn, which he answered by appearing from a covert close at hand.

"What made you wind your horn?" he demanded.

"The sun has already sunk three hours," I returned; "and knowing the intricacies of the forest, I feared you might have lost your way, and blew the blast, as I have several times previously, to attract your attention."

"I did not lose my way," was the only reply he made, and we returned to the castle.

"For a long period these secret meetings were carried on, and I had been fortunate enough to attend them all; gathering little by little, until I had sufficient to make up a good story for De Beaseant. I forwarded it to him to Aquitaine, in Normandy, and received for reply, that the young earl must not marry; that the lady must be sacrificed rather. This was a startling command, but I had put myself in a condition which prevented my refusing to undertake it, if 'twere necessary. I had by degrees ingratiated myself so much into the young earl's favour, that I wormed his secret—none to me—out of him, but learned also much with which I was unacquainted. It appeared that his intimacy with this maiden had originated in his accidentally having saved her life. One day, when separated from me and some of his vassals in the heat of a spirited chase, his attention was taken from his pursuit by loud screams; he turned to the spot, and beheld a female upon her knees, struggling with a

rough outlaw, who, with uplifted dagger, was dragging her to a cave near to the spot. The earl heard him menace her with a fierce oath, that unless she was silent he would bury his skean in her heart. As she still uttered the most piercing shrieks, the fellow proceeded to carry his threat into execution, when an arrow, discharged from the earl's bow, quivered in his heart, and he fell with a terrific groan at her feet. The earl sprang to her side, and having allayed her fright and excitement, saw her safely to the borders of the forest. He ascertained during their walk that she was of good family, one whose alliance would not sully his escutcheon, and whose beauty and personal acquirements would add fresh laurels to his high-born position. He was already smitten with her, and conceived the romantic notion of gaining her heart without communicating his rank to her, in the hope that she would love him for himself, and not for his title. He, therefore, under a feigned name, wooed her and won her. He told her that he was the son of a yeoman, and more fully to make the deception bear the appearance of reality, he gave out to his vassals that he was about to visit his uncle in Normandy.

"He took but one attendant with him: I was that one. He furnished a cottage at Locksley,* in this county, besought her to wed him secretly, and fly with him to his home. For some time she objected; but at length, on his expressing a belief that she did not love him, and a determination, if she refused to consent, to go to the wars, she gave him her hand, and, with tears in her eyes, told him she would give up all the world for his sake. He pressed her to his bosom in joy and thankfulness, and soon after they were married by his confessor—the only one let into the secret besides myself. I did not attempt to prevent the wedding, in order that I might have a hold on De Beaseant at some future time. We retired to the cottage, and for some time they lived very happily; the earl liked his privacy so well, and wishing his people to believe that he had been across the sea, stayed beyond a twelvemonth at this humble abode. I sent the whole history to De Beaseant, and he communicated in reply his determination of returning. In the meanwhile a child was born; but the earl's wife, like his mother, perished in giving birth to her first-born."

"And that child was—" hastily interrupted Gilbert, waiting for the reply with intense anxiety.

"The boy you call Robin," returned Ritson, almost exhausted by his long tale.

"I knew he came of noble blood," cried Gilbert, exultingly. "Then he is Robert, Earl of Huntingdon; my Robin, the yeoman's foster-son, Robert, Earl of Huntingdon! Proceed, for Heaven's sake, Ritson, proceed; your information more than purchases your entire forgiveness."

With a feeble smile, he continued his story.

"The Earl was distracted at his loss. He refused all consolation, would listen to nothing, but gave himself up entirely to despair; his reason forsook him, we were compelled to confine him; his strength gave way, and he was stretched on a bed of sickness, reduced by fever to the last extremity. I knew not how to act, but thinking I should best comply with De Beaseant's wishes, I gave the lady burial as a yeoman's wife, in the precincts of a neighbouring

* In Locksley town in merry Nottinghamshire,

In merry sweet Locksley town,

There bold Robin Hood he was born and was bred—

Bold Robin of famous renown.

[Robin Hood's Birth, Breeding, Valor, and Marriage.]

No known map of Nottinghamshire contains the name of this town, although that may be considered no proof that it did not exist, as the names of a vast number of towns and villages have disappeared, which are known to have existed. A Loxley in Warwickshire, and one in Staffordshire, are both mentioned in Spelman's "Villare Anglicum," Adams' "Index Villiarum," and in "England's Gazetteer," by Wharfedale; but neither appear to be the true one

monastery; the child I placed with a cottager's dame, and waited with impatience for De Beaseant's return. He arrived while the Earl was still confined to his bed, and he approved of what I had done.

"To prevent the suspicion of foul play, and as yet there had been none very material, fortune having favoured his views in the preceding circumstances, he directed the Earl's removal to his castle, accompanying him, as if he had brought him from the Continent. Seemingly fortune had determined that Baron De Beaseant should be Earl of Huntingdon; his nephew declined daily—all hopes of his recovery were fled.

"One day De Beaseant sat by his bedside, and for the first time since his wife's death, the Earl spoke coherently; he related to his uncle the whole of the preceding events, and drew from him a promise to bring up his boy as though he were his own son. To this De Beaseant consented, although he had no intention of carrying his promise into effect; the Earl, after a few more words, sunk back upon his pillow, dead. I was in the room, and De Beaseant made me swear, over the dead body, never to reveal what I knew while he lived. There was great mourning among the vassals when the Earl's death was made known, for he was beloved by them, and he was buried with all the pomp his rank demanded, in a monastery at St. Neot's. Spite of what I had done—of the motive with which I had attended him, I grieved sincerely for his loss, his uniform goodness to me having affected even my thankless heart.

"De Beaseant, as Philip Fitzooth, assumed the Earldom; and it now remained for him, in order to enjoy it securely, to put the child away. I proposed death; but he had sworn to act as though 'twere his son, and he would not imbrue his hands in its blood. We planned several schemes. At length I thought of you; the distance you lived from Kimbolton, your retired forest life, your honesty—all decided that you were the best person to whom the charge of the boy could be committed; it was resolved, and 'twas done; you know the rest concerning him."

"True," observed Gilbert, on finding that he stopped; "but what has become of the Earl?"

"He went, some years since, to Normandy, taking me with him. On our return we were wrecked. He perished. I bore the tidings to the castle, and the rich Abbot of Ramsey, William Fitzooth, De Beaseant's nearest relative, now holds possession of his estates. In a quarrel with a favourite attendant of the Bishop, I drew my skean and stabbed him to the heart; I was thrust from the castle, and excommunicated into the bargain. I should have been hanged on the ramparts, but some of my fellow-men proved that he had commenced the quarrel, and had first wounded me. Stung with rage, I swore to be revenged, and I shall be, although I shall be dead long ere it is accomplished: but I know little of Gilbert Head, if he suffers Robin to be defrauded of his right."

"You indeed know little of me if you believed otherwise," cried Gilbert, with enthusiasm. "Robin shall be reinstated, or I'll lose my life in the effort. What relations were there on the mother's side? If you know aught of them I might claim their assistance; for 'twill be to their interest to place their kinswoman's son in his right station as an earl of England."

"Her father is old Sir Guy, of Gamwell Hall," said Ritson.

"What!" cried Gilbert, starting to his feet, "old Sir Guy, of Gamwell, the other side of the forest, with his stout sons and stouter foresters, one of the rangers of the forest?"

"The same," articulated Ritson, almost inaudibly, growing faint and exhausted.

"Here's goodly help, indeed," rejoined Gilbert. "With his powerful aid I doubt not I shall oust Master Abbot of Ramsey, albeit he is styled the rich Abbot of Ramsey and Baron of Broughton."

"You will, you will"—suddenly and eagerly exclaimed Ritson, springing up on his bed—"you will promise me that?"

"With heart and hand," returned Gilbert, surprised by his act. "If there is but half a chance, Robin shall be Earl of Huntingdon, in spite of all the abbots in Christendom—and there's a round number of them."

Ritson's eyes gleamed vividly while Gilbert spoke, and he held up his hand pointing, as if registering the speech as an oath; and when it was concluded, fell back in his bed, saying—a bitter smile crossing his features—

"I shall not die unrevenged. I am content—I am content!"

There was a dead silence for a minute, and Gilbert thought he had breathed his last. He approached and bent over him; he found him yet alive, gasping for breath, his eyes glaring hideously. His struggles were terrible, but eventually he overcame the spasm, and said, with a voice awfully changed—

"Gilbert, I have but a few moments to live: I feel it. Listen to me while I can speak, and do not interrupt me. Yesterday, the Earl of Nottingham, in whose pay I have lately been retained, commissioned me to murder the two persons, a youth and his sister, now in your house. You know I attempted, and was prevented. Bid them beware of the Earl: he seeks their destruction; why, I know not.

"And now for myself: when I am dead, bury me in the spot I shall name to you. Not far from hence there is an oak which has a beech tree growing from its trunk—the branches of the two put forth their leaves together: beneath its shade lay me. Do not fail in this—promise me by your hope of heaven you will."

"I promise," returned Gilbert.

"Then shall I die happy," uttered he.

"Will you not have a priest to shrieve you? there is one in the house; I will fetch him," said Gilbert, preparing to depart.

"No, no—come back," hastily uttered Ritson, half rising in his earnestness. Gilbert returned to his couch, and seated himself.

"No," he continued, "I will see no one—all will shortly be over; you alone shall receive my last words; I have yet more to say. Gilbert, you know not the wrong I have done you—do not dream how deeply I have injured you. Gilbert Head, you had one only sister."

"Ha!" exclaimed Gilbert, starting and clenching his hands, while a foreboding of something horrible flashed like lightning through his brain.

"Peace! hear me out," said Ritson, motioning him to silence. "You and I were playfellows—grew up companions; you fell in love with my sister, and I with yours—nay, start not; you knew it not, I was too much of a villain to let you. I loved her to madness: this I knew not myself, until offering to wrong her; she spurned me from her, and refused ever again to meet me. I could not live without her; I followed her at every turn; I urged, I entreated, prayed her forgiveness; at last she yielded to my earnest, nay, frantic appeals, and granted it. I could at that moment have worshipped her. I adored her, and used every means, employed every art, to make her return my affection, and succeeded. Beneath that tree did she plight her vows to me; I swore to be faithful, honest, and true to her—and seek her happiness alone in every future act. She believed

me; her gentle nature knew no guile; but I deceived her, grossly, wickedly deceived her. We were married, as she thought, by a monk from Linton, but a wild companion personated the character—"

"Hell and death!" interrupted Gilbert, grinding his teeth, scarcely able to prevent himself from springing on the dying wretch, and at once inflicting the death upon whose verge he now trembled.

"Restrain your rage, Gilbert; although I deserve annihilation from you, the worst is yet to come; I fear I shall not have breath to finish. She remained for some time longer under your father's roof, until her condition was such that she must either quit or acknowledge the marriage. About this time you married my sister, and there existed no earthly reason why I should not have acknowledged yours, but that I wished to travel. My passion was satiated, and I began to grow tired of her. I had serious thoughts of quitting secretly and at once.

"One evening she met me, as usual, beneath the oak and beech-tree. She there urged me to acknowledge her as my wife, or take her away. I made a thousand shuffling excuses, but she set them all aside. She conjured me by my love, by my honour, to have compassion on her and consent. To her entreaties I proved deaf. She still continued to urge me; I grew surly—I felt a devil within me. I resisted her importunities; and in a passion of tears she fell at my feet, beseeching me to kill her rather than expose her to shame.

"She had no sooner uttered the words than the thought of its advantage ran like lightning through my brain; 'twas as if the foul fiend had whispered I was alone with her; no soul near, none knew of her meeting me; none, but one, knew of our connexion, and I could not be discovered. As the tempter's words sounded in my ears I drew my knife, and looked hastily round; there was none near.—God! there was none near. Had there been any human soul—aye, one living thing—I had not done the foul deed; but there was none to step between me and my horrid intent. She looked up in my face, and said, 'You must consent to what I ask! Let us leave this place together! I care not where—where you go I will cheerfully follow. Every spot in the world is the same to me, if thou art with me. Have mercy, Roland! take me! take me! Should my brother know of this, I am lost!'

The last words decided her fate; my knife gleamed in the air, and—"

"You did not—you could not—" almost frantically screamed Gilbert.

"I murdered her!" gasped Ritson.

"Holy Mary!" groaned Gilbert, and buried his face in his hands in agony.

"The knife I buried in her bosom!" he continued hoarsely. "She shrieked as she received the blow, and for a short time was senseless. I awoke then to the horror of my crime. Hell was raging in my soul. A hundred times was the knife raised to plunge into my own heart, but I was withheld by the promptings of a worse spirit. She, in a short time, opened her eyes, and turned them with a faint look upon me, and smiled. Almighty God! that smile was to me the most tremendous punishment I ever endured."

"You have once more been kind to me," she feebly uttered, 'once more ere we part for ever. I have noticed lately that you treated me, looked, and spoke to me coolly; I thought you had ceased to love me; and 'tis better to die, I feel, than to outlive your love. You have spared me the misery of living to learn its truth; and I forgive you having taken my life; for as freely do I give it you as I gave you my heart.

Farewell! let no one know that I am even dead; they will think me lost, or carried away, or anything, rather than they should know the truth. Lay me beneath this tree; 'twas where I first owned my love for you; I would it should be my last earthly resting-place, and if you will promise me that when your time arrives, you will be laid beside me there, I shall die so happy. You will promise me, will you not?"

"Blinded by tears, in an agony of maddening grief and remorse, I swore to comply with her wish. She took my hand, pressed it, even kissed it; she prayed the Holy Mother to intercede for me. With kind glances from her dying eyes, with a smile and blessing on her lips, she yielded up her spirit.

"When I found that she was dead, I committed a thousand extravagancies. I railed, swore, cursed my villany, and flung myself, exhausted, upon her bleeding body. At length, when somewhat recovered, the necessity for concealing the body forced itself upon me. With my hunting-spear and my skean I dug the grave at the foot of the tree, loosening the earth with my weapons, and throwing it out with my hands. When I had dug it sufficiently deep, I laid the body in it. I kissed her cold lips, and dared to offer up a prayer for her repose. As I threw the mould over her, like a weak child I wept, sobbed, rained tears; and when I had completed my task, I sank senseless upon the ground. I slowly recovered to be attacked by a wolf. As well as my scattered senses would permit, I kept him at bay; at that moment you came up, and saved my life. The night had passed away during my occupation and my swoon. You had spent it madly seeking for your sister, whom I had so recently murdered. The wolf wounded me in my shoulder, and you took your sister's blood, which stained my dress, for the effects of my wound. You thought my incoherent replies were caused by my alarm at the encounter with the animal, for it was a large and fierce one. I accompanied you in your search. We wandered through the forest until the sun was high: 'twas in vain—I—I—I—Holy Mother of God! look there, Gilbert! 'Tis Annie!—she smiles on me—she calls me—I come! Gilbert, remember—the foot of the oak and beech!"

He suddenly ceased, and when Gilbert raised his eyes from his hands, Roland Ritson was dead.

CHAPTER V.

"—— Now for a welcome,
Able to draw men's envies upon man.
A kiss, now, that will hang upon my lip
As sweet as the morning dew upon the rose,
And full as long."

MIDDLETON'S "WOMEN, BEWARE WOMEN." 1567.

KING.—My guards—seize him. How stand we now?
To whom belongs it now to sue? Kneel thou.

MEL.—Not though the block were there. Lo! there's the sword

I ne'er shall wear again; that ne'er knew spot
Till in a tyrant's heart I tried, but failed,
To sheathe it.

KING.—You do hear—to prison with him!

MEL.—And to the rack with thee!—the bed, where groans,
And not repose, await thee. I defy thee! THE BRIDAL.

BRILLIANTLY and merrily, in the morning's brilliancy, did Robin, Allan, and the stout-hearted, sturdy-limbed friar, take their way through the sun-tinted glades of the broad forest. The bonny Shirewood was not merrier with its bright green leaves, its fair flowers, and its blithe singing-birds, than were the three travellers. There was the witty saying, the lively ditty, and the clear, silver-toned laugh of Robin, tempered with the staid,

yet sprightly converse of Allan; while the jolly friar, by turns, yielding to the influence of both, doing honour by a lusty chorus to the ballads of the one, or lending a pious exordium to the counsels of the other. In this fashion did they leave Gilbert's forest-nome behind them, and in this way did they proceed, until the altitude of the sun proclaimed it mid-day.

"Good Master Allan," observed Robin, "the sun has found out the broad of my back, with a most scorching discernment; likewise hath my stomach discovered, with a grumbling precision, that my breakfast was taken when the lark rose. Now, a short distance from hence, there exists a babbling, bubbling brook, a stream of clear, sparkling, crystal water, which runs laughing over some glittering pebbles, moistening and nourishing quantities of wild flowers. Where it rises, or where it loses itself is of no import, but I know where it is shaded by a wide-spreading, fantastical oak. I, therefore, propose that we seat ourselves beneath its shelter, and discuss in grateful cheerfulness the contents of this wallet and wine-skin."

"I echo thy words in all heartiness of spirit," cried the friar; "and my teeth shall bear witness how much I am of thy opinion."

"I have no opposing voice to offer," said Allan, "but I would it should not be late ere we turn our eyes on Nottingham's proud towers. I have matters of some moment to transact there, which must not be interfered with by a loitering journey."

"We are at your command," returned Robin, "and go or stay, as you list."

"We will to the stream, there rest and refresh," exclaimed Allan, "and when our repast has concluded, prithee have we far to journey?"

"Oh, no," answered Robin, "three miles from this glade will cover the distance."

It was with considerable satisfaction that Allan received this intelligence, and felt, consequently, less reluctance to accompany his youthful guide to the intended resting-place; and when it was reached, the satisfaction was still greater that it had not been missed.

It was situated in the bosom of a small dell, encompassed by trees of all descriptions. Here was the monarch of the woods, with its fanciful gnarled branches twisted into straggling but admired disorder; there, the tall beech, with its thin, elegant boughs; the graceful aspen, the stately elm, the dark pines, the larch, and the gentle willow, with its drooping dress of pale green leaves, like unto the aerial drapery of a fairy. The earth was carpeted with a turf, whose tint and smoothness made it difficult to believe that it was grass and not velvet the feet were pressing. There was a profusion of flowers here, there, and everywhere; they sprung up among the grass, just of sufficient frequency to make the variation sweet to gaze upon, but they clustered at the foot of the trees, as though they sought protection of a power stronger than their own, as fragile and delicate females in their weakness cling to man.

In the midst of this dell stood an oak of enormous magnitude,—its twining, strangely-shaped arms, shot out to an almost incredible distance, while its trunk, decorated with moss, and encircled by the dainty ivy, was of a girth whose extraordinary dimensions betokened a good old age: at the foot of this king of the forest sparkled the stream of which Robin had spoken; it was a cool, delicious, winding piece of nature's wine; looking like a fluttering satin riband of purest white, waving over a dress of rich green velvet; a sweet refreshing thing which—

"Wanton and wild, through many a green ravine
Beneath the forest flowed. Sometimes it fell
Among the moss with hollow harmony,
Dark and profound. Now on the polished stones
It danced, like childhood, laughing as it went;
Then through the plain in tranquil wanderings crept,
Reflecting every herb and drooping bud
That overhung its quietness."

"This is a treat I counted not on!" exclaimed Allan, gazing his fill upon the scene before him, "right glad am I that you have brought me hither. Is this sweet and sequestered spot well known? How came you to know it, Robin, distant as it is from thy home?"

"Twas Gilbert, my foster-father, who gave me the knowledge of this place; once in the year, at the close of autumn, do we pay it a visit—it looks not then as now you see it—the yellow leaves thickly strew the ground, and the long branches of the trees around throw themselves nakedly in the air. 'Tis a sad sight to see, after having beheld it in its prime; but it is a sad duty we come to perform, and the scene befits it."

"May I enquire what the duty can be that leads you, in a drear season of the year, to such a distance?" asked Allan, with an air of interest.

"Beneath yon beech tree," replied Robin, pointing to one a short distance from them, "lies a twin brother of Gilbert Hood's; I bear his name. He was christened Robert, but his brother, in his fond familiarity, called him Robin. The reason of his lying there is this: the two brothers, as was their wont, had been hunting together; the chase led them to this spot, and here they slew it. While refreshing themselves after the fatigues of the chase, two fierce outlaws broke rudely upon them, demanding with savage action their money and their weapons, at the same time expressing their intention of carrying off the slain deer; the brothers, however, coolly defied them, and prepared to resist their lawless intrusion. Ere they could put their resolve into action, one of the villains, who bore a cross-bow, discharged a bolt at poor Robin, which he, unprepared, could not avoid: it entered his brain, and killed him on the spot. Even while the laugh was in the mouth of the outlaw at his success, an arrow from Gilbert's bow pierced his heart; the second outlaw, surprised by the sudden destruction of his comrade, was for a moment paralysed; but he was not allowed time for even an ejaculation of wonder—Gilbert sent him to his account as speedily as he had his companion. Thus in one little minute he was bereft of him to whom he had been so affectionately attached, to whom he had borne the most devoted love as a dear brother, as a most esteemed friend. He dug his grave where he fell, and with no soul near save his own, no eye save Heaven's, laid him in the earth, weeping over him with a heart almost broken, as he covered his body with mould and leaves. The bodies of the ruffians he left to the beasts of the forest and the birds of prey; soon there was nothing but their bones to whiten in the sun. It was a twelvemonth ere Gilbert prevailed upon himself to visit this spot; when he had done so, he made a vow to make a pilgrimage to it annually, and religiously has he fulfilled it. Thus became I acquainted with this place."

"'Tis a pity that so sweet a spot should have been thus desecrated," remarked Allan.

"Ah!" chimed in the friar, who had listened to the foregoing with a feeling very like impatience, "where will you find the spot, however fair, which has not in some way or other been desecrated? why even my breast has had its share. I wish I could say the same for my stomach; but I am afraid if you boys get talking so spiritually, there will be a forgetfulness of things bodily. Come, master Robin,



laid bare his store of provisions. There was plenty to satisfy their wants, much as they might have been hungered, and certainly plenty to slake their draught had they been ever so athirst, for was not the limpid stream flowing at their feet? But, pure and tempting as it looked, they did not pay it so much homage as they rendered unto the wine skin; indeed, they had commenced to assuage their thirst with the juice of the grape, and as the day was warm and they were dry, they were less abstemious than was perhaps prudent. Robin waxed exceedingly merry as the wine mounted to his brain, nor did his hilarity remain unseconded by his companions. Allan grew romantic, and the friar talkative. The latter gave them his whole history, birth, parentage, and education; how he came of good family; his name, Giles Sherborne; had been educated for the church, but preferred a life in the merry old woods, rough as it was, to

seat thyself, and show us the contents of thy wallet!"

Robin, at the friar's request, sat down and

cloistered ease and luxury; how, for some certain reasons, which he did not think it advisable to explain, he had not entirely absolved himself from the convent, but was a lay brother, with a kind of *carte blanche* from his abbot, as regarded his conduct, in consideration for a decent handful of property received; how, when occasion served, he handled his quarter-staff with masterly skill, and how, from the frequency of such handling, and from his invariable habit of tucking up his sleeves and gown, he had been nicknamed FRIAR TUCK!* how he fully intended to continue his career as he had hitherto done. Being happy and kind with all he could, and fighting with those with whom he could not be friendly; lending a hand to assist a friend, and a quarter-staff to whack a foe; saying prayers for those who needed their efficacy, and singing a ballad for those whose taste led them to prefer the profane to the sacred.

The fumes of the wine mounting to Allan's brain, it became his turn now to dilate; he spoke of his descent, of the high Norman and proud Saxon blood which flowed through his veins; shewed how, through a staunch adherence by his father to the cause of Thomas à Becket, he had been banished the kingdom by King Henry. What he said of his ancestors met with little attention; but he spoke of Marian, and then did Robin open his eyes and ears, while Friar Tuck opened his mouth and that of the wine skin, making a most loving union between them; and then when Allen had said many kind things of his sister, he spoke of the Baron of Nottingham and of his fair daughter. In the generous enthusiasm of his youth and of his nature, brought out by the wine he had drunk, he told how dearly he loved the daughter, and how particularly and heartily he hated the father—one all angelic gentleness, and the other all fiery roughness. He said that he had been brought up with the fair Christabel, for that was the name the baron's daughter bore; that while the world had smiled upon his parents, so had the baron, but that so soon as the world showed a grave countenance, immediately there was a frown of awful portent upon the baron's, and shortly afterwards he turned the broad of his back upon them. Thus the marriage which had been planned between himself and Christabel was rudely broken off, and they were harshly separated, as the lady's father had determined, for ever.

But Allan had no intention that the baron's determination should be carried into effect, and had, therefore, used every effort to frustrate whatever design the fierce old fellow conceived to render his wishes realities. He had obtained possession of a secret, by which the father of his ladye love was completely in his power. He had found means to make him acquainted with his knowledge, and the old noble had spent an hour alone in his chamber, raging, fretting, fuming, raving, and ejaculating fierce oaths. When his passion had reached almost a white heat, he grew exhausted, and cooled down, until he had so far moderated his wrath as to hit on the idea of cutting off his youthful enemy, "e'en in the blossom of his sins." Allan had politely intimated by "verbal process," at the time he gave the baron to understand that he possessed his secret, that he would pay him a visit for the purpose of coming to an amicable arrangement; but as this was not a conclusion at which

the baron intended Allan should arrive, he, knowing the route the young man must take, sent a party of his people to put a stop to his journey to Nottingham, and to his life as well. Their ill success has been recorded. Their attempts in no way damped the resolution of Allan: he had fully resolved to see the baron, and force upon him the absurdity of dreaming even of preventing his becoming his son-in-law; and if he still persisted in refusing him that gratification, he would divulge the secret. Where, then, would be the projects, the schemes of the mighty baron? Much longer might he have continued in this strain, had he not suddenly discovered that he was expending his breath for his own satisfaction alone. He was aroused to a sense of this fact by a running fire of snores proceeding from the capacious nose of his ghostly fellow-traveller, who had talked and drank himself into a sound slumber, while Robin had silently withdrawn himself from the spot, and kneeling at the foot of the beech tree which waved over the remains of Gilbert's brother, offered up prayers to Our Lady for the repose of his soul.

As soon as Allan awakened to the fact that his conversation was listened to only by the green things blooming around, he at once perceived the necessity for proceeding on their way to Nottingham—a desire which he speedily communicated by pricking the point of a spear with which he was armed, upon the crupper of the sleeping friar; perhaps a little too much wine had rendered his hand unsteady, or probably a little annoyance at the little attention the lay brother had paid to his story, induced rather too forcible an insertion of the spear's point. Be it as it may, the effect was such, that with a roar, like that of a raging lion, Tuck jumped to his feet, possessed himself of his quarter-staff, and lent Allan such a blow, that if he had not dexterously interposed his spear, he must have measured his length upon the ground. The friar, still smarting under the pain of the wound, which bled freely, blinded by fury, considering not whom he was attacking, laid about him with the best of his ability, raining a shower of blows upon Allan, whose agility was his best defence, without listening to the repeated calls for quarter which the youth made. At length, Robin hearing the clatter, arose from his knees, and ran hastily to the scene of the affray; he interposed, and inquired the cause of this sudden encounter; Allan laughed so heartily, so convulsively, that he could not reply; but the friar, whose countenance bore anything but a smile, exclaimed with asperity, rubbing tenderly the wounded place—

"Cause? beshrew me! 'tis cause enough when pious folks lie stretched engaged in their devotions, some rude comer, in very wantonness of spirit, inserts with vigour his hunting spear in the person of the unexpectant, unprotected devotee, in a place too, forsooth, where not having let or hindrance, it enters freely, letting blood like water."

"I humbly crave thy pardon, most reverend, most pious father!" cried Allan, as well as his mirth would permit him. "I meant not to hurt thy feelings, or to make the wound as wide as thy wit, or as deep as thy goodness; forgive me, I mistook thy devotions for a most unsaintly sleep."

Robin joined heartily in Allan's mirth on discovering the cause, and eventually, the pain having in a degree subsided, the friar himself laughed freely; a reconciliation was effected, and they proceeded on their way. In less than an hour they were in Nottingham, and it was now to be considered how access might be obtained to the castle by Robin and the friar, provided any unforeseen circumstances should

* With respect to Friar Tuck, though some say he was another kind of religious man, for that the order of Freys was not yet sprung up," (MS. Sloan, "Yet, as the Dominican Friars (or friars preachers) came into England in the year 1221, upwards of twenty years before the death of Robin Hood, and several orders of these religious had flourished abroad for some time, there does not seem much weight in that objection; nor, in fact, can one pay much regard to the term *frier*, as it seems to have been the common title given by the vulgar (more especially after the reformation) to all the regular clergy, of which the friars were at once the lowest and most numerous."
—Smith's Edition Robin Hood Ballads.

prevent the return of Allan; and in case of incarceration, how a liberation might be effected.

"Rest your minds easily upon that point," observed the friar; "there is a maiden in the castle whose confessor I am. I have, I am assured, the greatest influence over her, and I know she possesses one equally great over an influential of the castle; therefore there is no difficulty in obtaining access, even at the same time as yourself, Master Allan; but if you are going to poke any of your fun at the baron, as you did at me, I cannot so easily promise to get you out of the dungeon he will introduce you to, so certainly as you will find an admittance to it; be advised by me—do nothing hastily."

"Fear not for me," said Allan, "my mind is fixed upon one point, and come what may, I'll not yield an inch!"

"If you know that you are justified by honour in your determination, you are quite right," said Robin; "nothing should move me."

"Nothing shall," responded Allan, firmly.

They proceeded through the town, continuing their walk up the hill until they reached the drawbridge of the castle. Ere Allan could return answer to the warder, who had demanded the nature of the business leading them to seek admittance, Tuck stepped forward and cried—

"The blessing of St. Benedict, our holy patron, upon thee, Herbert Lindsey; I crave admittance for myself and these friends, one of whom is bound to your noble master upon a special mission of a private nature, while I would give thy daughter the benefit of my ghostly counsel; and my friend, the youth here in his forest garb, will take whatever is to be given to the wearied traveller in the buttery, whither I will join him and you as soon as my spiritual converse with the fair Maude hath concluded."

"What, jolly Tuck, honest Tuck, the merry friar of Linton Abbey!" shouted the warder. "Ho, ho! right welcome, my mirthful Sir; an open gate and a hearty welcome to thee!" The drawbridge was lowered, and they entered the castle keep.

"The baron is in his chamber, Sir," exclaimed the warder to Allan, in answer to an enquiry respecting him; "unless your errand is one of importance and of a nature to gladden a disturbed mind, I would scarce advise you to see him."

"Is he ill or angry?" asked Tuck.

"Both," answered the warder; "the gout has clapped his red-hot claws into his shoulder, and he is like a mad bull bound to a stake; if any one goes near him he roars and chafes as if he had been goaded. Ah! he's never been right since he received that ugly cut in his skull from an Infidel's scimitar in the Holy Wars."

"His humour will not daunt me," said Allan. "I am resolved to see him."

"Be it as you will. Hey! Tristram," called the warder to one of the serving men passing, "how runneth the baron's humor?"

"I've just left him roaring like a tiger, because the leech in operating upon him folded some bandage unskilfully, he kicked him out of the chamber, and made me do the job, sitting with his poinard in his right hand, swearing that if I did it as bad as the leech he'd cut my nose off."

"You had better defer your business till his health is better," suggested Herbert.

"Not a day—not an hour—a minute even," said Allan, speaking excitedly.

"As you will, noble Sir," returned the warder. "Tristram, lead this gentleman to the earl."

The man did not like to refuse, but his face length-

ened marvellously; he had just been congratulating himself upon his escape from the lion's den, and now he was about to walk into his mouth; being well convinced, that upon him the baron would wreak his wrath if the stranger should happen to be one whom he wished not to see; it was therefore with some hesitation that he asked—

"Does the baron expect to see you?"

"No," replied Allan.

"Shall I announce your name, if you please?"

"No."

"Oh!" responded the man with a bow to conceal his chagrin, "follow me then, Sir;" and so he led Allan from the spot.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the warder, as they disappeared; "poor Tristram returns to the baron's presence as if he was going to his execution. By the holy mass! but his heart beats not his ribs faster than the baron will his head if thy friend be not a welcome guest; but I must not stand dallying here, I must to the walls. Good father Tuck, you will find my daughter in the larder—go thou to her, she will make thee welcome. I shall be relieved in about an hour, and will join you; go in with ye, you know the way."

"Most assuredly, right well do I," answered Tuck.

"Fare thee well, for the present, honest Herbert."

The civilities of departure being exchanged, the friar led Robin through divers and sundry passages, until they reached the door of the larder; he knocked, and the permission to enter being accorded, they walked into a convenient apartment fitted up for the reception of edibles and cooking utensils; from a seat by the side of a sparkling fire rose a young girl, about eighteen years of age, and greeted them. Robin looked at her as he spoke, and smiled. "Aha!" thought he, "this is the damsel Friar Tuck confesses, is it? Well, of all the wicked-looking, mischief-loving, merry-eyed, merry-hearted Christians I have ever seen, this little darling surpasses all!" and in his enthusiasm this mental ejaculation very nearly became audible. He was not displeased to hear Friar Tuck exclaim, when he merely pressed the maiden's hand.

"Her lips, boy!—her lips, never mind the palm; the little ruby lips for me. Kiss her, Robin; you will leave a little of your shamefacedness behind you."

"Fie!" said the girl, with a wicked toss of the head, and a throwing of the eyes into the corners of the lids, "how can you talk such nonsense?"

Robin, nonsense or not, acted upon his advice, and after a faint struggle—truly a faint one—in fact, a very faint struggle, on the part of the lady, for she rather admired Robin's looks, he succeeded in getting a good long hearty kiss, which quite refreshed him, and left its fragrance upon his mouth for a long while. The friar did himself this same kind office, bestowing the kiss of grace and the kiss of peace, to which the young damsel made but a slight objection; indeed, she seemed rather to treat the worthy friar as a young lover, instead of a ghostly adviser, and his treatment of her was anything but purely canonical. There was some refreshment, with some stiff ale, placed before them; and in the height of their jollity, for they waxed wondrous merry, Robin took upon himself to insinuate that certain little passages passing between the two was certainly unlike the general behaviour of confessor and penitent.

The friar laughed, and said a little affection between relatives could not be of much harm.

"Relatives!" echoed Robin, "I did not know that you were relatives."

"Didn't I tell you that?" said the friar with a

roguish leer; "only think of my forgetfulness! Oh, yes, we are relatives."

"In what degree?" asked Robin, a little wickedly, for he perceived at every question the maiden's cheek grew deeper in scarlet.

"Oh, very near, I can promise you," answered Tuck, coolly; "cousins of the tenth degree: my grandfather—that is, my mother's father's sister's aunt's cousin's nephew's son, married this young lady's father's cousin's uncle's niece's aunt's grandmother by the father's side."

"Indeed!" returned Robin, laughing, "cousins too! I shouldn't have thought it."

As the ale went down their spirits uprose, and two hours passed away without their perceiving it. The three were very merry: they sung by turns, they joked, laughed, and sometimes—we blush to say it—they kissed—Robin taking especial care to have his share of the latter. In the midst of their festivity, in the height of their hilarity, the door opened, and a fellow, martially equipped, followed by six stout men, well armed, entered; the leader saluted Maude with a smile, and then bent his eye sternly on Robin and the friar.

"You were the two persons," he exclaimed, interrogatively, "who accompanied the young stranger lately seeking an interview with the baron?"

"We were," replied Robin.

"And what then?" demanded Tuck, saucily.

"You must accompany me to the baron's presence," returned the soldier.

"For what purpose?" asked the friar.

"That is a question you must put to the baron," answered he; "all I know is, that I am to bring you before him; so, good father, prithee attend me to his chamber."

"I must finish my ale," cried the friar, taking a long pull at the tankard, and then offered its remains to the soldier, who instantly availed himself of the proffered gift, nor took it from his mouth until he had drained its contents; he drew a long breath, and, with a grin of satisfaction, led the way to the baron's chamber. They traversed galleries, passages, ante-chambers in great numbers, and at length stopped before a massive oak door: here the soldier gave three loud taps.

"Come in," cried a gruff voice. The man beckoned Robin and the friar to follow him close. "Come in!" roared the voice passionately, and the soldier, followed by his prisoners, entered the room. They were at once confronted by Baron Fitz Alwine.

"Where have you been wasting your time, villain?" exclaimed he, addressing himself to the leader of the soldiers, as they all approached.

"May it please you, my lord, I have"—

"Thou liest, hound, thou hast not!" roared the baron, interrupting him fiercely, "how dare you say you have? You have kept me here three hours waiting for you."

"My lord, three hours!" echoed the soldier, surprisedly, "it is scarce ten minutes since I"—

"Insolent slave!" cried the testy baron, "do you give me the lie i' my teeth? Ho, rascals!" he bawled, turning to the men attending, "disarm him—take him, drag him to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle-keep. Away with him."

The fellows proceeded instantly to obey the command, and were conveying forcibly their leader from the apartment, when the baron, in a voice of thunder, roared to them to desist.

"Knaves!" he shouted, "would you dare to carry him off before he answers any of the questions I intend to put to him?"

The men hesitated, but a second still more peremptory command for them to take their hands from their leader, and restore him his weapons, was instantly obeyed.

"Now, villain!" exclaimed the baron, "now that you have experienced my clemency, tell me, are these serfs companions of the dog that thrust his filthy carcass into my presence a short time since?"

"Yes, my lord, they are," replied the soldier.

"And how do you know they are? How are you sure of that?"

"Because, my lord, they said they were."

"Because, my lord, they said they were," mimicked the baron, "and because they said they were, I suppose you believe them. Do you believe every knave's tale you hear?"

"My lord, I thought—"

"You did not, fellow! How should you, how dare you think? Quit the room, rascal—take your fellows with you—begone to your lair! Stay! come back! keep within hearing. There, away with you."

Robin listened to the foregoing almost in a state of bewilderment. He looked with astonished eyes at the impetuous, hot-headed earl. He was a man of about fifty, of the middle height, with a small quick eye, a Roman nose, thick bushy eyebrows, large mustachoes, a grisly beard, long black hair, and an angry fierce expression of countenance. He was habited in a suit of scale armour, with a white shirt over it, bearing the cross upon the breast, showing him to be one of the Crusaders; by his side hung a lengthy toledo; and, take his appearance generally, he seemed just the man to use the last-mentioned weapon upon any and every occasion; an embodiment of "the word and the blow," the latter coming first; a perfect living gunpowder magazine, that would, with the least spark, make a terrific explosion; a fiery, fierce, fighting, fuming, ferocious, frantic slave to passion; a brawler, a quarreller, at the slightest cause for anger; fighting for a look; a deadly enemy for a careless word; moral and high-principled only where his own private interest was concerned, and decidedly unprincipled and immoral in every other point of view; brave, when beyond the reach of danger, but undoubtedly the reverse where courage was a virtue; and to sum up all, a complete epitome of venality.

"So, my young forest whelp, and you, my roving friar," he exclaimed, at the top of his voice, "for what vile purpose did you sneak into my castle? What thieving expedition have you quitted, in order to favour me with a specimen of your pilfering abilities?"

Robin looked indignantly at him, but vouchsafed no answer, while the friar grasped his staff a little more firmly as he leaned upon it.

"Am I not to be answered?" roared the baron, enraged at their silence. "Tell me to what undeserved honour am I to attribute the visit of an outlaw's bastard, and the scum of some beggarly priory—fit attendants on the brawling beggar who preceded you?"

"Thou liest, as regards me," cried Robin, chafing at the baron's language; "I am no outlaw's bastard, nor came I with a brawling beggar; neither am I your slave, nor any man's, be he baron, earl, duke, or prince."

"Oh, ho! mighty well! Out upon thee, thou wood-cur! dost thou beard me? dost thou fling thy saucy words in my face? By St. Ignatius! I'll have thee hanged up by thy ears, and whipped with thine own bow, thou yelping pup! Darest thou to tell me I lie!"

"Thou, or any one who defiled his teeth by uttering such foul epithets," returned Robin, coolly stringing his bow, an act which the baron eyed askance

rather unsatisfactorily, but without suffering his uneasiness to appear.

"Had I not a most entire conviction," he said, "that you will be safely locked up in a cell a short time hence, I would instantly on the spot punish your audacity. I shall, however, be lenient to you, and suffer you for a short time to exist, on consideration that you answer several questions I purpose putting to you."

"I am not so entirely in your power as you fondly imagine," said Robin, with a calmness and a coolness which inexpressibly delighted the friar, who stood a quiet spectator, but quite prepared for any contingency the baron's inflammable temper might produce. "You will be much deceived if you believe otherwise. You may ask me whatsoever questions you please; none will I answer until you have replied honestly and truly, as you hope for grace and mercy hereafter, to one which I shall put to you!"

The baron, accustomed to be implicitly obeyed in every word or motion, was absolutely petrified at Robin's, to him, unparalleled impertinence; he clenched his right-hand, while, with his left, he sawed the air warningly. For a moment he seemed to have lost his breath; he moved his lips, but did not articulate a word. At length it burst from him in a torrent, the words tumbling so fast over each other, that they were scarcely distinguishable—

"Ha! ha! ho! ho! not in my power! question me! Ho! ho! witch's brat! thou unlicked bear's cub, what dost mean? A sentence, a word, the thousandth part of an exclamation from me, and thou wouldst be with thy ancestors in hell, base-born churl! Not in my power, thou serf's mongrel! why I'd strangle thee myself with my sword-belt, and will, if thou dost not answer me as becomes a slave to his lord."

"No you won't," said the friar, quietly; "that is, I think you won't."

Earl Fitz Alwine turned to him as he spoke, with somewhat of the manner a starving tiger would make an acquaintance with an object offering an easy prey; he poured upon him the most degrading epithets; he called him a hang-dog type of his gorging, rapacious, guzzling brethren; but the friar replied, that he entirely differed with him, with all due deference, and begged to observe, that either the gout, or a large quantity of wine, had impaired his understanding, an expression which drew a loud laugh from Robin. This incensed the baron to such an extent, that in an ecstasy of passion he seized hold of a missal, of a tolerable size and weight, standing upon the table, and hurled it at the friar with such force and dexterity, that, alighting on his bald head, it almost stunned him, and made him stagger rapidly backwards.

He, however, recovered himself, and, without having that consideration for rank which should induce us all to bow quietly to any freak or whim the *great* may possess, he gathered his staff at the quarters firmly in his hand, and returned the baron's gift with a sturdy blow on the gouty shoulder. The recipient uttered a roar like a wounded bull, and the next instant his skull gave a very hollow sound from a second blow, which was followed up by a vast quantity more, for lo! the friar's forehead exhibited blood, and smarting under the pain of the blow, he gave vent to the passion it created, by beating the giver all round the apartment. The baron attempted to ward off the blows with his arms, but the pain was almost as great as though he had stood still to be beaten. He roared for aid and for mercy, until he was beaten down upon his knees in a corner of the room, alternately begging for quarter, and calling for his people. Just as Friar Tuck felt that he had obtained about satisfaction in

full, and was allowing the baron to rise, the soldier, who had the command of the six retainers, put his head gently through the half-open door to see if he was really wanted. No sooner did the almost-exhausted earl catch a glimpse of him, than he flew at him, seized him by the throat, and bumped him violently against the wall, obliging him with that small mark of his favour for not coming and assisting at the very moment he was needed. When he had given him as much of that discipline as his smarting shoulders and sides would permit, he bade him seize the friar and Robin, and convey them to separate dungeons, until he made known his pleasure what further was to be done with them. As this was a proceeding to which both had most positive objections, they prepared to resist it, and the friar, bidding Robin follow close at his heels, marched up to the door, pushing, with a strong hand, the baron, who stood at the threshold, out of his path. He elevated with his left hand a crucifix, which he had snatched from the table, and brandishing his staff in the other, called out in a loud voice—

"In the name of the Holy Virgin, I charge thee, let me pass free; he that dares to offer me the slightest molestation, shall feel the weight of excommunication and my staff—the last will not be the lightest—in the strong hand of a son of the Church; out of my path, ye dogs!" And he cleared his way. The men, awed by the cross and his friar's habit, fell back, giving him free way in spite of the commands issued by the baron to hold him. Robin followed close behind him; but, though they suffered Friar Tuck to stalk away, they were not so liberal to his young companion. Just as he imagined he was clear of them, he was seized from behind, his arms pinioned, a poniard-hilt forced into his mouth as a gag, and his weapons taken from him, ere he could make the slightest resistance. The friar, believing that he was following, did not turn round, but kept on the even tenour of his way, chuckling at his success. The baron did not send after him, for in the year of our Lord eleven hundred and seventy six, it was no joke to meddle with any of the members of the Church, as Henry the Second found to his cost when he quarrelled with Thomas à Beckett; therefore, did Baron Fitz Alwine, wisely, as he deemed, suffer Friar Tuck to escape; but determined to keep Robin, in the hope of obtaining an elucidation of some circumstances concerning his daughter and Allan, which he could not thoroughly comprehend. With a patience rather unusual to him, he waited until his prisoner had ceased struggling; for when Robin found that, at present, there was no chance of escape for him, he became still, and then the gag was removed from his mouth, in order that he might answer the questions the baron was anxious to obtain.

"You accompanied Allan Clare hither to day; what was his purpose in coming?" was the first inquiry made.

"I do not know—it was not my business," replied Robin.

"'Tis false," exclaimed the baron, anger and voice beginning to rise together; "you both know and can tell—aye, and shall tell."

Robin smiled, the baron chafed.

"How long have you known Allan Clare?" he demanded.

"About twenty-four hours."

The baron opened his eyes, and said, "Truly for one so young, thou art well skilled in lying."

"Thou liest to say so!" cried Robin, with a flushed brow, "an 'twere my last breath, I'd tell thee so; and since you credit not my speech, I'll speak no more."

"And be flung from the ramparts, as thy choice companion, Allan, will be speedily," growled the baron. "Answer me, boy; were not thou and thy companions attacked on thy way hither? if not, which path did ye take?"

Robin made no answer, but coolly turned his eyes from the interrogator to the window; the baron gnashed his teeth, and was about to commit some extravagance when the door opened, and there entered two of the men who had attacked the cottage of Gilbert Hood the night preceding; one of them was he that had been antagonist to Robin, and was finished off by Lincoln. There was quickly a recognition between the two, decidedly unfavourable to Robin; for the fellow made a hasty recital of the ill success attending his expedition, and ended by giving a glowing description of the part the young gentleman, then in the baron's custody, had taken in the fray. Fitz Alwine, ere the conclusion of his tale, had worked himself up into a perfect whirlwind of fury; his rage at the loss of two of his men, the remainder being sadly bruised and beaten, and no point gained—was assisted by the agony the gout in his shoulder had produced, and the splitting headache with which the staff of Friar Tuck had endowed him. He turned like a hyena to Robin, and would have inflicted summary vengeance upon the spot, but that he thought he might make him the means of exquisite revenge upon Allan, or somebody,—he did not care whom. In a voice, husky with passion and pain, he bade the retainers drag their prisoner from the spot, and confine him in one of the turrets of the castle, there to thrust him in, until he confessed all he knew respecting Allan Clare: and, upon his bare knees, begged, in humblest humility, for forgiveness of his insolence.

"Farewell, Baron Fitz Alwine," said Robin, with a calm smile, "if my liberation depends upon that condition we shall not meet for a very long time, and, so, a long farewell. Perhaps you will be kind enough to send to my foster-father, Gilbert Hood, who is one of the forest-keepers, and holds a snug tenement on the borders of the forest, near Mansfieldwoodhaus; by-the-bye, you fellow can direct you, and let him know that you have undertaken to provide me with board and lodgement until further notice; he might be uneasy at my absence. You are a father yourself, good my Lord Baron, and can appreciate my motive."

"In the name of the foul fiend! away with him, drag him hence!" roared the baron in a paroxysm of rage.

"Fear not my stay," cried Robin, with a saucy laugh, "the desire to part is mutual;" and then, in a loud, clear voice, as they dragged him away, he sang—

The old baron's daughter was young and fair,
With her sweet blue eyes, and her golden hair;
The baron was gloomy, gouty, and wild,
He hated the world, but he loved his child.
With a hey down and a down.

The old baron's daughter loved the old boar,
Her father, but loved another much more;
A tall handsome youth, with monstrous fine eyes,
Who won her young heart—a delicate prize.
With a hey down and a down.

The baron he raved, he stamped, and he swore,
Tore his hair, cursed his stars, and many things more,
On learning his child, the last of his race,
Loved dearly a youth, whose wealth was his face.
With a hey down and a down.

He swore with fierce oaths, they never should wed,
Was stone to the tears his gentle child shed,
At length, when she found he would not relent,
She married one morn without his consent.
With a hey down and a down.

As he finished his ditty, his dungeon door was locked upon him.

CHAPTER VI

"No light, save yon faint gleam,
Which shows me walls
Which never echo'd but to sorrow's sounds;
The sigh of long imprisonment; the step
Of feet on which the iron clank'd; the groan
Of death; the imprecation of despair!"

THE TWO FOSCARI.—BYRON

"A casement high, and triple arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carved images
Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints' and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of kings and queens.
Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon.
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst;
And on her hair a glory like a saint.
She seemed a splendid angel newly drest,
Save wings, for Heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint!"

JOHN KEATS.

ROBIN listened to the departing footsteps of the men-at-arms until they died away, and all became still—he felt strangely, he hardly knew how he felt. It was the first time that he had been placed in a situation of this nature; he therefore scarcely knew in what light to view it. He did not much care about it, yet he decidedly did not like it; he felt a sort of reckless mirth upon him—yet he felt inclined to be serious, when he reflected how anxious Gilbert would be if he was detained there for some time; or, indeed, if the baron should keep his word of flinging him from the ramparts, there would be an end to his returning—and that would be the worst of all. He gazed round his cell, 'twas a wretched looking place, about ten feet square; it contained two doors, over one of them was an opening to let in light, but guarded with oaken bars which did not appear to be over strong—damp and age having placed them on the high road to be rotten. The cell was built of stone, the doors were stoutly banded with iron, and the fastenings of each were on the opposite side. He tried them both, but found them to be quite immovable. But it was evident that it was not intended to proceed to very harsh measures, for he was not chained—had been accommodated with a stool and a kind of bench intended as a substitute for a table, but bearing a very small resemblance to one. He sat himself down to collect his thoughts. It would not do to stop there, but how get out? perhaps by the window, it seemed practicable. But if he succeeded in accomplishing that, where then was he to go? he knew none of the intricacies of the building, not even where the window overlooked; and he concluded that if he attempted to make his escape, he should be detected, brought back to his dungeon, and probably undergo the most rigorous treatment. Still it was not his nature to sit quietly down in a dilemma like this, and let fate do its worst; he felt that a danger was half surmounted when it was stoutly stared in the face, and so as a commencement, he thought, at all events, he would try and see where the window overlooked. He accordingly took his bench, and placed it under the window, then the stool upon it; he gave a spring, and caught firmly hold of one of the bars; he raised himself up until he got his elbows upon the horizontal flat portion of the opening, the upper part of which was built in the form of

a half circle; he then thrust his body up, edging his chest along, until he could touch the bars: he found to his surprise, as well as his gratification, that he could put his head easily between them. Now he had often heard that where the head will go the body will follow, and it was with no small pleasure that the conviction forced itself upon his mind, that it would be an easy matter to escape. He saw that this cell was level with a portion of the ramparts, the door beneath him leading on to them; he looked down to see what depth he should have to drop, and started as he saw a soldier applying his ear to the keyhole;—he supposed to ascertain in what way he was amusing himself. In a moment, he dropped from the window quietly on to his stool, and thence to the ground; he began humming an air, then stopped; he heard the soldier's footstep leaving his door. He began singing again, and then, even while doing so, listened for the soldier with the most earnest attention; presently he heard him returning stealthily, and then he broke out carelessly into a song.

The sun brightly smiled on sweet flowers,
And they pantingly felt his warm smile;
The dew distilled tears in faint showers,
Their swooned spirits to freshen the while.
A maiden peered round for her lover,
From the leafiest dell e'er could be:
And blushing trembled all over,
When she found the fond youth at her knee!

Heigho! well-a-day!
Soft fingers will mingle,
And blushes will tingle,
The cheeks of young souls!
Well-a-day!

Here he heard the soldier rub his hands and cough, depart a few steps and then return,—he wondered how long the fellow meant to stop there. If there was always a guard on that spot, he must give up all hopes of escape that way; yet, if he could only lull any suspicion the fellow might have, he perhaps would not, after leaving, return so near but that he might have a chance to get out without being seen by him. The soldier was still listening—he went on with his song—

Kind glances that maiden was stealing,
At the youth who breathed passionate sighs;
And words of such wondrous deep feeling,
That sweet pearls trembled in her blue eyes.
He cried, "the blue heaven above me,
Ever prints a foud kiss on my brow;
I've sisters, sweet spirits, who love me,
And I faint as I ask—wilt not thou?"

Heigho! well-a-day!
Ah kind ears will listen,
And blue eyes will glisten,
At words from young souls,
Well-a-day!

He stopped—all was quiet; was the soldier gone? He listened intensely, not a sound met his ear—he thought he'd have a peep; he cautiously mounted his bench and stool, and sprang up to the bars again; he edged forward, got his head through, and looked beneath. What was his consternation on perceiving two soldiers listening at his door; and who should come up at this precise moment, but the pretty Maude, the warder's daughter; of course she turned her eyes at once full upon poor Robin, started, and made an exclamation, while he dropped like a shot upon the floor without stopping to get down by means of his artificial ladder. He heard a talking outside, and could very plainly distinguish the voice of Maude chattering volubly; in a fit of desperation he proceeded with his song, hoping that it might drown the explanation of why she had started and half screamed, which he fancied she was giving.

The ivy the oak is entwining
And with fondness it tenderly clings;
Fair sunbeams are lovingly shining
O'er the frailest, most delicate things;
The streamlet its bank is caressing,
Gentle clouds are embracing the sky,
Light zephyrs thy rose-lips are pressing,
I implore thee, sweet love, may not I?

Heigho! well-a-day!
When faint words breathe consent,
Blue eyes will beam content,
Ah! these vows from young souls,
Well-a-day!

He ceased, for he had come to the end of his song, and he waited with some anxiety to see what was to be the result of the deliberations of the party outside. He thought it advisable to remove his stool and bench from beneath the window, and had scarce accomplished it, when he heard the door unlock, and Maude entered, bearing some refreshment. She set it down, and telling the man who unlocked the door that she wished to exchange a few words with the prisoner, requested his absence for a short period. He hesitated; but Maude murmuring something about having nothing to say to him again if he did not, he took the hint, and made himself scarce.

"Well, young forester, you are in a pretty hobble," she said to Robin when the door had closed upon the gaoler; "here you are, and here you are likely to stop, like a bird in a cage. The baron is in a towering fury, storming and stalking about like one of the great horrid infidel Moors he said he killed so many of. Well, you must make yourself comfortable."

"If I thought you would keep me company, my charming Maude, I should be happy enough," cried Robin, snatching a kiss from her lips, which he had several times that day saluted.

"You are a forward boy, and require teaching," observed Maude, with a most wicked smile, disengaging herself from his embrace.

"I am sure under your tuition I should improve," laughed Robin. "But to be serious, know ye what has become of Allan Clare?"

"Yes," replied she; "he is safely chained in a dungeon far more wretched than this, and I am very much afraid he will be cut off in an untimely manner very soon, and very suddenly. It was foolish of him to tell our lord the baron to his teeth that he was a hoary villain, and that he would marry his daughter, the Lady Christabel, in spite of him. I happened to be attending my lady, and we entered the room just as he made the speech. Directly he saw my lady, he called her by name, rushed and caught her in his arms; she shrieked and fainted. The baron tore them asunder. I carried her to her chamber, and when she got there I recovered her, left her weeping, and arrived in time to meet you and the friar, jovial Giles, in the larder. Now you know the whole true and faithful history."

"Supposing, by any chance, I should find my way out of this cell," said Robin; "how may I avoid detection, and get safely away? Should I meet 'jovial Giles,' as you call him, I may be able to assist in some way Allan Clare."

"Ah!" said Maude, "but how are you to find your way out?"

"Never mind how—perhaps you can guess. At all events, do as I ask you, and I will some day return the obligation. Where's Friar Tuck?"

"In the larder," said Maude, slightly blushing. "I have told my lady where her lover is, and trust her she will set her true knight free. But the friar's service may be needed, so you must not expect to see him just yet. If you succeed in getting out without being seen—and I doubt it—steal round the ramparts

to the left. The first door you come to in the next turret you will find open; enter, and keep to the left, down the stairs, along the corridor, antechambers, galleries, until you come to the larder. If you hear no sound from it, enter, and hide yourself somewhere until I come; I will then contrive some means to get you outside the castle."

"A thousand thanks, my pretty Maude," said Robin, joyously; "I shall not forget this kindness, believe me;" and he looked in her eyes with an expression which said more plainly than even words could, "I should like to have another kiss." Maude perfectly understood the look, and laughingly throwing up her head, her long black curls dancing about, returned his look with a glance which said as plainly in answer, "There, take one." Robin instantly availed himself of this tacit permission, and gave her a hearty kiss, which the young lady by no means resisted—and perhaps, to say truth, rather liked. It was very agreeable for the second it lasted, but it was disagreeably interrupted by the harsh voice of a soldier who entered, exclaiming—

"So ho! my sprightly damsel, this is your exchange of words with the prisoner, is it? This is bringing refreshment, eh? 'Tis fit honest Herbert knows how his daughter cheers the hard fate of the captives. Truly it must be no unpleasant thing to be one."

Maude started and half-screamed as his voice broke on her ear; but as he approached to lead her from the cell, she recovered herself, and dealing him a smack on the face that made it tingle again, ran laughing from the cell. The fellow looked after her, rubbing his cheek, and then bestowed a glance and an epithet by no means affectionate upon Robin ere he passed through the doorway, carefully locking the door after him. When he was gone, Robin sat himself contented down, and partook of some bread and ale that Maude had brought him, determining to wait patiently until the moon was up before he attempted an escape. He heard the sentinel pace backwards and forwards before his door; he heartily wished him in the bosom of his ancestors, but not wishing to show his concern, he kept singing at the top of his voice snatches of all the ballads he was master of. He had for some time indulged himself in this fashion, when he heard the voice of the sentry in harsh tones bidding him be less noisy, telling him it better became his situation to be a trifle less merry. Robin thanked him for his advice, and in a jeering tone wished him a very good night. The man made no reply, but walked on, and Robin kept very quiet.

He could tell by the decreasing light the sun was fast sinking, and at the lapse of another hour the moon was high in the heavens, without a cloud to dim its brilliancy. Listening with an anxiety and an attention quite intense, he waited in expectation of hearing the constant, heavy tread of the sentinel, but all was still as death—no sound met his ear save the dull dreamy hum of the night air. He believed the time had now arrived to attempt his meditated escape, and his heart beat short and fast as he placed his stool upon the bench beneath the barred opening. He mounted it, and thrust his head between the bars, turning his anxious eyes in earnest search for his guard. He saw him leaning on his pike, watching something in the valley with breathless attention; he stood so still, so motionless, that he looked like a statue. Robin saw at a glance that, if he wished to escape, now was his time. He looked at the depth, and found it too great to drop without making a noise, which must lead to his discovery, unless he had the assistance of something to lower himself by. He paused for a moment to think what he could employ

for the purpose, and bethought himself of his sword-belt. Although his weapons had been taken from him, his belt still remained, and he lost no time in taking it off, looping it tightly round one of the bars, and then proceeded to put it into use. He gave another look at the sentry, and found him unchanged, still gazing upon what Robin discovered to be a troop of horsemen winding along the vale beneath the castle. The man's mind seemed fully occupied by what he was so earnestly watching; and Robin, breathing a short prayer to the Holy Virgin, squeezed himself between the bars, feet first. Lying upon his stomach, he kept firm hold of his belt, lowered himself, steady-ing his descent with his feet until near the bottom; then he dropped, and alighted on a trap-door, which instantly, to his alarm, gave forth a hollow sound. He turned the corner of the tower like lightning, and hid himself behind a buttress, which fortunately happened to be in deep shade. He heard an exclamation from the sentry, and peeping round the corner of the buttress, saw him approach; the man just gave a hasty glance round, but noticed not the belt hanging from the window; he then turned back, and renewed his scrutiny of the party in the vale.

Robin waited till all was still; he then stole from his hiding-place, ran swiftly round to the left, according to Maude's direction, and soon found the door named. He opened it, entered, and descended a flight of steps into a small room, so dark he could not distinguish his hand before him. He proceeded cautiously along to find the door through which he was to pass. After groping about, and stumbling over some furniture, he found it, and entered a passage; he remembered the injunction to keep to the left, and it led him into some strange dilemmas; for every hollow place let into wall or passage did he grope his way round. He found himself in a long corridor; he proceeded carefully, and then descended stairs, until he thought he should never stop, but continue until he reached the domains of a monarch, whose realms are more famed for their warmth than for any particular advantage they possess. But this idea, although somewhat justified in holding from the depth of his descent, was not realised, for at length he found himself in a stone passage. He still kept to the left, walking in and out, and carefully round every pillar and abutment, heartily wishing architects had never thought of such things; but was eventually stayed by a flight of stairs leading upwards, and he began to have some shrewd suspicions that he had lost his way. "I shall go walking into the arms of some of the fiery old baron's bloodthirsty retainers, if I am not careful," he muttered; "however, it's of no use to go back; I have reached so far unmolested, perhaps I shall get to the remainder of my journey as safely: here goes."

He mounted the stairs lightly and swiftly until he reached the top, but thinking he had another stair to ascend, which was not the case, he brought his foot to the ground with a bang, that made the place ring with its noise. He felt the blood rush into his face and ears, and was by no means restored on hearing a voice close to him exclaim, "S'death! who's there? what is that?" He did not see any necessity to answer either question; so, sinking against the wall, he stood perfectly still, scarce breathing. He heard the questions repeated, and likewise had the satisfaction of hearing a sword unsheathed and scrape along the ground in search of him. He hesitated whether to retreat or remain still; he decided on the latter, but edged himself as close to the wall as he could possibly get; he soon found his resolution a wise one, for he heard the voice mutter, "'Twas some door, I suppose; yet 'twas strangely close." Then the stranger, with

footsteps as stealthy as his own, proceeded along the very way he himself intended to pursue. This was rather awkward, but Robin instantly determined to follow, though at a respectful distance, as he concluded that the person preceding him might unconsciously show him a way to escape: he followed, but, as though the stranger heard his footsteps, he suddenly stopped; Robin did so also: the stranger went on; so did Robin: again he stopped, Robin doing the like: a pause of a minute of breathless anxiety to Robin ensued. The stranger proceeded, and Robin followed as cautiously and lightly as he possibly could; but the boards would creak, and the stranger would hear it, for again he came to a dead stand, and muttered; "Tis very strange; there must be some one on my track." He remained silent for a few seconds, and then called out in a low voice, "Who is it who thus follows me? Speak, what is thy purpose? if aught human, face me; if otherwise, in the name of the Holy Jesus, state thy reason for thus hovering round my footsteps?"

Robin acknowledged to himself that the stranger could not be revelling in the most agreeable sensations



in his state of incertitude; but as our hero felt himself quite as well off as there was a chance of being, in his present situation, he thought he'd better say nothing, and so remained silent. The stranger, who waited a reply in vain, then hurried on, as if impelled by some sudden thought, and Robin, making a shrewd guess

at it, followed him with all the speed his caution would permit; so nimbly did he manage it, that, before he was aware of it, he found himself at the very shoulders of the stranger. He checked himself, or he would have run over him—an act he certainly had no intention of performing. However, he kept close to his elbow, and they reached the end of the passage, and passed through a doorway almost together. Robin had barely glided through, when the stranger closed the door, and fastened it with massive bolts, at the same time giving utterance to a faint laugh, in which Robin, with the greatest goodwill, noiselessly joined, believing that he had quite as good reason to laugh as the other.

The stranger now proceeded with less caution, for his footsteps made a louder ring upon the stone pavement than heretofore; but Robin, for a time, preserved his caution. Suddenly, in spite of every hazard, he felt an irrepressible inclination to let the stranger know he was still followed. He chuckled at the idea—he could not resist it—and he gave utterance to a short cough, suffered his footsteps to sound, and then bounded on one side, awaiting, in complete stillness, the result. As he expected, the stranger stopped short, evidently in a perplexed state; then he hastily retraced his steps, waving his sword in all directions, but Robin, ensconced behind a pillar, eluded his search, and at length, in a state of desperation, he pursued his path without stopping, closely followed by Robin. The corridor they were pursuing led them into the chapel; the moon was throwing a bright light into it, and our hero saw that he must now be more than usually cautious in his proceedings, or nothing could prevent his being discovered. He therefore waited until he saw the figure of him he was following emerge into the light: to his surprise, when this had taken place, he perceived that he was habited as a Benedictine monk. It surely was not Tuck? No; there was none of his portly bearing. However, Robin thought he would pursue this friar, and see who he was—whether likely to prove a friend or enemy: he did not approve of his wearing a sword; there was nothing priestly in that, and he could only come to the conclusion that he was some one in disguise.

There was also another motive equally strong inducing him to follow him up, which was, although he saw that it was the chapel into which the friar had entered, yet he was as lost here as if he had been in the remotest part, for he had no idea whether he was entering by a private passage, or whether 'twas the public one. The friar had disappeared; and he cautiously followed until he got to the corner, and then he peeped round it, and saw a female, partly shrouded in a veil, kneeling at the foot of a tomb, repeating her rosary; a few paces behind her, with his cowl thrown back, stood the stranger he had followed. He was gazing upon the lady, with an intense desire to speak exhibiting itself by a certain impatience in his manner, but respect for her devotions withheld him. Robin turned from him, although he longed to get a view of his countenance, to the lady. He was struck by the appearance of the light thrown upon her. She was habited in pure white, and the moon shining full through the stained window, tinted her with many soft hues—

"As down she knelt, for Heaven's grace and boon,
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst."

There is something touchingly beautiful in the sight presented by gentle and frail mortality humbling itself in pure sincerity of heart before the Great Architect of the universe; and on this occasion, it

was more than usually exquisite—the solemnity of the hour—the solitude of the place—and the solemn stillness reigning around, lending a beauty indescribable, while the profound devotion of that lovely lady made her seem like an angel worshipping the Great Supreme. Robin gazed on her in long and earnest admiration; she looked so calm, so holily lovely. The stranger still continued a short distance behind her, standing motionless as a statue. Robin began to wonder if he meant well, and determined to stay. He had no weapon; but still he felt he should be some slight protection in case of danger. The lady's orisons were long and fervent; and while Robin was wondering what would be the result of her discovering the stranger behind, he observed her prepare to rise, having completed her prayers. The voice of the stranger, in a low tone, then rose on the air, uttering the word, "Christabel!" The lady half shrieked, and turned hastily round, and Robin, with surprise, saw and knew who stood before him, ere the lady, sinking into his arms, murmured, "Allan, dear Allan Clare!"

CHAPTER VII.

"And from afar he heard a screaming sound,
As of a dame distressed, who cried for aid,
And fill'd with loud laments the secret shade.
A thicket close beside the grove there stood,
With briars and brambles choaked, and dwarfish wood;
From thence the noise, which now approaching near,
With more distinguish'd notes invades his ear;
He rais'd his head, and saw a beauteous maid,
With hair dishevell'd issuing through the shade;

* * * * *
Thus furnished for offence, he cross'd the way
Betwixt the graceless villain and his prey."
THEODORE AND HONORIA.—DRYDEN.

"He chose a farm in Deva's vale,
Where his long alleys peep'd upon the main.
In this calm seat he drew the healthful gale,
Here mix'd the chief, the patriot, and the swain,
The happy monarch of his sylvan train;
Here, sided by the guardians of the fold,
He walk'd his rounds, and cheer'd his blest domain!
His days, the days of unstained nature, roll'd,
Replete with peace and joy, like patriarchs of old."
THOMSON.

UPON ascertaining that the spirit of Ritson had passed away, Gilbert descended slowly and sadly to the apartments beneath. He communicated to Margaret the decease of her brother, and in as brief a manner as might be, the story he had learned relative to the parentage and connection of Robin, as well as the gloomier portion relating to the murder of his own sister. Margaret burst into tears, upon hearing Gilbert's narrative; wicked as she knew her brother to have been, still he was her mother's child, and she retired to her room, to offer up sincere prayers for the repose of his soul. The worthy priest accompanied Gilbert to the chamber where the miserable Ritson lay stretched in death, and Marian, calling Lance to her side, took her way 'mid the shades of the forest trees.

She felt a heaviness upon her spirits, for which she could not well account. The intelligence of the death of the brother of Margaret, although of a nature to shock, still would not have communicated the feeling—the weight at her heart under which she laboured; she felt an indefinable dread of something about to happen, accompanied by a strange sensation of desolateness, which she never before remembered to have experienced; it would have been a pleasure to her to weep, and yet she knew not why: she was an orphan, with no relative in the wide world to cling to but her brother, whom she loved most devotedly.

This was a fact of which she had been painfully aware for a few years; then why should it come upon her now, with all the force as though she had but that moment learned the sad truth? Why should she feel so *alone* at this moment, when time had materially softened the grief she had endured for the loss of parents whom she had adored with the most perfect enthusiasm? It was a question she could not answer, but the influence of the feeling was on her, like a load of lead upon her brow and bosom.

She wandered on—the thought of her brother, her dear kind Allan, who since he had been left her only support, had never let her feel the loss of their parents, so far as lay in his power to supply their place; who had ever shown her every little kindness and affection which her wants demanded, or his own delicacy deemed she needed. She thought of him, to breathe a blessing on his name and a prayer for his safety, for she knew the errand upon which he had departed was one of danger and difficulty; and although she knew he could not reach the cottage of Gilbert Hood until the sun had sunk below the horizon, still she grew anxious for his return. With thoughts of her brother, the form of Robin continually intruded upon her vision—a pleasing, but unbidden spectre, who uncalled and unexpected would make his presence palpable; all the while she was speculating upon her brother's safe return, she could not separate the unharmed accompaniment of Robin with him. Did she think of her brother's features, the clear bright eye of Robin also shone brightly on her imagination, and his musical voice and laugh rung in her ear; she was really glad to hear that he was so well born; she had heard the whole of Gilbert's communication, and hoped that he would be reinstated in his possessions without opposition; there was also a sudden thought arose accompanying that hope, but it gave birth to a blush, a half angry smile, and so was dismissed.

She wandered on, the old dog at her heels. The sun was touching the tree tops, and the bright daylight was merging fast into the softer twilight; the foliage began to assume a rich purple hue; the shades of the huge trees grew longer, more decided, and deeper; no sound, save occasionally a sigh, breathed by the wind through the leaves: there was a grand solemnity in the scene peculiarly calculated to act upon the spirits—particularly where there already existed a tendency to sadness. Marian felt her despondency increase, and those recollections bearing the impress of misery upon them were the only ones which now fast thronged upon her. Her life had not been a long one, truly, but it bore more than its share of the ills which blight and break a young spirit; and she tinged the future anticipations with the hue of the past, until at length they were too heavy to bear unmovedly, and so she seated herself beneath a tree amid the young flowers, and placing her face upon her hands and knees, she wept long and deeply. For some time she remained in this sad mood, until at length the increasing gloom warned her to return to the cottage: for the first time she recollected that she had taken no notice whatever of the way she had come, merely wandering on as her fancy had led her, following the mazes and winding in the intricacies of the forest, without a thought arising respecting her return.

She arose from her seat and looked around her, but without being able to decide among the paths diverging right, left, and before her, which to take for the right; neither could she, from the position in which she stood, remember the situation of the cottage, that she might at least take some path leading in its direction. There was little time left her

for reflection; the sun was dropping rapidly behind the trees, and the forest was growing proportionably dark; she knew it was only left her now to take one, right or wrong, and endeavour to leave the forest, studded as it was, she was well aware, with outlaws and wolves.

With a sort of desperate determination, she chose the path she thought most likely to have been the one she had taken hither, and followed by old Lance, who seemed in no way affected by the alarm she felt, she hurried on with the hope that she might attain some place which would guide her, e'er the sun had quite sunk to his destination. She hastened on, fancying that she recognised in some of the old trees objects which she had seen as she came, but instantly some new combination of trees would come upon her sight to dispel the illusion, and throw her into greater doubt than ever. Her sadness now gave way to the alarm she naturally experienced in being placed in such an awkward situation, which was by no means lessened on hearing Lance give utterance to a succession of short, low growls; at the same time she fancied she heard footsteps behind her; she immediately began to entertain a series of horrible fancies, and accordingly increased her speed. She turned down a pathway which she was certain she had passed along as she came, by a curious knot of pine trees which grew there; she darted down it, making her walk a run, for she had come to a positive conclusion that there were footsteps coming rapidly after her, and it was no friend, or Lance would not have commenced barking so furiously.

To her dissatisfaction she perceived that this pathway led through a vista of trees, so thick and so short a distance apart, that with the little of the sunlight left, it was almost as dark as though a moonless night had suddenly enshrouded her: disagreeable as this was, she had no alternative but to proceed, and recommending herself to the protection of the Virgin, she flew along it with all the speed nature had given her. Some parts of the path were so dark that she could scarce see her way; then an opening in the trees would show a sudden gleam of twilight, acquainting her that it was not yet night. The barks of Lance grew fiercer and more continued, and the alarm this circumstance engendered, induced her to use every exertion to keep up her pace. The pathway now began to widen, and she began to hope; suddenly it diverged into two tracks, one of them she must take, and one of them she did—to find in a very short time that she had chosen the wrong one, for the path which had widened—had been only like a sudden gleam of sunshine on a stormy day, to be as speedily clouded—narrowed and ended in a thicket. Her heart died within her as she discovered this, for she knew she was at the mercy of her pursuer, who, had he intended well, on seeing her fly evidently in alarm, would have called to her in a friendly manner, and offered her assistance to escape from the unfortunate dilemma in which she was placed. He had observed strict silence, and had kept at a certain distance, probably awed by Lance, who showed no amicable feeling towards him. But who was he? Was it a he? She had not even during her flight turned her head to look; now that no chance of escape existed, she drew a long breath, and resolved to turn boldly round to face the coming danger with as much firmness as she could call into action. Lance was with her, that was something; and she could tell by his demeanour that he would not suffer her to be molested without a sturdy effort on his part to prevent it. Trying to re-assure herself in this way, she stopped and turned resolutely round. She saw a fellow stealing along, with about the same

swiftness he had herself used and in the same direction which she had taken. On perceiving that she had stopped he stopped also, and for a moment hesitated; but it was but for a moment, for he advanced as swiftly as before. Old Lance, with more courage than politeness, advanced to meet him, with an aspect betokening that, if an acquaintance sprung up between them, it would be dangerous to one of them. So thought the stranger, and conceived that the largest share might fall to his lot, for, as Lance advanced, he checked his own pace, and cried out to Marian to call off the hound.

Marian, with a spirit which the certainty of her danger gave birth to, exclaimed—

"I must first learn the purport for which you have followed me, ere I withdraw him!"

"Call off your hound, I tell you," replied the man, "or it will be all the worse for you. I do not mean to offer you harm; I know well who and what you are, and seek you for a very different purpose."

"How am I to know this?" demanded the maiden, firmly.

"By learning the ease with which I could have sent a bolt from my cross-bow through your brain, had such been my intention," he answered. "Call off your hound, I tell you!" he shouted, as the dog moving nearer him, prepared for a spring at his throat. In the haste of the moment she called to Lance, and the well-tutored hound obeyed the call, by backing, with his eye fixed on and his long fangs displayed to the stranger, until he reached the side of Marian; here he stopped, but still kept marvellously on the alert, growling with subdued sound. The man approached until he came within a few feet of Marian, and she saw that he decidedly belonged to that class of persons who gather their income from the involuntary contributions of others. His face, as well as the darkness would permit her to see, was of a villainous turn, peculiarly adapted for a cut-throat. He had a large pair of glaring eyes and a prominent nose, being the only features visible through the profusion of black matted hair which covered his skull, cheeks, and chin; his body was encased in a doublet of goat-skin, his legs in trunks of deer-skin, and shoes rudely constructed from the same materials, covered his feet, while the twisted thongs of deer-hide fastening them, wound crosswise up his leg. At his back was slung a cross-bow, and at his side a short sword; his arms were bare, and his whole appearance such, that Marian would have been overjoyed that moment to have had a hundred miles between them; however, she would not appear to be alarmed, since she knew it was quite a chance if she escaped, and possibly a firm demeanour might lead the rogue to believe that she had some assistance at hand; she, therefore, when she conceived that the distance was small enough between them, exclaimed—

"Advance no further, but at once tell me your purpose in thus dogging my footsteps! You say you know who and what I am, and seek me for a purpose opposite to offering me harm. What is this purpose?"

"That you shall know anon," was the reply; "at present you must follow me."

"Where?"

"You will know all, by-and-bye," returned he, "quite soon enough, and probably more than will please you!"

"I'll not follow you!" said Marian.

"You won't," said the fellow, fiercely; "we shall see that, my dainty maiden. Come, I have no wish to harm you,—yet, but you will not like the means I shall take to make you comply, if you come not at once and willingly."

"I will not move an inch," said Marian, firmly; "if you dare to offer me the slightest violence, you will bring upon yourself a punishment which will make you rue your ruffianly conduct to a defenceless girl."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the man scornfully, "'twas boldly spoken, but, although I admire your spirit, it will not move me to forego my purpose. I like your looks, my girl, and I have a great mind to make you an offer—and I will too; listen, you arrived yesterday, at the cottage of a forest-keeper, named Gilbert Hood, accompanied by your brother, who has to day gone to the Castle of Nottingham, from whence he will never return."

"Never return!" echoed Marian, interrupting him, alarmedly.

"Never return," replied the man, "and serve him right too, for a fool,—he must needs thrust his head into the lion's mouth, and then be surprised he has it bit off. No, no; the baron having got him safely in his power, will not let him out of his clutches very easily. Thus, you see, he has got one of you, and now he wants the other,—which is you. I suppose the old tiger has taken a fancy to you; but so have I; and if you like to live with me, like a loving wife, in the old wood here, why, you shan't see anything of the baron, and you may be as happy as the day is long with me; a dry cave for your lodging, dry leaves for your bed, and the tenderest venison for your food; why, a queen could not wish for more! What say you, damsel, shall it be so?"

"But my brother," said Marian, scarce heeding the proposition; the words, "he will never return!" ringing in her ear.

"Oh," said the fellow, misunderstanding her, "if he escapes, he can live with us, if he likes; he'll find an outlaw's life a bonnie one, I warrant, an' if he don't, why, let him hang; I doubt not though that is his fate by this time. Come, girl, how is it to be? which dost thou choose, a young sturdy fellow; or the tough, wrinkled old hog, Fitz Alwine, Baron of Nottingham though he be?"

"How know you my brother is in the baron's power?" inquired Marian, still harping on her brother, and tears beginning to find their way into her eyes.

"To Satan with your brother!" roared the outlaw, "what has he to do with my offer? By St. Dunstan, I'll no longer give you a choice. It shall be as I wish; you shall live with me; and let the baron get you out of my paws if he can. That shall be it, my little beauty. Come, I'll give you the first kiss now," and he advanced hastily to put his intention into execution, but Marian, awakened to his intent by his last words, sprang back, at the same time almost shrieking—

"To him, Lance! to him—his throat, my brave dog! hold him, Lance!"

It seemed as if Lance had only been waiting for some such exordiums, for ere the three first words had been succeeded by a fourth, he sprang up to the man's throat. The fellow, in his haste to favour Marian with a salute, had forgotten the dog; but whether his occupation was of that nature that it frequently placed him in similar situations, or whether he was naturally dexterous, we cannot properly determine, but instead of Lance catching him by the throat, he caught Lance by it and flung him off. The dog was too heavy to throw far, and was too nimble to be disconcerted by such an act, and his feet had scarcely touched the ground, when they left it again in a second spring at the outlaw's windpipe. The man made a bound to avoid it, but Lance just caught his ear. When Lance gripped, there was no

mistake about it. And, albeit, he was an old dog, his teeth were wondrous sharp. He gripped the ear, which not being sufficiently thick to prevent being bitten through, or so tough that it would not easily separate, the consequences were, that the dog being very heavy, and his teeth very sharp, he dropped to the ground with the ear in his mouth. The roar of agony which followed might have been heard from one end of the forest to the other—but it excited no compassionate feeling in Lance, who dropped the ear and was at him again.

It was the outlaw's turn this time; and as Lance flew at him, he leaped with agility to one side, drew his short sword as Lance came again at him, and received him with a tremendous cut on the skull, which laid it bare, and stretched the faithful animal senseless upon the ground. With a grim smile, despite the torture his wound gave him, the outlaw turned to the spot where Marian had stood, but found she was no longer visible; in the struggle between himself and the dog, she had passed him, and now sought rapidly to regain the path she had lost. With an oath the fellow followed in pursuit; Marian by no means ran badly, and fear lent her speed; but, poor girl, distracted with terror, she turned again into a wrong path, and actually ran away from the house she was endeavouring to find.

The ruffian, who just caught a glimpse of her light garments as she turned down the path, chuckled as he perceived that she had again mistaken her way, for he knew the locality well, slackened his speed in order to bind up his wounds, which were bleeding terribly—being quite assured that he should speedily overtake her in the path she had taken; nor was he wrong in his conjecture. He collected hastily a few herbs with which the forest abounded, which bore the credit of possessing healing properties well known to himself and others of his class, who, being out of the way of all doctors, were compelled, in cases of emergency, to doctor themselves. These he bruised together, and laying them on a piece of cloth, applied them to the wounded part, and bound it up; when this was completed, an operation over which he wasted little time, he departed in search of the lady. For a short time he saw no glimpse of her.

"She runs better than I thought for," he muttered, as he went down the alley at the top of his speed. He reached its terminus, which branched off in three directions; he looked hastily down each, but saw nothing of her; he cursed his stupidity for letting her get so much the start of him as thus to double him; but though thrown off the scent, it was by no means his intention to give up the chase. He, therefore, deeming it most probable that she had taken the one which looked likeliest to lead to Hood's cottage, he rushed down it. As he reached a turn, some distance on, he fancied he heard footsteps, light ones, it was true, but he was sure that they were footsteps borne upon the wind, which blew gently in his face. The sun had quite sunk, but the moon was fast rising, and by its cloudless brilliancy lighting up the uncovered spots in the forest.

The fellow redoubled his pace, and as he turned a second glade, at a considerable distance he beheld the light dress of Marian fluttering in the night air as she fled. With an exclamation of triumph, he followed in the pursuit, gaining at every stride rapidly upon her; she saw him as soon as he had caught a glimpse of her, for as she fled, ever and anon she turned her head, and as he had emerged from the pathway into the broad glade lighted by the moon, her quick eyes saw his odious form. In an instant the courage which had hitherto kept her silent, and in-

duced her to employ all her energies in an attempt to escape, now forsook her; and as the villain approached nearer and nearer, she gave utterance to the most frantic shrieks.

Labouring under an agony of terror, she flew along, although, at each instant, she felt as if she must fall to the ground. Still she kept up her pace; but her shrieks were dreadful—panting, breathless, fainting, nature could do no more. She had striven to her utmost, but in vain; the villain was close upon her—the forest grew dim before her—she began thinking of her brother—of her home—a thousand dim things flitted across her imagination—she stretched her hands wildly up and down—and, at length, with one piercing shriek, in utter helplessness and despair, she fell senseless upon the ground.

How often does it not happen that at the moment when we believe there is no possibility of escape from some deep and crushing misfortune, into which we may have fallen—when all hope is gone—when we look to the quarter from which we might expect some assistance, but find it not, there turns up from some unexpected source the means by we are saved!

So was it with the young timid girl, lying fainting upon the ground; there *was* succour nigh, for which she could not have hoped nor expected. At a short distance from the place where she fell, was a tall stout forester, a deer-keeper, on his nightly watch to keep the deer from unlawful hands; he was armed for fighting to the teeth, and possessed that sort of dauntless courage which is prompt and cool in all danger, however great, and is your only true courage. He heard the shrieks, and made for the direction from whence they proceeded with all speed, and broke through the thicket close to the spot where lay Marian, just in time to prevent the outlaw laying his rude hand upon her.

"How now!" he shouted, "hands off, you ugly knave!—back, villain! What, thou black-muzzled varlet! hunting down this child as a lurcher would a fawn?"

The fellow started on hearing the forester's voice, as if he had seen an apparition; yet, although the forester had bade him touch her not, he did not heed him, but stooped with the intention of raising Marian from the ground; the butt end of the forester's hunting spear, applied with some force to his side, frustrated his intention, by hurling him to the ground, while the tall sturdy forester raised the insensible girl in his arms as if she had been an infant.

"Poor child!" he exclaimed; "poor little thing, frightened out of its wits by the ugly visage of yon grim brute. Ho, master Devil's-mug! take my advice and back to your hiding place, or by the holy saints I'll raise such a clatter with my spear about your hideous pate, I'll make your eyes flash fire for a month. I will. Off with ye."

"The girl's mine," grunted the outlaw, who had no very strong inclination to attack the forester, every way his superior, and therefore rose from the ground without in any way retaliating the blow which had laid him there.

"Thine! it's false, thou filthy villain," said the forester. "I'd as soon credit the bear and fawn, the vulture and cygnet, mating, as you having aught to do with so fair a piece of God's handy work as this. Harkee, thou fiend's cub! unless you decamp at once with all the speed you're master of, I'll make a short shrift of you, and treat you to a dance in the air from the nearest oak. I have the thong handy to do it, and most certainly the will to put it in execution. I am quite satisfied that you have been guilty of some foul play; if you are here when this maiden wakes,

and she tells me as much, Saint Peter have mercy on you! for I won't. Troop, my fine fellow! I give you no further warning, mind that."

The outlaw did mind it; muttering a choice assemblage of oaths, he slowly departed the way which the forester pointed out with his finger. When he had some short time departed, the honest fellow, who still held Marian, finding that she continued senseless, lifted her gently in his arms, and bore her away. He had not journeyed far, when he reached a small spring, which ran trickling windingly through a portion of the forest; he laid her gently down, and with the cool liquid bathed her temples. In a short time he had the satisfaction of perceiving returning animation; breathing a deep sigh, she opened her eyes, and said, faintly, "Where am I?"

"In Sherwood Forest, gentle one," answered the forester, whose simple mind led him to answer the question literally. On hearing his voice, which sounded strangely in her ears, she endeavoured to rise hastily and disengage herself from his hold, but the effort was vain; she was too weak, and, bursting into tears, besought him to have mercy on her.

"No harm shall come to you, damsel, fear not," said the forester, gently, "that rogue is far enough off by this time, and if he were here, he should not lay a finger, even of kindness, upon you, unless he'd stretched me as dead as my great great grandfather at your feet; and before he could manage that he'd pass one of the longest nights he ever did in all his life, that I'll wager. Come maiden with me; I'll lead you to our hall; you'll find succour and welcome in all true heartiness beneath its roof 'll warrant you. There be maidens as tender and gentle as thyself, to cheer, weep, or pray with thee, perhaps do all three, most like—it's in their nature—and you'll find a race of stout lads to crack a crown in thy behalf, though it wore the thickest in Christendom—and, beyond all, an old hale man, who will be a father to thee in thy loneliness, and a friend in thy distress; an open hand, a warm heart, and a true spirit—gentle, or as the lion, as befits it—hath the old man, although he is my uncle, that's the truth. Let no man, unless he has a stout hand and stouter heart, gainsay it in my presence, or by my halidame, my staff and his skull should speedily try which was hardest. Come, maiden, it is not far—a slight exertion will bring thee to it."

Alternately consoling and cheering Marian, who had been so overcome by the exertions she had made, as even now to be unconscious of where she was or whither going, the forester led her unresistingly along; suddenly, as if restored to something like consciousness, she enquired rapidly—

"Who are you? what are you? whither are you taking me? is this the way to Gilbert Hood's?"

Here were four questions in a breath; the woodsman being a simple man with one tongue, hesitated a moment how to answer, but decided the matter by asking a question without answering one.

"What, my pretty damsel, do you live with Gilbert Hood across the forest, yonder? are you his child? to think I should have known Merrie Gilbert since I was a rough boy, an' he never to tell me of his bright-eyed daughter; I know of his foster-son, young Robin—the sprightly young trickster, always up to some prank—but I heard nothing of you; how close the old boy has been—and so you are a Hood, are you?"

"No!" returned Marian, who was obliged to let the rough forester have his say, for his voice was so full and loud that she stood no chance of making herself heard while he was speaking; "I am no child of

his—I have but been a partaker of his hospitality since yesterday; to-night I strolled in the woods; I lost my way, and that fearful man attacked me; I fled from him, and—

"I know the rest; well, you must have run some distance, for you are too far to think of returning to-night to Hood's cottage; you must come to my uncle's, and when you are safe there, I will step over to old Gilbert, and let him know all that's taken place."

"You are very kind," replied Marian; "indeed I heartily thank you."

"No thanks, damsel, no thanks to me—thank the Holy Virgin, not me," said the young man; "be-shrew my gallantry, you asked me some questions which I answered not, let me make up for my fault; you would know who I am, what I am, and whither we are going. Firstly, maiden, look on me; I stand about six feet six inches high, my shoulders you see are broad in proportion—I have an arm and a hand which will knock down an ox or lead a timid damsel to a May dance; I have a leg and foot that shall carry me untired forty English miles in the day, or shall dance as lightly as that of the slimmest youth round the May-pole:—I am rough and tough, and my heart's as tough as my body and limbs; my name is John Naylor,* but in consideration of my trifling size, my honest friends call me LITTLE JOHN. I am just twenty-four, an English bowman, yeoman, and deputy forest-keeper; and not the least am I proud of being the nephew, by my mother's side, of old Sir Guy Gamwell, of Gamwell Hall; and to finish, maiden, you are now going to Gamwell Hall, the most famous for all good qualities in all England, let the other be where it may."

"I put my trust in thee," gently uttered Marian; "one who hath the power to feel a pride in such personal qualifications, will not break the trust a weak defenceless maiden may place in him."

"May my right hand wither in my hour of need if I prove aught but as a tender brother to thee, damsel!" exclaimed Little John, for we shall use his familiar title; "lean on me, and fear not to press heavily; I can with ease bear thrice thy weight at the top of my speed so, there, very well indeed, we shall soon be at the Hall."

So saying, cheering and soothing by turns, with all the kindness his honest nature could infuse into the tone of his voice, they walked slowly on towards—as Little John expressed it—the most famous hall in all England.

Their path lay through a portion of the wood thickly studded with huge oaks. Although the moon, which was at the full, shone brightly, still the thickness of the foliage threw a deep gloom over their path; anon the bright patches of moonlight would make the open glades look as though they were fashioned of polished silver; and again, as they passed through the thickets, brakes, and coverts, they would be enshrouded in the shadows of the vast forest trees. But this was to have its end; and after passing along a more than usually dark path, they emerged suddenly on the borders of the forest, to behold a sight which, weak, faint, and nervous as Marian still felt, perfectly entranced her.

It was high ground upon which she stood, and the land stretched away beneath her for miles of the most varied and picturesque description. Within a quarter of a mile of where she stood were the straggling cot-

* The real name of Little John has been variously given; that of Naylor seems to be the best authenticated. Parties claiming to be true descendants were living in the last century. A bow belonging to Little John, with the name of Naylor upon it, is still said to be in existence.

tages of vassals, in number sufficient to constitute a village. The little huts raised their heads humbly amid a sweet profusion of fruit and flower-trees, and upon a little eminence stood the small, quiet, neat village church, to which the villagers regularly went to hear mass; it had its small burial-ground attached to it, and the strangely formed yew trees waved their dark branches over the happy ones sleeping beneath the green turf. To the left, upon a rising ground—for it was almost a dell, and quite a vale, where existed this small village of Gamwell—stood the hall; it stood up more proudly than any building in sight, but there was a degree of honesty in its bearing that made you pardon the pride of its appearance. The style was rude, partaking of the domestic and military character in its construction, the architecture Anglo-Norman, and was, as we have said of Gilbert Hood's, somewhat in advance of the domestic buildings of the period. Sir Guy had taken down the one in which he was born, and replaced it by another more calculated to unite the comforts and pleasures of a country residence with so much of the military character as the unsettled state of the times made essential: like the adjoining buildings, it was surrounded by trees, which, if they took somewhat from its dignity, they added to its homeliness; and this, perhaps, was by far the greater charm. A bright light shone from its windows, showing that its inhabitants were not in a state of repose; if the house—aye, the whole village, looked so in the broad moonlight.

"How very beautiful!" exclaimed Marian, as she gazed on the scene before her; "how very beautiful!" she repeated with enthusiasm; "so unexpected and so sweet!"

"So I say, maiden," chimed in John. "There's a rare bit of English scenery! Let the Normans say what they please of their own land; where will they beat that, I should like to know?"

"It is indeed worthy being proud of," returned Marian.

"Aye, aye," said Little John, delightedly; "I was born and bred in it, and hope to die in it. Proud of it, maiden! it's a land to fight and die for! and so says my uncle, Sir Guy. But we must not stand talking here about the outside, bonnie though it be; we must try what the inside of the hall has for you. Let us on, maiden; there is a dew falling, and it will chill your slight frame, if we hasten not to quit it."

Feeling better, though very tired, Marian was able to walk more cheerfully along, and soon were they at the door of the mansion, enduring the clamorous welcome of a score of hounds, whom Little John succeeded in quieting with his voice and staff, and led Marian through a group of wondering serving men, to the spacious hall in which Sir Guy, his family, and retainers were about to sup. Sir Guy* was in the act of giving his orders to the carver, who was already flourishing his knife, when Little John, accompanied by his timid companion, passed up the hall, crying out—

"My good uncle, I claim your hospitality for a distressed damsel, who would have fallen a sacrifice to a thieving outlaw, but happily I was near to prevent it, and have brought her unto you, until she can be restored to her friends in health and safety."

"The maiden is welcome in the name of St. Julian, be she gentle or simple," returned Sir Guy, in a tone

of voice that fell marvellously grateful on the ear; "bring her to me, kinsman," he added, "and let me see who hath excited thy sympathy."

Little John accordingly led Marian to the head of the table, where was seated old Sir Guy, his wife, and two fair daughters. In her flight from the outlaw, she had lost her head gear, and had in her way to the hall been accommodated with a scarf, by Little John, which she had wound round her head; she hastily removed this, as she believed that its adornment could not assist any favourable impression her appearance might make upon her beholders; she looked pale from fear and exhaustion, but not a jot the less lovely. The old knight, and, indeed, all who gazed upon her were struck by her beauty, and ere a word had left the old knight's lips, his two daughters were at her side; he noticed with pleasure their promptness to meet and receive Marian, and said kindly—

"I am right glad, my fair maiden, that my honest nephew should have been fortunate enough to render thee assistance when needed: 'twas like him to do't when he had the chance, and I am heartily pleased to see that having the chance he has done it. Poor child, you look fatigued and weak; take some wine and refreshment, it will relieve you;" but Marian, thanking him, declined it, and begged to retire to a couch, if they would accord her so kind a boon. She had scarce made known her wish, when the youngest daughter calling a maid, who came bearing a torch, led her from the apartment.

"Now, Little John, for your tale, my gallant knight, my chivalrous cavalier in behalf of distressed damsels!" shouted Will Gamwell, the youngest of seven sons, being himself about eighteen years of age; "now for the why of your succouring, and the wherefore of your bringing hither that beautiful black-eyed damsel. Your story, sir, your story!"

"Aye! the story, the story!" cried the seven sons together; their sonorous tones, accompanied by the baying of a set of deer-hounds, formed a tolerably strong demand upon Little John. When silence was obtained, he complied with their request, and finished by observing that he was about to cross the forest to let Gilbert Hood know the cause of the young lady's absence, in order to prevent any alarm he might labour under by her sudden disappearance. Will Gamwell, upon hearing this, expressed an earnest desire to accompany him, for he wished to see his old playmate, Robin.

"I haven't seen him since Christmas," he said, "and I should like to have a word with bonnie Robin, for he's after my own heart."

"Not to-night, Will, my boy," said Sir Guy, "'tis too late. Robin will be dreaming ere you reach his home, and 'twould not be friendly to disturb his slumbers to-night, seeing that to-morrow will serve the purpose quite as well."

"Nay, father," returned Will, "you mistake Robin; I know him better. If this lady is missed, he will be abroad in the wood, in search of her. When I meet with him, I will tell him he needn't fear for the maiden's safety—that she is well bestowed; and then we can try our skill with the bow by moonlight."

The old knight raised a few more objections, which were all over-ruled by his son, and as he did not wish that his boys should be in any degree effeminate, but be able, on any emergency, to pass a night in the woods, he gave his consent to the youth's departure. Accordingly, with his young companion, Little John once more threaded his way through Sherwood Forest.

* Gamwell, of Great Gamwell Hall,
A noble housekeeper was he,
Aye, as ever broke bread in sweet Nottinghamshire,
And a squire of famous degree.
"A new ballad of Bold Robin Hood."

CHAPTER VIII.

"There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him; he had look'd
Upon it till it could not pass away:
He had no breath, no being, but in hers!" BYRON.

"Dearest, best, and brightest,
Come away
To the woods and to the fields,
* * * * *
Come away
To the wild wood and the plains,
To the pools, when winter rains,
Image all the roof of leaves." SHELLEY.

"When, from sentiments of honour and a desire to act justly towards those over whom he may possess temporary power, a man renounces the cherished idols of his bosom, preferring their happiness with the certain forfeiture of his own, he has achieved the greatest victory of which he is capable—a victory over himself."—SHAKESPEARE.

"Madam—Madam—hast!
For God's sake! Madam—Madam!—here's my master,
* * * * *
Was ever heard of such a curst disaster!
* * * * *

They're on the stair just now, and in a crack
Will all be here;—
* * * * *

Fly, Juan, fly! for Heaven's sake, not a word;
The door is open—you may yet slip through
The passage you so often have explored;
Here is the garden key—fly—fly—adieu!
Haste—haste—I hear Alfonso's hurrying feet—"

BYRON.

ROBIN HOOD did not advance from his covert, although he knew that they were friends before him. As he had staid in the hope of befriending the lady, had she needed it, he thought he might still remain, in order to prevent their being interrupted by any sudden intruders; thus doing them both a service. He also understood at once that it was better that they should not know that they were observed even by him, for it would put a constraint on their words and actions, unpleasing in all respects. He was anxious to learn how Allan had got freed from his fetters, and how he had obtained that friar's gown; he had a shrewd suspicion that it had been effected through the instrumentality of the pretty Maude. "Well," he thought, "if she only contrives to get us safe on the other side of these castle walls, what a number of kisses I'll owe her until the first opportunity of payment arrives."

The lady now raised her head from Allan's shoulder, upon which she had suffered it to rest when she sunk into his arms; he observed it, and said—

"Dear Christabel, once again, after an absence of two long dreary years, do I hold you in my arms. Sweet love, this moment well repays me all I have suffered since we parted."

"And have you suffered for my sake, dear Allan?" murmured the lady.

"Can you doubt it, Christabel?" returned Allan, with warmth. "I loved you passionately ere it was our cruel fate to part; and when you were torn from me—all access to you rudely denied me—almost every hope of ever seeing you again destroyed—think you I could have lived and not have suffered deeply? Believe my affection to be more worthy of you. Can I forget the day on which your father scorned and spurned me—called me beggar, who could ne'er be mate for child of his—and that same day carried you from Huntingdon hither? I stood upon the hill on the outskirts of the city, and watched you until I caught the last glimpse of your person as the winding road hid you from my sight. As your form faded, it seemed as if hope, joy, life itself, were passing away from me. The morning was fresh and clear, yet as mine eyes gazed their last upon you, 'twas as though the sun had ceased to shine and the air become filled

with a thick and heavy mist. Long after you had vanished from my sight did I still gaze on; and when, with a bursting heart, I turned away, I felt as if shut out from the world for ever. I wandered among the hills alone, oppressed beyond endurance; and in the fulness of my grief, upon a wide heath-covered down, with no human eye to gaze upon me, I sat me down, God help me! and wept like a weak child."

"Dear, dear Allan," murmured Christabel, "I grieve most sincerely that I have been the cause of one pang to you. Heaven knows, could I make each moment of your life a happy hour, how joyfully I would do it."

"And I know it too, dear Christabel," returned Allan, fervently; "and be my fate what it may, never will I wrong your sweet kindness to me, as I hope for happiness."

"And have you been true to me, dear Allan, and will you be; and love me ever as I love you, Allan?" asked Christabel, with a sweet simplicity.

They had been children together, loving each other from their earliest recollection; and she loved him truly, tenderly, and sincerely; she knew him worthy of her love, and was unacquainted with that false delicacy which, had she possessed it, would have kept her from telling him so much.

"My own Christabel," was Allan's reply; "in thought, word, or deed, I have never swerved from you. You have been the dearest, brightest hope in my existence. I have sworn to be true to you; I have been hitherto, and I swear to remain so. I have kept your image unfaded in my heart; it will never have its brightness dimmed by any other object; and as I prove to you, so Heaven help me in my hour of need."

"Bless you! Heaven bless you, Allan! You need not ask me if I have changed; I could not, if I would. I have loved you since I could lisp your name, and a woman's love—when she *truly* loves—is a devotion which knows not, admits not, of change or deviation. My father may separate us, Allan, but he cannot either make me love or wed another."

Allan murmured his thanks, and pressed the gentle girl to his bosom; while Robin, who could not avoid hearing this colloquy, felt very much as if he should have vastly liked to have been saying all this to Marian, and she to have replied to him, even as Christabel had done to Allan.

"As to my truth, though," murmured he, "that would have been awkward, because those kisses to Maude would have told something against being exactly true to Marian." His speculations were interrupted by Allan's voice questioning the fair girl, who was leaning on him, and looking upon his face with a gaze almost of adoration.

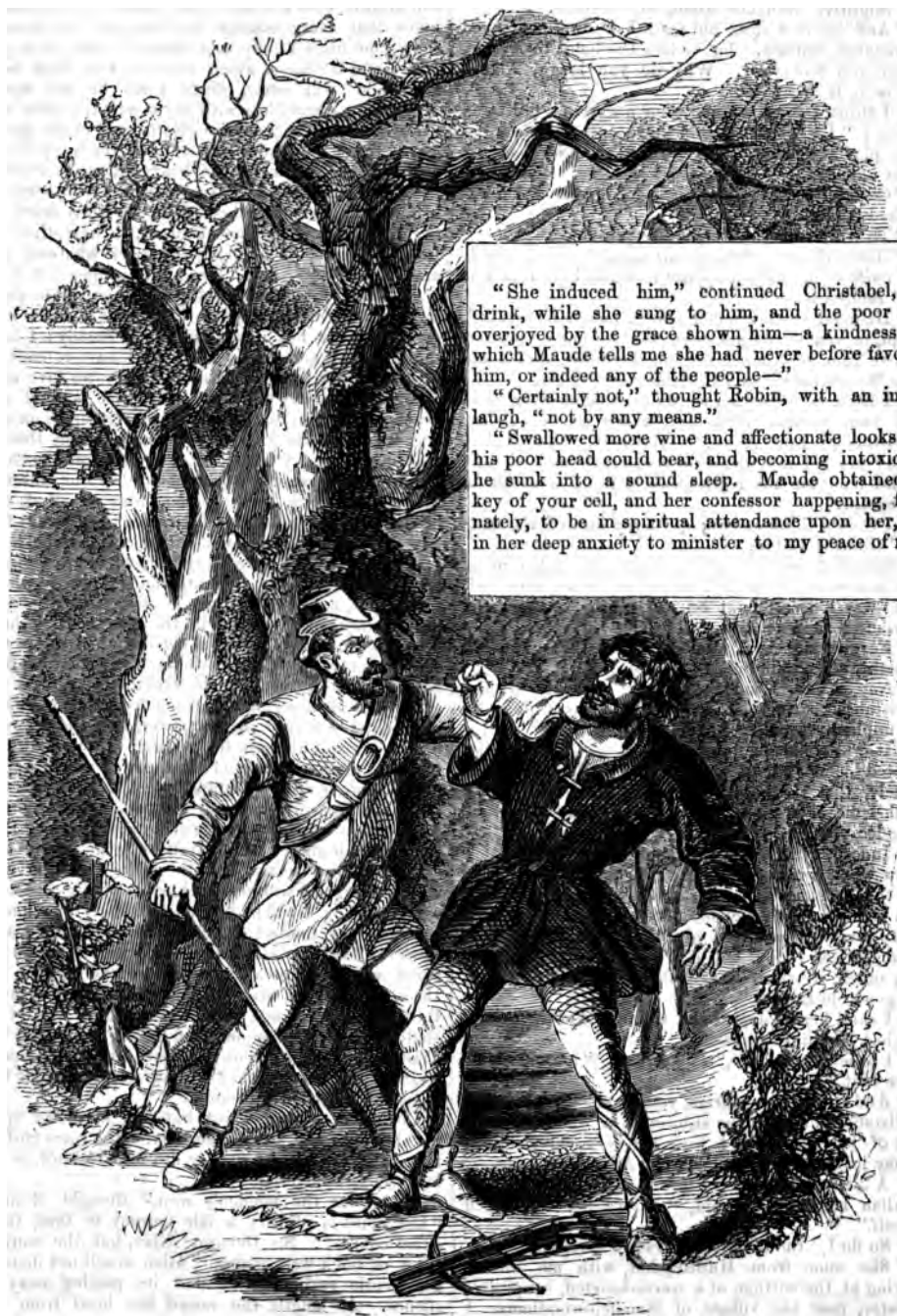
"Dear Christabel, how did you contrive to ascertain the cell to which your stern father commanded me to be dragged? and by what ingenuity did you produce a disguise and an open prison-door for me?"

"By merely employing woman's wit—it was the only engine I had at command—and when put in action, served me effectually, as you have discovered," said Christabel, playfully; "but I must not take upon myself all the credit. I am mainly indebted to my handmaiden, Maude, a quick-witted intelligent girl, for my success."

"I thought so," muttered Robin.

She was attending me when I encountered you in my father's apartment, this afternoon; and through her tact, I not only learned the situation of your dungeon, but the means by which you might be set free. It seems that your gaoler was one whom her pretty looks had beguiled of his kind thoughts.

"No doubt," interpolated Robin, mentally, "I should not be surprised if that wicked-eyed little Maude had not, by her pretty looks, beguiled of their kind thoughts all the young men in the castle, serving-men, gaolers, men-at-arms, and all, and, by the Mass! a very pleasant style of being beguiled truly."



"She induced him," continued Christabel, "to drink, while she sung to him, and the poor man, overjoyed by the grace shown him—a kindness with which Maude tells me she had never before favoured him, or indeed any of the people—"

"Certainly not," thought Robin, with an inward laugh, "not by any means."

"Swallowed more wine and affectionate looks than his poor head could bear, and becoming intoxicated, he sunk into a sound sleep. Maude obtained the key of your cell, and her confessor happening, fortunately, to be in spiritual attendance upon her, she, in her deep anxiety to minister to my peace of mind,

as well as to my most earnest wishes, confided to him the strait we were in, and he—as she tells me, for I have not seen him—is a dear, kind, fatherly saint."

"Very fatherly," thought Robin, with another silent laugh.

"Is his name Tuck?" inquired Allan.

"Yes," said she, eagerly, "it is that; why do you ask? Do you know him?"

"Slightly," returned Allan, with a smile.

"And he is a dear old man, I know," continued Christabel, warmly, "for he lent the habit to Maude, which you now wear. Why do you laugh, Allan? He is so, is he not?"

"I think I could answer your question," muttered Robin; "I wish you could have seen the dear old man play at quarterstaff last night," he added, with a quiet chuckle.

"Certainly, dear Christabel, for aught I know," replied Allan.

"Then why do you laugh?" enquired she.

"Tis nothing—a trifle; this same dear old man is not quite so old as you appear to think him, that was all," replied he.

"He must be very much younger than I imagined, Allan, or you would not have smiled; but no matter, I love him very much for his kindness, and I am sure Maude does," said Christabel, smilingly.

"I have no objection to Maude's being over head and ears in love with him or any one else, dear Christabel," said Allan, hesitatingly, "but I had rather you did not love him very much, even though he did lend me his black gown to avoid detection in my escape."

"I should think so too; quite my idea of the matter," thought Robin.

Christabel looked for a moment at Allan as if she understood him not, and then, when she did, there was a small pout on the pretty lip, and she murmured reproachfully, "Allan!"

"Forgive me," said Allan, hastily, "'twas a foolish thought, and unkind of me to utter it."

"Nay, Allan, I am not angry," quickly uttered Christabel, fearing she had wounded his feelings by her implied reproach.

"It was selfishness in me, sweet girl," fondly ejaculated Allan; "but I love you so deeply, so intensely, that I—that I—I am ashamed to tell you what I meant in giving utterance to the wish that offended you."

"Indeed, dear Allan, it did not offend me; but I know what you were going to say, and since you have not the courage, I'll even say it for you:—It is that you love me so deeply and intensely, that you wish me to love you, and you only, the same; and so I do, Allan, indeed I do; and if I said I loved the friar very much, it was only as I should reverence any of the good old fathers."

"I shall henceforward call the friar *Father Tuck*," laughed Robin, to himself.

"I believe you, love," said Allan; "let us talk no more of it."

"And how is dear Marian, your sweet sister?" asked Christabel, changing the subject at a wish. "We'll talk of her Allan, for I love her very—very dearly. I may love her 'very much,' eh, Allan?"

"A fair retort," smiled Robin.

Allan laughed, and said, "I love her very much myself."

"So do I," thought Robin, rather seriously.

"She came from Huntingdon with me, and is staying at the cottage of a warm-hearted, hospitable forester, near the village of Mansfieldwoodhaus. I induced her to come with me, because—Christabel, because, I say, I induced her to come with me thus far, because—"

"Well, Allan."

"Because, dear Christabel, I had a faint hope that I—my heart beats as I utter it—might persuade you to leave your stern and cruel father for the home of one who loves you tenderly and truly, who will make his future study that of rendering thee happy, dear Christabel; who will feel it his greatest happiness to know that every coming hour he may be able to show you little kindly acts that will draw from you a cheerful word,—a sweet smile,—or a fond look. An' thou wilt come, there shall be my sister, Marian, to cheer thee with her merry thoughts and little songs, when you have grown tired of the green-leaved trees, the tender flowers, and the music of the forest birds. Or when the heavy rains, succeeding the sweet sunshine, shall keep thy feet from straying in the cool, calm air, thou shalt set thee down in thy happy home in quiet content, to hear the low-breathed words of a loving heart, or whatever else may please thy fancy. Thou wilt come—wilt thou not? Lend me the aid of thy kind thoughts—plead for me with thyself, sweet Christabel; come with me! I speak not unadvisedly, nor hastily: I have thought long and deeply upon it! I have considered how short our term is here on earth—we love each other dearly—most dearly, why then should our peace, our hopes, our happiness be trampled on and laid waste by the caprice of another, even though that other be thy father, who, if he profits nothing by our happiness, can gain nothing by our misery? We are suited in taste, person, tone of mind, and in all things essential to constitute a life of rare felicity with each other; come with me, Christabel! If you wish it, it shall be to a forest home, whose pleasant appendages of trees, of fruits, and flowers, whose song-birds, and the old wood to wander through, shall create such ecstacy in thee, as shall perhaps draw the soft tears of too much happiness from thy calm quiet eyes. Come with me! It shall be, if it better pleaseth thee, to the bustling city, with its gaieties of all descriptions; each festivity and enjoyment shall be placed in thy power, that thou may'st derive joy and pleasure from them. Come with me, my own, my fondly loved! thou can'st not be happy here; there is none to sympathise with thee, none to cheer and pleasure thee, and all the harsh words and harsher acts of thy proud, selfish sire, to make thee feel more desolate still. Wilt thou not leave this cold, cheerless home, for the hearth of him who adores thee, and whom thou hast so kindly confessed thou lovest? I will be ever unchangeably affectionate to thee; thy fondest anticipations shall not reach, however deep its imaginings, the extent to which my spirit will fly in creating happiness and honour for thee. I am lone, even to abject loneliness, without thee. Wilt thou not speak the one kind word that shall make me far happier than it falls to human lot. Thou wilt come, wilt thou not, dear Christabel? Speak to me, love! let me hear thy sweet voice murmur thy consent; say thou wilt come!"

Christabel answered not, but laid her head upon his shoulder, and sobbed audibly. The tears rushed into Allan's eyes, and so they did into Robin's, as the low sob met their ear.

"Ah, but the maiden's won," thought Robin; "the point is gained; a fair journey to thee, thou sweet couple!" So thought Allan, but the conjectures of both were wrong. Allan would not disturb her gentle ruth, but awaited its passing away in silence. At length she raised her head from his shoulder, and said:—

"Allan, dear Allan, hear me! I have not the same power of expression given to me that you possess; I am not gifted with the capability of clothing my

simple thoughts in the earnest and impassioned language that you have just uttered; but I feel as deeply, however inadequately my thoughts may find a tongue in my words. Allan, you know I love you truly and sincerely; and by the value you set upon that affection, do not tempt me. I implore you, do not tempt me. I repeat, I love you; would follow you, work, slave, die for you, cheerfully this instant. I would quit this place, any spot—the world owns not one small spot in which might exist the combination of all that could make life one untiring joy, I would not quit to be with you, dear Allan, even were you in an agony of wretchedness; but Allan, my father is here. Were my father any other but my father, I would not hesitate one second; but he is my father, Allan, and however painful the sacrifice may be personally to me, I cannot leave him—I cannot leave him. He is harsh and cross, wayward and violent, but he loves me—I know he does in his heart most tenderly; he is alone, quite alone in the world; his hasty temper forbids that his dependants should feel an affection for him, and the same failing has deprived him of all friends. My mother, whom he passionately loved, was taken from him by her Maker when I was a child, a mere infant; he has no one to have a kind thought or word for him but me. I cannot quit him; I cannot! Do not look so, Allan. I cannot bear an unkind, a harsh look from you, it will break my heart. Consider, Allan,—reflect, you asked me to plead with myself for you. I ask the same of you; I am his child, Allan, his only child—the only tie that links him to the world: the only thing he loves, and is beloved by; for I do love him, albeit you seem not to understand it. Ask me not to quit him, Allan! ask me not in such words, and in such a tone; for while you speak thus, I should forget all that honour and self-esteem should make me remember. Tempt me not, I do most earnestly implore you; by the love you bear me, do not. I—I cannot quit him." A passionate flood of tears interrupted her, and again, almost in a fainting state, her head made a pillow of his shoulder.

"Poor girl!" muttered Robin, feeling as if he had an egg whole in his throat; "poor sweet girl! it is a fearful struggle between love and duty."

It was a fearful struggle between love and duty; and no one there felt it more deeply than did Allan. For a while the feelings struggling in his breast were almost more than he could bear, but by a tremendous effort he so far conquered them as to be able to speak, though in a voice that was rendered hoarse and husky by emotion.

"My own, my proudly loved and honoured Christabel," said he, "thy wish is mine; thinkest thou I would suffer my selfishness, whatever the agony I might endure, to weigh an atom in the scale with what thou hast nobly thought thy duty, even to a sacrifice of thy happiness? No, Christabel, even though thy wish, I will not say determination, should blight my fondest hopes, make my life a wasted, withered thing—and I say not this with any covert idea of inducing thee to change—I would not have thee lose one jot of thy self-esteem, even for the intense happiness I might receive, didst thou comply with my earnest solicitation to make my home thine. No, my own love! stay here, more adored, more honoured than thou hast ever been; a change must come, and that speedily; but not in such a guise that in after years thou canst ever reproach thyself with having done aught thou hadst a shadow of a doubt was not right. Thou art right, now, sweet Christabel, as thou hast ever been since I have known thee, and I will wait patiently until the time shall arrive,—and it will

come, I feel assured—when thou wilt be mine, without having infringed or violated any duty."

"Dearest Allan!" murmured Christabel, through her sobs and tears; she could articulate no more; and Allan, who could appreciate her thankfulness, although she was unable to express it, pressed her hand fervently, without uttering another word.

At this juncture a small side-door, situated in a niche, next to where Robin was hidden, opened suddenly, and Maude appeared, bearing in her hand a lighted taper. She ran hastily forward towards her young mistress, and was closely followed by honest Friar Tuck.

"Oh, my dear lady!" she cried, "such a misfortune! Oh, dear, what's to be done! We shall all be slaughtered without mercy or shrift! Oh, dear! oh, dear! was there ever such a misfortune?"

"For Heaven's sake, Maude," said Christabel, startled by this sudden intrusion; "what has occurred to alarm you thus? Speak, tell me what does it mean?"

"It means, my lady, that we shall be sent into the other world without a single question being asked us, whether we are ready or not. I am not ready; I never was ready; I never shall be. I'll tell the fiery old gentleman so. I'll scream it to him, if he won't hear me. I'm not going to be cut off in my prime without a word for't, never believe it."

"What is all this rambling about? Why do you not speak, girl? Are you mad? What means all this? Tuck, cannot you tell me?" said Allan, who addressed Maude first sternly, and then the friar, for a solution of this strange interruption.

"No," replied Tuck; "I know no more than this. I was seated—no—kneeling."

"Sitting," said Maude.

"No, Maude," answered Tuck; "I was kneeling at my devotions—"

"At your ale," interrupted Maude, scornfully; "at your devotions, indeed, you sot."

"Fair and softly, pretty Maude," said Tuck, "goes far. You are skittishly inclined to-night, methinks, sweet Maude."

"Whatever my inclining, you are none of it," returned Maude, pettishly.

"For mercy's sake cease this wrangling," cried Allan; "and let us know the reason of your sudden and alarmed appearance; if there is danger, inform us of what it consists, that we may know how to meet it?"

"Ask Friar Tuck," returned Maude, throwing up her head with a disdainful toss; "you sought your information of him but now, let him answer you."

"Maude, this is cruel of you," said Christabel; "tell me, I beseech you, what is there to fear?"

"Why this, my lady; your ladyship is aware that I gave Egbert Lanner more wine than his head had strength to bear, and that it accordingly sent him to sleep, from which he was awakened by a message from my lord baron, who intended to pay that young cavalier at your side a visit. Well, my lady, as Egbert was disturbed before he had had time to sleep off the effects of the wine, he marched into the baron's presence exceedingly drunk, my lady; he stuck his arms a-kimbo, and asked my lord what he wanted with him? at the same time expressing a hope that the tough old dog, meaning my lord the baron, had got the upper-hand of the gout in his shoulder, and fetched him a terrible slap on it. You know, my lady, what an awful temper your father has been in this week past, and to-day more particularly. But when Egbert hit him this blow, if you had but have seen him—as I did, for I feared some disaster, and followed Egbert into

your father's presence—Oh, my lady, if you had seen him, never could you have forgotten him; he was like a savage bull struck in a sore place; he stormed, he raved, he swore such dreadful things, and then ordered Egbert to be thrown into the moat; he snatched the keys from the poor fellow's girdle first, however, and commanded him to show him which was the key of the dungeon in which they had placed your—that young cavalier. Egbert was almost sobored by his situation, and on looking over them turned quite pale, and said it wasn't there; of course it was not, for I had got it. Well, my lady, my lord the baron turned as white as your veil, and his lips quivered with passion. He instantly ordered lights to be brought to proceed to the dungeon, telling Egbert to prepare for sudden shrift; for if the prisoner was gone he'd hang him at once from the castle walls, and leave him for the crows to peck; shocking, my lady, was it not? Directly I heard this I ran off for Friar Tuck, made him run with me to the dungeon, locked the door, and here's the key; so if that young gentleman wishes to get off in a safe skin he must come at once, before the uproar reaches my father's ears, else he'll never let him pass the portcullis; there's not a moment to lose: come, sir, away with you, I'll lead you direct from here to the castle gates."

"Fly, dear Allan, quick," cried Christabel, earnestly; "tarry not a moment; if my father should discover you, I fear the consequences—for he is so sudden and violent in his anger. Quick, Allan, quick."

"But you, dear Christabel," urged he.

"Think not of me, Allan; we shall meet again," she uttered, hastily, "if not on this earth, at least in heaven."

"Our separation shall not be for so long a period; Christabel," returned Allan, "unless I die suddenly, we shall shortly meet again, trust me."

"To be sure," chimed in Maude, "you're no true lover else; pray, sir, if you don't wish to die suddenly, come away at once."

"But are you sure your father will let us out?" inquired Friar Tuck.

"Am I sure? to be sure I am sure; he let you in, and if he knows nothing of this affair—which he does not at present, for he has been doing double duty—but I doubt but he will know if you stay much longer—he will let you out again," said Maude, making a long-winded parenthesis.

"But there were three of us," suggested the friar.

"Ay," said Allan, hastily, "where is Robin Hood?" "Here!" uttered he, advancing suddenly from his concealment.

There was a slight scream from the two females, and a movement by the two males, as Robin's voice sounded in the chapel, but the alarm was speedily dissipated on his approach. Maude was one of the first to recover, and greeted him rather more warmly than Friar Tuck felt pleased at observing.

"You have escaped, then," she cried. "How bold! how clever! But you look and are a forward rogue"—and she gave him a playful tap with her little hand across the cheek. Robin was uncommonly near giving her a kiss, but the presence of the company restrained his affectionate impulse.

"Were you imprisoned, Robin?" asked Allan, in astonishment.

"I'll answer all your questions when we are safe away; I promise you I have had nearly enough of Nottingham Castle, and, believe me, there is little time to lose if we are to get clear off; the Baron will not be long knocking at your dungeon door ere he discovers your absence, and then his first order will be to prevent all persons quitting the castle; so let us

off at once. For myself I care little; I have had, young as I am, many 'escapes for my life in the green wood, between wild beast, outlaws, and stray arrows; and even were I to be cut off, 'twould matter little—I have none to grieve for me; but you, Allan, you have your sister and—and—others to grieve for your fall. They are tied to you by feelings and circumstances beyond the common run of human fellowship, and you have therefore no right to be hazardous and careless of your life, when two such beings have a life-interest in you. Come, let us away at once."

The four looked at the boy who had uttered this, with a feeling something approaching to wonder; and Maude, in the fullness of her approbation, ejaculated, "Bless his heart!" There was much prudence in what he had uttered, and it was considered advisable to put it into practice, particularly as the tramp of footsteps was heard in the passage leading to the chapel.

"Oh! the Lord have mercy upon us, and forgive us our sins! here comes your father!" cried Maude.

"Fly, dear Allan, quick, quick!" exclaimed Christabel.

Allan returned Friar Tuck his gown, and he immediately donned it.

"Heaven bless and protect thee, my dearest Christabel," fervently uttered Allan, embracing her. "Farewell; we meet again shortly, never to part."

"This way, this way," cried Maude, holding open the side door, through which Allan, having imprinted a passionate kiss upon the lips of Christabel, darted.

"St. Benedict keep thee, sweet daughter Maude!" said Friar Tuck, about to perform the same kindness for her as he had witnessed Allan bestow on Christabel.

"Fool!" she cried, and pushed him through, "I'm coming with you."

"The Holy Virgin guide and help thee in thy strait, and bring all happiness to thee, dear lady," gently uttered Robin, raising the lady Christabel's hand gallantly and gracefully to his lips.

"Amen," she replied.

"Now, my pretty Maude, I am with you," said Robin, passing his hand round the damsel's waist, from which she most unceremoniously detached it, and said to her lady—

"To your beads, madam, to your beads; and when your father comes, be very much surprised, and know nothing. Kneel, my lady, it will look better; kneel. Oh! the saints keep us, here he is and all his troop!"—and she quickly disappeared through the side door, closing it silently but firmly, as the Baron, at the head of a party of his retainers, entered the usual entry, and found his daughter kneeling at the foot of the tomb, even as Allan had discovered her.

The fugitives kept on at a smart pace through several winding passages; Allan first, having quitted Christabel, now anxious to get clear of the castle; Tuck next, somewhat indignant at the push and cognomen of "fool!" which he had received from Maude in the chapel; and Robin brought up the rear with Maude, of whom, when the winding of the passages hid his friends from sight, he had essayed, but in vain, to steal a kiss.

"You are offended with me, fair Maude," he said, deprecatingly.

"I am," was the laconic reply.

"How have I been so unfortunate?" he demanded; with an affected air of melancholy.

"Oh! don't ask me," she replied, tossing her head; "you need not care, you have had enough of Nottingham Castle, you know."

"Oh, ho!" thought Robin, "that's it, is it," and

then said, "Nay, my pretty maiden, I said *nearly* enough—and so I have—of the *castle*; but not near enough of you, dear girl."

"Do you mean that?" she said, stopping and looking him steadfastly in the eyes.

"Do I not?" he replied.

"Oh!" she rejoined, "that alters the case."

"I knew it did," said Robin, throwing his arms round her neck, and giving her, without the least resistance on her part, a hearty kiss, much to the danger of the destruction of the taper, the only light they had.

"I wish you'd move a little faster," cried Friar Tuck, suddenly turning back; "which way are we to go?"

"Straight on," said Maude, advancing briskly and getting before them all. "This way, this way"—and she raced swiftly through the intricacies of the passages for some little time, until they came out at the end of one of the wings, a short distance from the keep. She summoned her father, and the four awaited his approach and first words with considerable excitement; it was, however, speedily allayed, for he cried—

"What, returning, cavaliers? I hoped to have had a stoup of wine with you, good Friar Tuck, at least; what, you must go, eh? Well, a fair good even to you, gentle sirs; farewell, friar, we shall see you anon."

"Even so, my son," returned Friar Tuck, wishing himself safe out, and surmising, to the best of his belief, that he would *not* see him there anon. The drawbridge was lowered, and Allan passed swiftly over it, as did Friar Tuck, after bidding Maude farewell, and bestowing a benediction on her father; Robin squeezed her hand, and she, while her father's head was turned, seized his hand, raised it to her lips, and imprinted a fervent kiss upon it, much to his surprise, and sorrow, if her act was sincere, that he had gone so far in his attention to her.

"We shall meet again," she uttered, in a low voice.

"I hope so," replied Robin. "In the mean time, dear Maude, try and discover where they have placed my bow and arrows; if you can get them away, will you keep them for me?"

"I will, if I die for it," resumed Maude.

"Your companions await you, sir," said the warder.

"The Holy Mother's blessing upon you! good night," cried Robin, and darted over the drawbridge. He joined Allan and the friar, and the three kept up a rare pace as they descended the hill, passed through the town, and paused not till they once more found themselves in Sherwood Forest.

CHAPTER IX.

"A wary cool old sworder, took
The blows on his cutlass, and then put
His own well in—so well, ere you could look,
His man was floor'd, and helpless at his foot,
With the blood running like a little brook."

BYRON.

"What dost mean
By that unearthly look, as tho' a corpse
Stood there and glared upon me?—Powers of grace,
Thou changest more and more! the little light
Thine orbs had left seems gone.—Thy lineaments
Grow sharp!—Their hue, that ashy was before,
Looks ashy now to that!—Thy frame contracts,
Like something that was vanishing—substance now,
Now air!—My heart is cowed before thee!—Where
'Twas all a conflagration, nothing lives
But freezing horror now."

THE BRIDAL.

THE elder companion of Friar Tuck, whose name was Eldred, or at least he bore that appellation with his brotherhood, had, with the assistance of Gilbert Hood, a good Catholic, completed the rites over the deceased Ritson; a white sheet was thrown over his body, and lights

were placed at his head and feet. The weeping Margaret, his sister, was led from the apartment by her husband, and Father Eldred sat him down to keep watch by the body. The night waxed on apace—the moon was high in the heavens—and Gilbert began to wonder at the prolonged absence of Robin and his guests; he also for the first time missed Marian. Acting upon his first impulse he sought his wife's chamber, to which she had retired to pray for the departed soul of her brother, and made inquiries of her respecting his fair guest; the answer, that she had left the cottage for a stroll in the woods, added to his uneasiness, and with some considerable alarm he armed himself and left his cottage in search of her. He began to fear she might have fallen a victim to one of the wolves, with which the forest abounded, or what was perhaps worse, the relentless outrage of one of the numerous outlaws infesting the wood.

Either way there was cause for apprehension, and it was evident something must have befallen her, or she would not have remained abroad alone until so late an hour. Perhaps she had lost her way, and he thought he would try what making the forest echo with his voice might effect; but then he was withheld by the idea that it might only serve, if she was unfortunately in the hands of ruffians, to forewarn them of his approach, and so enable them effectually to screen her from his sight. He knew thoroughly every inlet and outlet, and he resolved to try what a swift and strict scrutiny of each would produce. Accordingly he wandered up and down, through brake, covert, thicket, glade, and alley; at length, as he turned into one darker than usual from the thickness and massing of the surrounding foliage, a slight groan struck upon his ear and on his heart at the same moment. His bow was strung, and drawing an arrow from his quiver, ready for instant use, in case of sudden emergency, he advanced to the spot from whence the sound proceeded; he distinguished a form laying upon the ground; he neared it quickly; it was his dog Lance, lying with little life in him, and a desperate gash in the head. With an exclamation of surprise, mingled somewhat with a foreboding of evil, he knelt down and raised the poor animal's head upon his knee; the creature recognised him, and turned his faint eyes upon his master, feebly wagging his tail, expressive of pleasure at again seeing him.

"Poor old Lance, it is an evil foreboding for me to find you thus; poor old dog—who was it? what were they, eh?" The dog gave a low growl and tried to raise himself, but vainly—he had not the strength to accomplish it.

"Ah! as I expected—some of those marauding, thieving, hell hounds. God help thee, poor maiden!—if thou'rt in their merciless clutches, I shudder to think what thy fate must be—perhaps is; however, I must bestir myself if I wish to be of service to thee. Poor old Lance, I cannot leave thee thus; thy wound is a deep one, but does not appear mortal—we'll try what binding it up will do; and from his pouch he drew some fine buckskin, which it was usual in case of sudden wounds to carry upon the person; he wiped away the coagulated blood, sought for a few herbs, which he found and bruised, then applied them to the wound, bound up his head, lifted him from the place where he was laying to a more retired spot, and laid him there he trusted, to recover; the dog seemed to feel his kindness, for he gave a long, low whine, and once more there was a feeble vibration of the tail. Although there was something ludicrous in the appearance of the hound with his head thus bound, yet it had no such effect upon Gilbert, for he looked upon him with the fear of losing one of the staunchest

fleetest, most faithful hounds he had ever reared. He was affectionately attached to it; it had twice saved his life, and he thought only of its danger as he would that of one of his best and truest friends; and, in truth, Lance had proved himself one.

"By the Holy Virgin!" he muttered, grinding his teeth and clenching his hand instinctively, "If I catch the rogue who has treated thee thus, I'll teach him how to destroy a thorough-bred hound, as if he were a wolf or any other useless beast. Lie there, Lance, lie still, good dog, until I return, and then, if I find thee alive, thou shalt home with me, and I'll try what Lincoln's skill can do for thee; if not, I'll dig thee a grave myself—the bones of one so faithful as thou hast been shalt not bleach in the air while I have strength of arm to turn out a few feet of earth for thee, my good old dog."

A tear gathered itself in his eyelid, and he brushed it hastily away, saying—

"I have done that for thee, Lance, I have not for my wife's brother—I have shed a tear over thee, and I am not much used to weeping, I can tell thee; lie thou there, good dog, I'll be back anon." The hound seemed to understand him, for it gave another low melancholy whine, turned its large expressive eyes upon his master, and then nestled his head between his coiled legs. "Now, St. Peter throw the fiend's bantling in my path," Gilbert added, "and I'll say an extra Ave Maria for the chance I may get to make him dance to the music of a crab-tree staff, and no stouter arm than mine to play it."

Muttering thus did Gilbert proceed rapidly along the same path, which Marian, in her fright, so swiftly had pursued; as he came to its termination a sudden shade was thrown by some passing figure on the moonlight glade into which he was entering; it appeared to come from the side of a tree of considerable dimensions, and Gilbert, alive to every chance which might throw a clue in his way tending to discover the object of his search, darted round it and ran forcibly against the rough outlaw who had pursued Marian. He was in the very act, hearing approaching footsteps, of peeping round to see the new comer, and ascertain his character and purpose, when he thus suddenly plumped into his arms. The concussion was great, for neither expected any one was so near; but the worst of the shock was sustained by the outlaw, who, weakened by his recent loss of blood, had not strength to bear Gilbert's stalwart frame, and by a natural consequence, staggered and fell back upon the turf with considerable force. Gilbert, with some difficulty, saved himself from falling over him, but trod so heavily upon the fellow's extended hand, that he uttered a roar as if he had been wounded in a thousand places at once. Gilbert assisted him to rise, but not to depart, for he favoured him with a scrutiny by no means slight. His inspection anything but satisfied him, and he therefore commenced an examination of him.

"Who are you?" was his first question.

"What's that to you?" was the grumbling reply.

"Much!" returned Gilbert; "I am a forest-keeper, and you—I am sorry to be personal—look as like a hang-dog, a cut-throat, a forest law-breaker, as one pea resembles another; but answer me faithfully two or three questions I have to make, and I may let you pass scot free; if you do not, why I'll introduce you to the sheriff and the gaol. You have now an opportunity of seeing which you prefer—what I have offered, or a very high gallows in the market-place of Nottingham."

"There are two words to a bargain," said the outlaw; "first let me know what your questions are,

and then I'll tell you whether I'll let you take me a-visiting."

"I have no objection at all to do that; but I must first premise," returned Gilbert; "that if you do not do as I wish you, you will not be asked to let me take you a-visiting—you'll come whether you like it or no. These are my questions:—first, have you seen sought of a young dark-haired roviden, clothed in a light woollen garment decorated with red ribbons, this evening, in this or any part of the forest?"

The outlaw smiled grimly, and then said, "Well, your next question?"

"That is answered by your devilish grin," uttered Gilbert quickly. "It was a hound's fangs that gave you this wound at the side of your head?"—and he sprang at the fellow, and tore the bandage from his head.

"Hell and fury!" shouted the man, thrown off his guard, "how knew you that? you couldn't know—there were none here but our two selves."

"You have unwittingly confessed, villain!" cried Gilbert, seizing him by the throat, "tell me, where is the maiden? speak, ruffian! monster, speak! or, by the grace of Heaven! I'll squeeze every morsel of life out of your damnable carcass—speak!"

Gilbert did not consider, in the paroxysm of his fury, while he compressed with all his strength the windpipe of the unfortunate wretch, that it was not very possible to articulate distinctly; but he began to discover this by observing the sudden expansion of the man's eyes, which were beginning to resemble the markings upon a peacock's tail on a large scale, while his face, naturally dark, grew blue, then black, and his tongue was thrust out of his mouth, roving rapidly from right to left. As it was not the intention of Gilbert to utterly kill the fellow, as he should lose all information if he did, he relaxed his hold, and gave him a hurl which sent him staggering back. Gilbert, however, followed him closely.

"Speak," he roared; "speak, dog! hell-hound! tell me where is the maiden? tell me. I know where the hound is; of that hereafter; but tell me what have you done with the maiden?"

The outlaw was a moment ere he recovered his breath; he looked wildly about him, for he did not precisely remember the locality he was in, in consequence of the necklace he had just fitted on. When, however, a dawning consciousness pointed out to him where he was, and how he had been treated, he, with all the speed he was master of, turned his cross-bow from his back to his hands—he had no bolts or he would have shot at once—grasped it with both hands, and made a desperate blow with the butt end of it at Gilbert's head. He was unprepared for it, saw it descending, had barely time to jerk his head on one side, when it alighted upon his shoulder with tremendous force; he staggered, fell to the ground, but regained his feet in a moment. Gilbert was never without his crab-tree staff; he played well at it, and there was a little mixture of pride in his preferring it to any other weapon, when engaged in any sudden strife; he therefore now threw away his bow and grasped his staff firmly, at the same time crying out—

"Now, my fine fellow, see how I'll make you skip; you have never had sore bones yet; I'll beat every bit of life out of you, and hang you after, and then I shall not repay half what I owe you; now, dance, you rogue." Gilbert made play with his staff by giving the fellow such a whistling rap upon the ear—the sore ear—that he grinned hideously, but uttered no sound, though his head did. He had only his cross-bow to defend himself, and that was of little use, from its unwieldiness, against the light staff used

so briskly and smartly by Gilbert; his only chance to avoid the rapid blows poured upon him was by following his opponent's advice, and leap here and there. He did so, but soon got out of breath; but Gilbert allowed no breathing time—he followed him up, made his staff fly in all directions so dexterously and so swiftly, that the wretched outlaw never knew where to expect it, until the ring of his bones told him that it had come. He began to have serious thoughts of crying for quarter; it was not possible for human nature to bear this severe handling much longer. Still he thought, "If I can only break his staff, I'll beat his brains out with the butt end of this; I will, I will." He clenched his teeth hard, and in spite of hard knocks, gathered himself up for a blow at the staff, which would shiver it to atoms. At length a fair opportunity, as he believed, served, and using all his strength, he swung his bow from his back to give it all the force he could, and dealt it at the staff, but it was too long in describing the circle. Gilbert avoided it, and the outlaw, not calculating upon missing, had the pleasure of finding it bury itself in the ground with such tenacity that he could not readily extricate it, and he pulled hard too.

To see how Gilbert belaboured him while this chance was in his power!

"Quarter!" roared he; "have mercy! quarter! quarter!"

But Gilbert was too excited to hear—he rapped away even passionately; at length, the stillness of the man told him it was time to leave off.

"I have beaten the rogue insensible!" he muttered, pausing to recover his breath; "well, 'tis not half what he deserves. The Virgin save me, but this is a heavy day for me—a heavy day. I have lost my wife's brother—but that's not so much loss either; but I learned of a dear sister wronged and foully murdered—the Holy Mother pray for her! my foster-son, Robin, in danger, for aught I know, for he ought to have been with me long since—there's somewhat wrong, or he would. I have lost, or am likely to lose, my good old Lance, the faithful brute—but I have paid for his hurt; and there's a dear young lady, a guest, lost, violated, and probably murdered, by that limb of the foul-fiend; beshrew me, if 'twere not an unmanly part, I should like to have another half hour's drubbing at yonder cub's carcase, if 'twere only to put me in better spirits. There let him lie and rot, and his resting-place will be a roasting-place below: I wish I had the basting of him. Tut, tut, this is childish—wicked, for aught I know—but I cannot help it; I feel as I have never felt—I should like to do something devilish. If a wolf would but cross my path now!—pshaw! It will not do to think i' this fashion—I'll try what a prayer will do;" and he drew forth his rosary and commenced repeating it, as he walked slowly away, scarce knowing what direction to take. He had not gone far ere the outlaw raised his head and peered round; on perceiving that Gilbert had gone, he raised himself, and muttered—

"I wasn't fool enough to let you beat me insensible, you forest-keeping slave! and if you have kept your promise of shewing me what sore bones are, I'll be revenged on you yet for it, deeply and unappeasably. He thinks the girl has fallen my victim; he can't know otherwise for some time yet, if he knows it at all, for she was carried in the direction of Gamwell, that's some consolation; I'll try a better soon, when I'm able to move about a bit; we will see how he will like a lighted torch in his cottage thatch. To-morrow I shall be as stiff as a rusted lock. Ah! oh! how my bones ache! the fiends of hell catch him and roast his marrow slowly out of his bones, for thrashing me

thus." Muttering fearful oaths, the poor wretch dragged himself to a neighbouring thicket, there to rest for a short time, and then seek out some place where he could more securely secrete himself.

Gilbert pursued his way with a heavy heart; he feared, having been unable to extract aught from the outlaw concerning Marian, that the worst had befallen her. He knew that the fellow was in some way concerned with her fate, by the look of intelligence and the horrid laugh he gave when he had been questioned respecting her. Gilbert also felt satisfied that Lance had given the wound the fellow bore on the side of his head; these were all proofs that she had been in the wretch's power, and in that event what had become of her? He wandered on, scarce even knowing what he was doing, much less whither he was going, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps and voices rise on the air; grasping his staff firmly, he quickened his step to meet the comers, be they who or what they might; he hoped that they were foes; he fully hoped that they were people with whom he could quarrel; it would go far to satisfy him to beat somebody else, even if he got soundly thrashed himself; but such an event, however desired, was not this time to gratify him, and he recognised the voice of young Will Gamwell, chaunting a ballad, which Robin had taught him, and which he (Gilbert) had taught Robin.

The echoes of the old wood were waked up by the following plaintive words:—

In a sweet little spot, all in a green dell,
There stands a small cot, and in it doth dwell
A maiden so beauteous that no tongue can tell,
Half so well,
Of her charms (and fondly we call her "our belle,")
E'en as I—
Woe, woe, for my heart!

Her eyes, like clear skies, are the pearliest blue,
There's no flower lives of such delicate hue;
No tendril, no blossom, no bud ever grew,
Half so blue,
And diamonds and pearls start in them—sweet dew!
Ah! those eyes!
Woe, woe, for my heart!

Her skin is so clear, and her lips are so red,
Her cheeks of such tint they oft shame the rose dead;
And her hair long and fair twines round her small head,
It is said,
Like the vine round the oak, such sweetness it shed,
On my soul!
Woe, woe, for my heart;

I told my fond love; 'twas in vain that I sighed;
She once gave her heart, but ah, the youth died
While yet in his youth, his beauty and pride;
She denied
Me all hope for aye; I would I had died
In that hour!
Woe, woe, for my heart!

It was with a feeling somewhat approaching to vexation that Gilbert heard the voice, more loud than musical, ring in the quiet air; he was in no humour to meet friends; he knew one of the comers was Will Gamwell, a friend of Robin's. He seemed all of a sudden to take a dislike to him, with his rude ruddy face, which had the hue of health so forcibly and visibly stamped upon it, that he had already, united with his very red hair, attained the cognomen of WILL SCARLET.† "Hang his red visage, what does he mean by shouting that little sad ditty in such boisterous terms; a plague on him! why does he not

† William Seadlock, Seadlock, Seathelocks, or Scarlet. This hero has also had the benefit of several names approaching the one by which he is so well known. In Skelton's "Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon," he introduces Scarlet and Seathelocke as the widow's sons, the latter being the elder brother, both of one mother, but of different fathers. Ben Jonson, in an unfinished pastoral, introduces these two personages also, but was probably misled by the old play of "Robin Hood." There is no doubt that, whatever the variation of name, but one person is intended. Although Will Scarlet appears to have been the constant companion of Robin Hood, his skill and position is undoubtedly second to that of Little John.

sing it like Robin, softly and gently?—but he was a rude cur ever. It is not that I made the ballad and taught Rob how to sing it, but the scarlet dog, the crimson-skinned cub, needn't—foh! shame on me! it well becomes me to rail thus at an honest lad, whose only failing is his roughness; I am changing, indeed, to do this. Ho! Master Gamwell! what ho! Will Gamwell! how is't that you're abroad in the wood so late?"

"Ho, yoho, hilloh!" returned the young gentleman, making the wood re-echo with the strength of his lungs; "who knows Will Gamwell, e'er he claps a blue, a brown, a grey, or it may be a green eye on him, eh? answer me that, good man and true, if you be?"

"He who has once heard Willy Scarlet sing will never forget it," returned Gilbert, with a deal of truth; "it needs no near approach, daylight, torch-light, or moonlight, to tell who sings, when Will Gamwell lifts up his voice and chaunts—it is not possible!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed a deep rich voice, but not Will Gamwell's.

"Approach, and let us see thy make, good stranger," cried Will, with some asperity, for he felt the satirical vein in Gilbert's speech, "let us see who and what thou art, sir stranger knave; perhaps my staff may teach thy wit a touch of politeness."

"Or he may teach thee how a broken crown tastes, Will," said little John, for 'twas he who laughed; "canst thou not hear—it is Gilbert Hood who speaks?"

"Oh!" cried Will, and ran forward to meet him; "news, Gilbert Hood!" he shouted; "good news, man; we have the lady—we've got the lady safely and snugly; Barby and Winny have her in their care; she's at the hall; Little John found her in the forest; she was running from an outlaw; all right, hurrah! Gilbert, where's Robin? which way? anywhere near? he's out in the wood on the search. Ho, hilloh! Robin Hood, oh! Ho, Robin

"Though 'tis merry to shoot in the bonny green wood,
With the deer in the glade, and thy yew bow so good;
Yet leave them for me, love—my own dear Robin Hood.
Sing lily oh, hey! oh hey, sing lily!"

"Peace, peace," cried Gilbert; "you may spare your lungs their labour. Robin left with two friends, for Nottingham, this morning; he has not since returned, and I am rather uneasy at his absence."

"I wish I'd been with him," cried Will! "oh, I wish I'd been with him. Why did he not come over for me? I long to go to Nottingham again—"

"Oh, have you ever been unto Nottingham's fair town,
There are sights to knock you up, and ale to knock you down;
There the proud old baron's castle stands, frowning on the hill,
And dungeons dreary, with ugly jaws enough to make you ill.
With a hey ho, hey ho, derry down, hey ho!"

"You don't expect Robin back to-night? he'll do as I'd do, if I could, stop a week; rare doings there, I promise you, Gilbert Hood."

"You look pale," said Little John to Gilbert Hood, kindly; "is it the moonlight only, or some great anxiety pressing on your mind? Don't think me inquisitive, but you look so haggard, so fagged, that I cannot help feeling as if I ought to ask you this question." There was so much sympathy and kindness in the tone of his voice, that Gilbert felt as if he could have burst into tears; he, however, shook it off, and replied—

"I feel the kindness of your question, John, and thank you sincerely for it. I do feel in bad spirits, my wife's brother died at my house to-day. I heard

of—of—no matter about that—I missed the young lady from my house. I followed, I found my best hound nearly killed—"

"What, Lance?" inquired Will, quickly.

"Yes, even the old dog," returned Gilbert.

"Who did it?" cried Will; "describe him to me, and if my father's seventh son, and that's me, ever comes across him with this staff, or any other, I'll play such a quick jig on his bones, as shall make him sing even quicker than he'll dance, and that won't be slow measure, I'd have you learn. What! kill old Lance! who has been out many a bright merrie morning with Robin and I? If he was my own brother, I'd never forgive him, until I'd beaten him to a mummy, and not then."

"I have every reason to believe I have beaten him to a mummy," said Gilbert with a faint smile; "I met the rascal, and raised such a clatter about his ears—ear, I should say, for I'm mistaken if the hound has not taken one from him—that as long as he breathes he'll remember it; that is, if he ever breathes again, for I left him insensible."

"Where! oh, tell me where! that I may have a look at him?" cried Will; "that if ever he gets well, and I meet with him, I may have a bout with him, for old Lance's sake?"

"Aye," said Little John, "lead us to the spot, and I will see if it is the same knave that I drove from that young timid girl to-night. I owe him a rap or two if ever he gets well, and I don't know if I shan't bind him, and give him a journey to Nottingham, and then, Will, perhaps you may go with me to see him safely in a certain strong dwelling there."

"Beautiful, beautiful!" cried Will; "is it this way?" and he proceeded to drag Gilbert along. They proceeded towards the spot where Gilbert had left the fellow lying, and Will Scarlet took care that the pace should not be a slow one. However, when they reached there he was gone; no vestige of a human being was there.

"He has given us the slip," cried Will; "never mind, I shall know the spot again, for this is the very place where I have so often met Robin—the old oak and beech tree."

"What!" exclaimed Gilbert, with a sudden start, "aye? so it is!" he continued, looking up; "this, then, is the spot!"

"Aye," said Little John, "'tis a strange place, and I have heard foresters say that it is haunted by a female; one or two of our keepers swear they have seen her too; but no one knows any story about her; it is supposed that it was some lady murdered by outlaws."

Every word went like a dagger to Gilbert's heart. Years had he dwelt in this forest, and never heard aught of this; he felt a cold sweat come over him, a sudden trembling seized him. At this moment a tremendous gust of wind tore by them—almost a whirlwind—it passed away.

"Almighty Heaven! look there," suddenly cried Little John, pointing to the trunk of the tree. A figure of a female, a thin, pale, misty shadow it was—a ghastly, ghostly thing—stood looking on them; frantically Gilbert fell on his knees, and stretched forth his clenched hands, almost shrieking, "Annie, dear Annie, my murdered sister—speak—tell me what would you?"

The figure smiled faintly, but kindly; pointed to the earth on which she stood, and then became fainter and dimmer, until she passed away, as the mist passes from the earth, leaving no form or substance to tell what had been there. Gilbert fell on his face fainting, and Little John and Will Gamwell

AND LITTLE JOHN.

stood like statues, almost paralysed with fear at what they had witnessed. For a minute were they thus, when they were unexpectedly startled by a deep groan a man appeared dangling from the tree. Little John caught him as he fell, and prevented him from coming heavily to the ground; he raised him, and saw that it



proceeding from the trees above them; there was a sudden smart rustling of the leaves, a crackling of the branches, and presently the legs, then the body of a wretch looked hideous; his face was ashy pale,

fearfully ghastly, and the blood trickling from his wound across his cheek, looked red to brightness; his eyes flashed and gleamed in a most unearthly manner, and he looked round him, shudderingly, evidently quite deranged. He, too, had seen the mysterious appearance, and the effect upon him had been tremendous. He raised himself to his feet, and said, wildly—

"Why do you glare on me?—it was not I that did the deed—'twas not I!—for mercy's sake take your eyes off me!—do you not see their looks pass through my heart like swords of fire? I did you no wrong—'twas Ritson. I only made your marriage a mockery, by acting as the priest. Mercy! Oh, God! those fixed glazed eyes, they turn me to stone—ice—ice. But now I was fire—raging fire, and now I am cold—stone-cold. Why do you glare so piteously? Have mercy, mercy!" he shrieked, and covered his eyes with his hands, while his whole frame shivered intensely. Suddenly he raised them, and glanced hastily round, shudderingly, then started forward as if to escape, but his frame, quite exhausted, could bear no more, and he fell heavily insensible to the ground.

"How strange!" muttered Will, whose mind was of that comfortably obtuse nature, that though it might for a time be startled by any strange out-of-the-way occurrence, was never deeply affected; "how strange," he added. "Was that a ghost, Little John?" He received no answer. "Whatever it was it quickly unearthed that old fox, eh?" and he slightly laughed.

Little John turned quickly round, and said, sternly, "Silence! William Gamwell; what we have this night witnessed is no matter to treat lightly, or to be spoken of with the jesting tongue of a foolish boy. Silence!"

Will, thus rebuked, hung his head abashed, but speedily recovered himself, and assisted his cousin to raise Gilbert, who lay without life or motion. "We must leave that poor wretch there," said Little John, in a smothered tone of voice, "until we have borne Gilbert to his cottage. Come, Will, we must carry the old man tenderly and gently."

"I'll do my best," said Will; and the two proceeded with the old man slowly through the forest, the pale moon showing them their way. As they neared the cottage, a long melancholy howl rose on the air; they both shuddered as they heard it.

"That was old Lance," said Will, in a low voice.

"And death is in the neighbourhood," uttered Little John, in a similar tone.

By the time they reached the cottage-door, a faint sigh escaped from Gilbert's lips, evidencing returning animation. They stopped, and placed his feet to the ground, at the same time raising him to an upright position. He opened his eyes, and stared wildly round him, as if in expectation of seeing some object, the sight of which would wither him. After taking the whole circuit in their glance, without witnessing aught, save the trees and forest things looking grey in the broad moonlight, another sigh heaved his breast, but it was one of relief; he looked for a moment steadfastly at Little John, and then bent his gaze upon Will, without uttering a word; there was something in the expression of his eye which Will did not exactly like; it was staring, even to a glare. The lad looked at the sky and at Gilbert, then at the trees, returning his glance to Gilbert, and still found the old man's eye, vividly bright, fixed upon his face; he thought he'd laugh, but the mirth died on his lip ere the sound could leave it; he could not even smile beneath such a glance; besides he recollected that

Little John had told him he had seen a matter not to be treated lightly: however he could not rest under a feeling as if he was having a hole pierced through his heart with an instrument of ice, that being the sensation which the glance of Gilbert produced. He saw that even his sturdy cousin glanced misgivingly upon the old man, and at length being inwardly assured that it was beyond a possibility for human nature to sustain longer the gaze of that cold grey eye, he determined to break the silence, and said suddenly and abruptly,

"How is it with thee, Gilbert? Art better, man? you look scared. I say, Little John, how he stares, don't he?"

"Come, Gilbert, man," said Little John, patting him kindly upon the shoulder, "look about thee, arouse thee! there are none here but I and Will Scarlet."

"No," uttered Will, with an anxious look over his shoulder, "there's nobody else—I mean—I don't think there is."

"Then it was a dream—a waking dream," said Gilbert, speaking for the first time, in low husky tones; "but, how awful!" He shuddered as he uttered this, and looked rapidly round. Will instinctively following his example, at the same time exclaiming:—

"It was no dream, though, Gilbert, I'll gage my quiver of my best arrows against a headless shaft: unless it be that four people may have the same dream at the same time, with their eyes open, and then—"

"Will, Will, curb that tongue of thine," uttered Little John, hastily; "it wags with more speed than wisdom. Now, Gilbert, this is thy cottage, enter; a little spirit or strong ale will cheer thee; the forest damps have chilled thee, come!"

At this moment the long wild howl of a hound made the forest echo with its dreary sound. All three started on hearing it; Gilbert shuddered violently; a deep groan burst from his quivering lips, and he buried his face in his hands. His whole frame shook with an excess of emotion. At length it passed away, and he threw up his head with an effort of determination: there was no moisture in his eyes, they were quite dry, and yet the cousins knew he had wept, for they had seen the big tears find their way between his fingers while they had encompassed his features. He spoke, and his voice was as clear and calm as though he had not been under the influence of an intense excitement.

"Friends," he exclaimed, "you have with me witnessed a vision, to you incomprehensible, to me a startling and fearful evidence, a corroboration of a frightful history, connected with one near and most dear to me. I cannot explain my meaning to you now; some other time will suffice. I have now a favour to ask of you, if the fear of a repetition of what you have seen will not fright you, and you are not cowed to gaze on the face of the dead. I would ask you to assist me now and at once to bury the body of my wife's brother—dead to-day—beneath the roots of that tree which showed you the spirit of my—a lost angel." Here his voice faltered for a moment, but by a strong exertion he mastered it, and continued; "He lies in my cottage. A worthy priest, now beneath my roof, hath prayed over and for him, hath done all our holy religion commands; it was his dying wish that he should be laid beneath that tree; from what we have seen, it is also the wish of another. I passed my word that it should be done, and, if alone I bear the body, and alone dig the grave—"

"Say no more, good Gilbert," said Little John; "so far as my help may serve, and that of this lad,

whose will exceeds oft-times his power, we are at thy bidding. The sight of a sainted spirit will not fright one who may look on his conscience with a steady eye; neither will the face of the dead daunt him who hath sent many rieving rascals to their account, without giving them time for a shrift."

"I am ready, too," chimed in Will; "don't fear, Gilbert Hood, that I—lad as Little John calls me, to which I question his right of doing—shall fail you. I can look on the black muzzle of your sturdiest forest-robbing murdering outlaw, without winking an eyelid, or giving an inch; then why should I care to look on one that can't hurt me? and as for ghosts, why—"

"We doubt you not," interrupted Little John suddenly; "you have said enough. Lead on, Gilbert, we will attend thee."

Gilbert did so, without another word, and they entered the cottage. They mounted the stairs, and saw the body of Ritson, covered with the white cloth, a cross upon his breast, and at his side, in attitude of austere and deep devotion, knelt father Eldred. The light from the torches threw a red glare around the room, giving somewhat of an unearthly character to the scene: patiently they awaited the termination of the friar's devotions, and when this time arrived, Gilbert communicated his intention to him.

"What has produced this sudden and hasty resolution, my son?" demanded the father; "believe me, it doth not appear seemly and certainly most strange. Why is this?"

"Ask me not now, good father," returned Gilbert; "believe me, I have a good and sufficient reason,—one which admits not of questioning; thou shalt know all anon, but not now."

"As you wish," said the friar meekly; "yet must your motive be deep and powerful, to make such sudden interment of importance."

"It is all powerful!" replied Gilbert.

At this instant the wild howl of the hound again rung sharp and clear through the forest, and then all was still again.

"Heard you that?" hoarsely whispered Gilbert to the friar.

"Even so," he replied; "many times this night hath that dog howled wildly, mournfully, and even fearfully; but 'tis one of those singular coincidences which oft arise without our being able to satisfactorily explain the cause."

"Ah!" said Will, "but it's the moon they bay at—it must be; because how is a dog to know when any one is dead—nobody can tell them, you know, unless a ghost—"

"Will!" cried Little John, reprovingly. The boy held his tongue, but wondered how it was that he could say nothing, since he'd been out that night, but he must be taken to task for it.

"There are sights and sounds, good father," said Gilbert, whose determination seemed strengthened by the wail of the hound, "which meet human eyes and ears, incomprehensible it may be to human understanding, but a construction may occasionally be put upon them, and when such is the case, it befits us we should act according to its dictates. So is it with me to-night; I feel called upon, imperatively, to bury my wife's brother this night, and by God's mercy it shall be done; when you shall know all, you will not challenge the propriety of my action."

"Be it as you deem necessary," returned the friar, who believed, although he was unacquainted with Gilbert's motive, that it was influenced by some very powerful consideration, and therefore made no further objection.

Lincoln was summoned, and a bier was hastily constructed of hunting spears; the old servitor took the body of Ritson upon his shoulders, and bore it to the outside of the cottage door, accompanied by Little John, and the remainder of the party. The corpse was then laid upon its rude coffin, and Gilbert, Little John, Will Gamwell, and Lincoln, each taking the butt end of a spear, forming a handle in their hands, carried the body, while the good priest followed. Slowly they went along; the night was cold, the wind had risen, and a mournful voice came from the rustling trees; there was something solemn, even awful, in the little procession; the dull tramp of the feet, uncheered by the sound of human voice, fell heavily and sadly on the ears. They reached the tree, and they laid the body upon the damp grass, beside the outlaw who still lay extended senseless. The branches and leaves of this strange tree waved slowly and moaningly in the night air, giving forth a low sound like a dirge for the dead man. Gilbert, assisted by Little John and Lincoln, out through a profusion of wild flowers growing at the foot of the tree, and cleared away the earth for a grave; they had not dug very deep ere Little John raised a round substance with his spade, and cried in a startling voice—

"Holy Mother of God! what have we here? a skull, as I am a living man!"

"Ha! give it me!" shouted Gilbert; "it is mine! it is my sister," he shrieked; snatching it violently from Little John, and pressing it, humid and mould-covered as it was, to his lips; he staggered wildly to and fro, and uttered incoherencies in a tone of voice little removed from a scream, and then sunk in a state of insensibility upon the earth. Will Gamwell sprang forward and raised the old man's head upon his knee.

"There's no life in him!" he cried to his cousin.

"Look to him," said Little John, hastily; "hold him gently and steadily while we complete the task he wished us to perform. Gently, Lincoln, we must see what this means."

"It's the body of a woman," said Lincoln, carefully removing the mould from the remains of Gilbert's ill-fated sister; "these are a woman's garments—aye, she has been foully murdered too. Look, here's a knife sticking in her breast!" so saying, he raised up the headless trunk, and a thrill of horror run through them as they saw he spoke truly; even while they were gazing upon it with this feeling, they were startled by a hoarse voice breaking on their ears; they all turned and saw the outlaw on his knees, glaring with looks of hideous distraction upon the body which Lincoln still held.

"Why do you show me this?" he cried. "I did not do it; it was Ritson—it was he—it was he—drag me not to it! Hell and death! I tell you 'twas not I; have mercy—let me go!" he shouted, and to their astonishment he shuffled on nearer the body, until he came quite close to it, yet struggling, as if impelled by some unseen power violently against his inclination. "I implore you," he continued, "let me fly. Hell! I cannot bear to see it! I cannot touch it! Darning tortures, drag me not so! I—'tis better to die and meet the fiend's malice at once, than bear this agony. Ha, ha! thus I defeat you—ha, I triumph!" and, ere a hand could be raised to stay him, he sprang at the body, clutched the knife from it, and buried its rusty blade in his heart. The blood shot out like a fountain from the wound; he drew the knife out, waved it in the air, turned round and round, and fell upon the body of Ritson, dead. This was an occurrence as unlooked for as it was extraordinary, and for a short time suspended all their faculties; Lincoln

was the first to break the silence which ensued after this horrid spectacle.

"There's another grave to make," he said; "this carrion mustn't lay with the gentle bird, who has been struck down by the knife of a lawless, heartless villain. Ah, me! I see it now! here lies my master's sister—a bright young thing she was, Master John; well do I remember her—here she lies cruelly murdered, and there, beneath the cloth, lies her murderer; a roasting to his bones, the dog! My master may tell why he would have them lie in one grave—it shall be so: but he should hang on the highest pine in the forest, to bleach in the sun, if I had my will. For the other rogue, he shall have enough mould over him to prevent him defiling the green grass that may grow around, if not over him, but no more. A hang dog, if 'twere not for spoiling the look of the forest, he should dangle from one of the beechen or oaken arms of this very tree."

"Peace, old man," said Father Eldred, "thou art of an age to know that 'tis not right to speak ill of those who have passed away."

"Ah! but father," observed Will, quickly, "if you speak well of all who die, where is the use of being good while living?"

"A shrewd and a good saying—well said, lad," uttered Lincoln; "for if you speak well of a rogue when he's dead, as well as of the good man, where is the gain of being virtuous?"

"My children," said the friar, "who shall question the wisdom of the Allwise; it is for Him who framed human laws to judge who infringes them. It is for Him to punish who has made rewards and punishments; it is not for poor weak humanity to rail at those who have done wrong; it is but a weakness, and a wickedness, for they have not the inflicting of the eternal punishment; and, as for the earthly reward, a virtuous man should feel, if he finds it not in his own conscience, it is worthless; he knows not of it after he has quitted this earth, and the good which the knowledge of good actions may do to survivors, is obtained by speaking their praises while they are here, and when they are gone it is enough for those who have been so weak as to do ill, that their name should not be mentioned; it would show a Christian charity, and the same end be gained. Proceed with your work, my children; the night wanes, and there is one lying senseless here, who needs your care equally—nay, more, perhaps, than those who lay lifeless before you."

It was with right goodwill Little John worked; they speedily completed the two graves, and the worthy friar, in a clear voice, repeated the prayers for the dead over the bodies, and then they were laid in their respective places, two in one grave, and one alone; the mould was heaped over them, and the bier which had borne Ritson to his grave, served as a litter to convey Gilbert to his cottage.

CHAPTER X.

"And from his lips
A thousand thronging curses burst their way:
He calls his stout allies, and in a line—"

SOMERVILLE.

MIR.—Beseech you, father!
PRO.—Hence! hang not on my garments
MIR.—Sir, have pity!

TEMPEST.

PROTEUS.—I like thee well,
And will employ thee in some service presently.
JUL.—In what you please;—I will do what I can.
PRO.—I hope thou wilt.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.



WHEN Robin conjectured that the baron would not stay long at the door of the dungeon which had confined Allan, ere he discovered

the bird had flown, he was perfectly right; that stormy personage, accompanied by a party of his retainers, arrived at the dungeon door, found it fastened, and no key forthcoming; but such an implement was not necessary to enable the persons without to discover who and what was within, for the cell was built nearly circular; it was lit from above, and as it so fell out, the moon happened just to be looking in at the grated window; there was just sufficient light to discover, by an inspection through the key-hole, that there was no person there.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the baron, with a ferocious tone, "admirable obedience of orders! of vast service a dungeon and goaler may be made! Ho! ho! By St. Griselda, but my next prisoner shall be stuffed into one of my daughter's birdcages, and bound with threads; 'twill keep him, to my thinking, as securely as stone walls and steel locks. Where is Lanner?"

"Here, my lord," said one of the soldiers; "we brought him along with us in the hurry, for had we left him he might have escaped."

"An' if he had, thou shouldst have hung in his place," roared the baron. The man inwardly congratulating himself that he had not left Lanner behind, brought him before his wrathful master.

"Now, dog! now, slave!" continued Fitz Alwine, "tell me what thou hast done with the key of this door, and by what vile cozening you have suffered the prisoner to escape? Thou seest the door is locked, and the key abstracted; thou knowest the make of thy prisoner was not small enough to enable him to get through the keyhole, or squeeze through the bars of his grated window; he is not a beetle, to crawl through the crack beneath the door, nor a breath of wind to vanish through the crannies and crevices; my temper is not easily moved, but the Holy Father judge between us, an' I have not cause for anger in this case. I ask not much in asking where the prisoner is who was entrusted to thy care, and I utter no more than justice in determining that, if he is not speedily discovered, thou shalt supply his place in all things, so far as punishment is concerned. Now, slave, tell me where he is—how and in what way you liberated him. Ha! by the foul fiend! has any among you been to the warden with orders to prevent any stranger passing? Stand not there like dolts. No answer; I thought so. Idiots! one of you fly, and do't; away with you."

A retainer instantly left his companions, and dashed down the passage at full speed; he took no light with him; all was utter darkness; he knew the path well, but, in his haste, had not remembered a flight of steps; not, therefore, taking the necessary precautions, he flew down them, head first, struck his temple against the sharp corner of a stone pillar, and, in an instant, with his skull fractured, lay dead upon the ground.

This accident enabled the trio to escape; had it not occurred, the man would have reached the castle gates first, and effectually prevented their departure; but fate ordained it otherwise.

"May it please you, my lord," observed the leader of the men, "as we reached this door, I observed a light disappearing at the end of this passage; the persons bearing it must have entered the chapel."

"And thou stoodst here, quietly, thou inconsiderate ass! and let me waste time and breath, while the rascal is escaping: away! on with you, after him, and if you let him slip through your fingers, knaves! you shall—you shall see—you shall see—" Here the baron was at a loss for a simile which would express the punishment he would favour them with, in case of failure, and finished by saying, "I cannot think

now, but I'll invent something hideously torturing for all." So saying, he seized a torch from one of the men, and dashed on. They soon reached the chapel; entered it; and found the Lady Christabel standing in an attitude of fear and alarm.

"Ha!" shouted the baron, and rushed to her. "How's this, Christabel! here at this hour! Where's thy minion, shameless wench? Speak at once, and without falsehood! Why stand ye there like fools?" he roared, as he saw the men stand in a cluster gazing upon him and his daughter. "Search every nook and cranny; leave no spot undiscovered; quick." The men spread themselves over the chapel with their torches, while he turned and again questioned his daughter.

"Where is the traitor, Allan?" he cried; "tell me. I know you are acquainted with the place of his concealment; and by the mass, if I catch him, he shall rue the hour he entered Nottingham Castle. Where is he? tell me at once, and don't stand trembling with that white sanctified face, as if you were a lamb, and I was a wolf, who intended to swallow you. Speak! Where is he?"

"I know not," returned the affrighted maid, not daring to look the passionate old man in the face. She spoke the truth; she did not know where her lover was, and the old gentleman had also given birth to an apt simile, for he did look very like a wolf about to make a meal of a lamb.

"'Tis false!" he shouted, "he is here."

"Indeed he is not," replied Christabel; "there are none here but your attendants and ourselves."

"That will speedily be decided," he exclaimed. "For what purpose came you here?"

"To pray at my mother's tomb," returned she, with her eyes filled with tears. Her father gazed steadfastly upon her for a moment, and then turned away to the men, who were returning from an unsuccessful search.

"What success?" he demanded.

"We cannot discover either of them," said one of the men.

"Either of them!" repeated the baron faintly, who had been consoling himself with the idea that he had at least Robin in his safe possession, and had but little doubt that by making a great show of inflicting punishment upon the youth, he might again get Allan in his power, for he well knew he possessed that keen sense of honour to make every effort to free from danger any one whom he might have led into it. When, therefore, the man made use of the word "either," he experienced a sort of strange misgiving that Robin had also taken wing; he therefore advanced to the man, and laying his hand upon his shoulder with a firm grasp, he repeated "Either! What mean you by *either*? One only has escaped! Who are you? and what mean you?"

"May it please you, my lord baron," returned the man, "my name is Caspar Steinkopf; I was one of the guard upon the ramparts, I had the watch on the eastern wing—"

"Ha!" interrupted the baron, with a roar, and commenced compressing his fingers, "you had the charge of the other prisoner, who was confined in the turret upon the eastern wing of the ramparts. Do not tell me that he is escaped, for if you do, I'll bury the blade of this knife to the hilt in your vile carcase, thou worse than dog."

The man remained silent; the baron grew white; his lips quivered with rage; he drew his breath short and thick; he tightened his grasp of the man; he drew forth his poinard, and in a voice thick with passion, cried—

"Tell me, has he too escaped? Speak, alave, or this moment is your last."

"You have said, my lord, if I tell you he has escaped you'll kill me," said the man, in a dogged sullen tone, and with a look as if he thought there were two words to say to it.

"And so I will," groaned the baron between his teeth.

"Then I'll hold my tongue," replied the man, with commendable prudence.

Swift as lightning rose the baron's arm, with the intention of putting his deadly threat in execution. The knife gleamed in the air; ere it could descend, a piercing shriek from Christabel arrested its progress.

"Father, father!" she screamed, "would you desecrate my mother's tomb by a foul murder?" The exclamation of Christabel had the desired effect; the baron hurled the fellow from him, sheathed his knife, and in a cold stern voice bade his daughter retire to her chamber; then turned to his men.

"They have both escaped me through thy vile laziness and carelessness, dogs," he cried. "Now mark me, they cannot be far from hence, probably are already in the warder's custody; but should they have succeeded in passing him, to horse all of you, and pursue them with all the speed your beasts can make. Their route lies through the forest towards Mansfield-woodhaus; keep on their track, and you must quickly overtake them; mind, I take no excuse, you *must*, I tell you, overtake them, ye being mounted, and they upon foot; bind them hand and foot, and return with all diligence. Away with ye! make up by your expertness in the pursuit for your carelessness in suffering them to escape. Away!"

The men instantly quitted the chapel at a rapid pace: at the same moment Maude entered; immediately Christabel ran towards her, and placed her finger on her lip.

"He is safe," whispered Maude. Her lady muttered a prayer, and prepared to quit the chapel, closely followed by Maude.

"Ho! stay," cried the baron, who overheard her whisper; "come back: come hither, Maude, a word with you, girl; nearer—d'ye think I am going to eat you?"

"I don't know," she replied, affecting great fright; "you look very awful, and open your mouth so wide."

"Come, come, Jezabel, I know better who I have to deal with," retorted Fitz Alwine, nodding knowingly. "You are not so easily frightened at a frown; but believe me you shall have something to frighten you if you tell me not at once '*who is safe*.' I heard you, hussy; come, no shuffling, tell me who is safe?"

"I didn't say anybody was safe," replied Maude, playing with the end of her long sleeve, and still affecting simplicity and fright. As the baron felt perfectly assured that she was acting, he began to fume.

"Out upon ye, for a lying jade," he roared; "with mine own ears I heard thee say '*he is safe*.' Now mark me, girl, your pretended fright and foolery don't deceive me; I can see you have assisted the knaves to escape; I shall shortly have them tied neck and heels and thrown into the moat—"

"When you get them," interrupted Maude, looking in his face with an air of simplicity, but a most wicked expression playing in the corner of her eyes. The baron ground his teeth, and continued—

"That will be in a few hours, at farthest; do not flatter yourself that they will elude me so easily. If I discover that you have been an instrument in effecting their escape, woe betide you!—you shall tremble then in right earnest."

"What will you do?" asked Maude, quietly.

The baron opened his eyes rather wide, and then replied, with a most significant nod of the head, "you shall see."

"But I should like to know, because I might then be prepared," she returned, still affecting great simplicity of manner.

"Insolent jade! you shall learn soon enough, never fear; you'll learn your fate too quick for your peace of mind, I'll warrant me; you shall know, don't be afraid," said the baron, with an awful frown.

"Oh, but I am," she replied. "But come my lady, you will be chilled if you stay in this damp place."

"Answer me, jade! ere you depart," roared the baron; "Who meant you when you said 'he is safe?'"

"Since you will have it, my lord, Egbert Lanner is a—favourite of mine, and you misunderstood me, for instead of saying he is safe, I asked is he safe? meaning that same Egbert Lanner, whom you promised to throw into the moat; that was all, my lord," uttered Maude, dropping a curtesy.

"I know you are deceiving me," he replied; "but beware, I shall soon know all; and then if I discover you to have conspired against me, I'll fling your knave into the moat, and you after him."

"Thank ye, my lord," cried Maude with a laugh, and ran after her mistress, who had already quitted the chapel. Swearing a fierce oath, the mighty and puissant noble followed her at a rapid pace.

He was in anything but a pleasant frame of temper: the gout, in the first instance, promoted his native irascibility; secondly was increased by the visit of Allan, his language and conduct, coupled with that shown him by Robin. Their subsequent escape, at a moment when he was consoling himself for the indignities he fancied he had suffered, by the contemplation of the manner in which he purposed punishing them added fuel to the fire—and to crown all, to be bearded by his daughter's waiting-maid, to be laughed at by one who ought—he thought—to expire with terror at his frown, had the same effect as the rowl of a spur would have, when smartly inflicted upon the sore ribs of a fiery steed.

In his rage, he felt an inclination to prance and curvette as the said animal might be supposed to do while under the influence of the goad, but this would have been rather *infra dig.*, and therefore he did not indulge himself; he determined, however, at least to seek out his daughter and rate her soundly; he might be enabled thus to carry off his pent-up choler as a safety valve carries off the waste steam; besides, he had been left in the dark.

When his followers had retired to obey his orders, they took their torches with them, and Maude's little lanthorn was the only light left; when she departed she took her light with her, and the choleric noble drew a fresh insult from this act, in thus leaving him alone lightless.

As we have said, swearing a fierce oath, he followed Maude at a rapid pace, but she was nimble—her lady had got the start, and kept it; Maude, having something more than an idea, that if the old gentleman overtook her he would beat her, did her best to reach her mistress for the sake of her protection. We have said she was nimble, and that the Lady Christabel had the start of her; it must also be understood that the baron was sixty, stiff-limbed, and encased in a suit of mail; it may, therefore, be easily supposed that, although he used his best speed, she had much the advantage.

Nothing despairing, however, he trotted on, but not being a bit better acquainted with the path than the unfortunate wight who had lost his life in falling

down the flight of steps, and possessing the same idea that the passage was of one level to the end, being also without a light to guide his inexperience, and keeping up his trot, as may be expected, he encountered a similar accident to the poor fellow who had preceded him; but he was not going at the same speed.

When his foot went suddenly down the first step, his brain immediately received the impression of a flight of steps; he instantly used what exertion he could put into force, and leaped out into the darkness with the full hope and expectation that he should turn up somewhere; it seemed an age to him while describing the distance from one level to the other. The attraction of gravitation was not suspended in his case any more than it is in all others, and of a consequence he came in contact with the ground with a heavy crash; his feet struck the ground, his knees struck his chin, his teeth bit his tongue, his forehead and nose struck a pillar, and his eyes struck fire.

Did the most pious and patient man—we except Job, and perhaps the exception proves the rule—ever bite his tongue by accident, sharply and vigorously, or have his eyes flashed fire from a violent blow of the nose, and not slip out an oath? No—not even the Pope, heaven save the mark! It cannot, therefore, be supposed that even our testy baron was very quiet under this dispensation of Providence. He was not stunned, but nearly; his mouth was full of blood, and he sputtered a round of fierce oaths, laying every saint in the calendar under contribution; he rolled over and over, and as he stretched out his hand to assist himself to rise, he laid it upon the cold face of the dead retainer; for a moment he left it there in shuddering wonderment, then hastily withdrew it—a cold tremor pervading his frame—he knew it was a human face he had laid his hand upon—that hand was wet—it must be blood. God of Heaven! 'twas not his daughter Christabel? with the same swiftness with which the thought flashed through his brain, he again drew his hand over the corpse—the habiliments were those of a soldier; besides, there was a stiff beard upon the chin, that decided the question at once—it must be one of his own soldiers; he roared for lights, and was answered by the echo of his own voice from the hollows of that dreary passage; he grew hideously alarmed, and gave another stentorian roar with a like result; then he jumped up, and in the intense darkness groped his way along as swiftly as he could; he soon arrived at the corridor leading to the inhabited portion of the castle, and then was not long in making himself heard, or in gathering a party to return to the spot where he had discovered the body. Upon reaching it, it was recognised as one of those who had kept watch upon the ramparts at the time of Robin's escape; the cause of his death was conjectured from the baron's accident, and he was borne away to receive the last sad rites preparatory to his interment.

Having directed what he deemed necessary in this affair, the baron repaired to his daughter's chamber with the peaceful intention of acquainting her that he would rather plunge a poinard in her bosom than see her the wife of Allan Clare; also that he purposed at once looking out for a husband for her, and marrying her as soon as the arrangements could be made with the first suitor who suited him, and he had somebody in his eye, with whom he intended communicating, even on the morrow—the audacious conduct of Allan rendering decisive measures necessary; the escape of the latter had prevented him punishing him bodily, but he chuckled and revelled in the thought that by marrying his daughter to another,

he could most exquisitely torture him, whether in or out of his power.

Allan had threatened him; had thrown out dark and mysterious hints of being able—by a word—to crush him; and upon this had proceeded so far as to propose terms, but had been hastily cut short by being consigned to the custody of a party of men-at-arms, and by them to a dungeon. The baron laughed at his threats—there was but *one* cause he had for fear, but that he felt assured Allan could not know; he, therefore, pshaw'd away the little doubts, which, spite of himself, would arise. When he entered the room, he found his daughter seated at a small table, upon which stood a crucifix, a vase of flowers, and a few indicatives of feminine presence; she was gazing steadfastly upon something, which immediately upon her father's entrance, she hid in her bosom; he noticed the act, and coming close to her, said hastily—

"What bauble was it you have just concealed?"

"No bauble," returned Christabel, timidly.

"'Tis false," he cried, raising his voice, "I say 'twas some bauble."

"We hold a difference of opinion, father," said Christabel, essaying a faint smile.

"Do we?" retorted he, with a sneering duck of the head; "'tis most probable we do; for you to think as I do, would be complimenting my powers of thought to an extent of which I might be wondrous proud!"

"You jest, father!"

"Not when I ask you to tell me what you so hastily concealed on my entrance."

Christabel was silent.

"Christabel!" said the baron, sternly, "were that a bauble, a trinket of small import, you would not hesitate to show it me at once without demur; I cannot, therefore, but suppose it is something which you have a powerful motive to conceal. I have a father's right to question, to know all you do or think, and I will. Tell me—what have you there?"

"A miniature!" replied Christabel, after a slight hesitation, and trembling with apprehension.

"Whose? whose, I say?" demanded the baron.

Christabel spoke not; her father grew a little frantic.

"Whose miniature is it? I have a right to know, and I will!" he cried.

"I cannot tell! I will not tell!" she said, gathering some spirit from the emergency of her situation. "If you have the right as a father to question, I have the right as a free agent to withhold an answer, where my conscience teaches me I have done no wrong!"

"Oh, ho!" laughed the baron stormily, "your conscience will always teach you you have done no wrong when it crosses your pleasure; mighty fine, truly!"

"You wrong me, father—with me 'tis a monitor to whose dictates I rigidly adhere!" she returned firmly.

"To be sure, I'm an old rascal, that must be understood," cried the baron, in a tone becoming very forte; "but I have an objection, a singular one, perhaps, of not liking to be told so, particularly by my own child. But of that enough; I care not to look on the bauble. 'Tis the miniature of that audacious knave and vagabond, Allan Clare. Now, mark me, Christabel, I have come to a decision respecting him; if he is once in my power, he dies, without hope or chance of being spared. So much for him! and rather than see you his wife—pah!—I'd fling you from the highest battlements of the castle; but I have no fear of such an event occurring. I intend you to marry immediately; your husband will be Sir Tristram of Goldsborough; he is not young, it is true, but he is younger than I am, and I am not old; nor is he over handsome. But those are good qualities in a husband;

your jealousy will scarcely be aroused by him—a great point gained in the marriage state, and well worthy of sacrificing a few minor qualities to. He is enormously rich—another great point; has great influence at Court—a greater still. I have made up my mind that you shall marry him; he is willing, and I am delighted at the opportunity of thus aggrandising you, for though I am a baron and he a knight, his wealth and influence far exceed mine, and I may shortly stand in need of good aid. There are a few other things which have assisted in deciding me, with which I will not trouble you just now. I send my proposals to him to-morrow; in six days he will answer me in person; on the seventh you shall wed him in the chapel."

"Never!" burst from the lips of the agonized girl;

"I will never consent!"

The baron laughed.

"I never thought of asking *your* consent—no such intention ever crossed my brain," said he, bitterly.

"Fool! you have nought to do but obey—you have no alternative!"

A shade passed over her pale features, and her small lips compressed with a sudden determination, as if a thought passed through her mind that there was one.

"I leave you now," he continued; "you can reflect or not as you please, upon what I have said—all you have to do is to obey; nothing you may say or do can make me alter my determination."

"I would to God my mother were living!" uttered the poor girl, with a sudden passion of tears.

The baron's brows lowered until they almost touched his cheek bones, then turning suddenly, he hastily quitted the room. He returned to his own chamber; for near an hour he paced it, buried in deep but uneasy thought. Among the many thronging memories that crowded his brain was the recollection of the lonely situation in which his only child had been placed for some years; debarred intercourse with her own sex, save her waiting maid, Maude—and an oath escaped him as her name crossed him—without even the kindness or attention of a parent to cheer her, having lost her mother when so young; and he could not help confessing to himself that he had treated her by no means affectionately; her portion, he felt, had been a sorry one; he was now in the act of violating her best and dearest feelings, by wedding her to a man she could never love, and separating her for ever from one whom she loved, and who returned it devotedly and adoringly.

Although even this reflection affected him strongly, it had no influence as regarded a change in his determination; but he resolved to act with more kindness and tenderness than he had hitherto done, and even with a sudden thought he left his apartment to seek hers, late as it was, and say a few kind words to her. When he gained the door of her room he stopped for a moment, and heard a low sob; it smote him on the heart as the sad sound met his ear, and opening the door quietly, he softly entered; he saw her busily engaged in writing.

Now, be it understood, that writing at that period was a most uncommon accomplishment, even for a baron's daughter, but she had acquired it in early days from Allan, who, having been intended for the church, had attained an art then principally confined to the priesthood. The baron stared on seeing her occupation, and advanced stealthily to the table; she was too intently engaged in her task to notice him, and for a moment he stood and gazed upon the small fair characters traced by her pen in wonderment: she raised her head, in the act of thought, and saw her

father's form standing before her. She shrieked with terror, and clutched at the paper on which she had been writing; but she was too late, her father had secured it. She attempted to fly, but he seized her by the wrist and grasped her firmly. Overcome by fright and agony she sunk to the ground, burying her face in the hand which yet remained unshackled.

With eyes glowing like burning coals did the baron endeavour to decipher the writing, but in vain, for, as we have said, in those days the art being principally confined to the priesthood, barons neither read nor wrote. He looked at it, followed every line, every letter, slowly and carefully, and then he could not make it out; he might as well have essayed to decipher a Chaldaic or Parsee manuscript, without having heard or seen the language, as understand what that paper contained. Twenty times did he wish that he had acquired the art, but it was a vain wish, and he felt it so; however, he resolved to be satisfied, and therefore determined to take it to his confessor, who could read it, and would translate it word for word to him. He still held his daughter by the wrist, and he thought she hung very heavily, and very silently withal; he looked at her, spoke to her, and found she had fainted. He lifted her from the floor, and laid her upon a couch of rude form in the room, and then violently rung a hand-bell which stood upon the table; its summons was speedily obeyed by Maude. As she entered, the baron said, sternly—

"Jezabel! look to your mistress, she has fainted;" and so passed from the apartment. The girl flew to the Lady Christabel, and used every means to recover her; in a few minutes she succeeded. Christabel gazed wildly round, as if unconscious where she was, and then ejaculated—"Oh, Maude!" burst into tears in the arms of her attendant.

"Dear lady, what is the matter?" asked Maude, with a tone of kind interest; "sweet madam, tell me, perhaps I may assist you!"

As soon as she could recover herself sufficiently to talk, she detailed the whole occurrence to her, concluding by acquainting her, that she had written to Allan, and that her father had detected her, seized the letter, and carried it off with him. Maude hesitated little in uttering her sentiments respecting the character of the baron, and puzzled her brain for a short time in what way to assist her lady; suddenly she cried—

"I have it! a good thought! Quick, quick, madam, sit down and write something like what your father ran away with, and give it me; be quick!"

"I do not know what to write," said Christabel, a little abstractedly.

"Anything! a song will do—make haste madam, or I shall be too late to serve you!" cried the impatient Maude.

"Take this," said Christabel, opening a box; she took from it a written paper and gave it to Maude, who instantly departed to the baron's apartment with it. She entered without asking permission, and saw the baron and his confessor seated together; the baron was in the act of handing the paper to the confessor.

"How now, jade!" cried the baron, wrathfully; "what brings you thus abruptly into my presence?"

"My lady wants the paper you took away," she said pertly, and drawing as near to the confessor as she could without exciting suspicion.

"Thou liest, Jezabel! she would not dare send such a message!" roared the baron, enraged at the interruption.

"Yes she would, and I *must* take the paper," she answered, snatching it at once out of the confessor's

hands, ere he could be aware of any such intention and then darted out of the room.

"Ha! ho! ah, vile jade!" shouted the baron, springing after her; "come back! S'death, I'll scatter thee to the winds if thou dost not. Ho, hussey! jade! Jezabel! come back—restore me that paper, or you shall perish, I swear by Hell and all its fiends!"

But it was not the intention of Maude to escape; she had thrust the note to Allan in the bosom of her dress, while she clutched the paper she had received from Christabel in her hand. She suffered the baron to overtake her, seize her, struggle, and eventually to get the paper from her. In his rage he raised his hand to strike her, but she fixed her clear bright eye full upon him, and he—thinking before he acted—stayed his arm.

"I did my lady's bidding," she said, calmly.

"Away to your lady!" he roared; "tell her she shall rue this bitterly."

Maude turned as if sullenly from the spot, but, when out of his sight, flew joyfully with her prize to detail her success to her fair mistress, who sat waiting her return with a heart beating high with hope and excitement.

The baron gained his own chamber and placed the counterfeit paper in the confessor's hands, bidding him read it at once; the old man opened it, placed it near the taper, and read as follows:—

To mine own sweet love, the fair Christabel.

When winter bringeth violets and clothes the earth with snow,
When tender flowers are dreaming, and snow-drops 'gin to blow,
When thy beauty bringeth gentle words and kinder looks to thee,
When in gladness thou art smiling, wilt thou cast a thought on me?

Dear love!

"Pshaw!" cried the baron, interrupting him, "that stuff; there must be some mistake!"

"I give you the literal interpretation of these characters," mildly responded the confessor; "there is more, shall I read on?"

"By all means," said the baron; "there may yet be something to hear. I am satisfied it was no mere love-sick song she was writing, her agitation was too great on discovering me for that. Read on."

The old man, making a slight deferential inclination of the head, continued reading—

When spring-time bringeth hyacinths and sweetest scented flow'rs,
When the sunshine cometh laughing through warm and fresh'ning show'rs,
When the jessamine and rose-bud are winning smiles from thee,
When thy heart is full and thrilling, wilt thou cast a thought on me?

Sweet love!

When fair summer bringeth joyousness and skies of clear deep blue,
When pale lilies, trees, each spray and flow'r, are gemmed with sparkling dew,
When the calm air, cool and fragrant with sweet breath, kisses thee,
When all is brightness round thee, wilt thou cast a thought on me?

Dear love!

"Pish!" interrupted the baron, his countenance expressing great annoyance; "I suppose we shall have the round of the seasons. Pah! this love stuff will make me sick. Is there any more?"

"There is another verse, my lord."

"Ah! well, I suppose I must endure it. Read on; I may perhaps gather something from that, if I have failed to do so in the others. Proceed," growled the

baron, gathering himself up with an air of disgust to hear the remainder. The confessor continued—

When Autumn—

"Bah!" interrupted the earl; "I thought so. By the Mass! the whole round of the seasons!"

Having finished his interruption, the father again commenced—

When autumn bringeth richest fruits, but also sad decay,
When things which were thy summer joy are fading fast away,
When those leaves which were the greenest fall withered
from the tree,

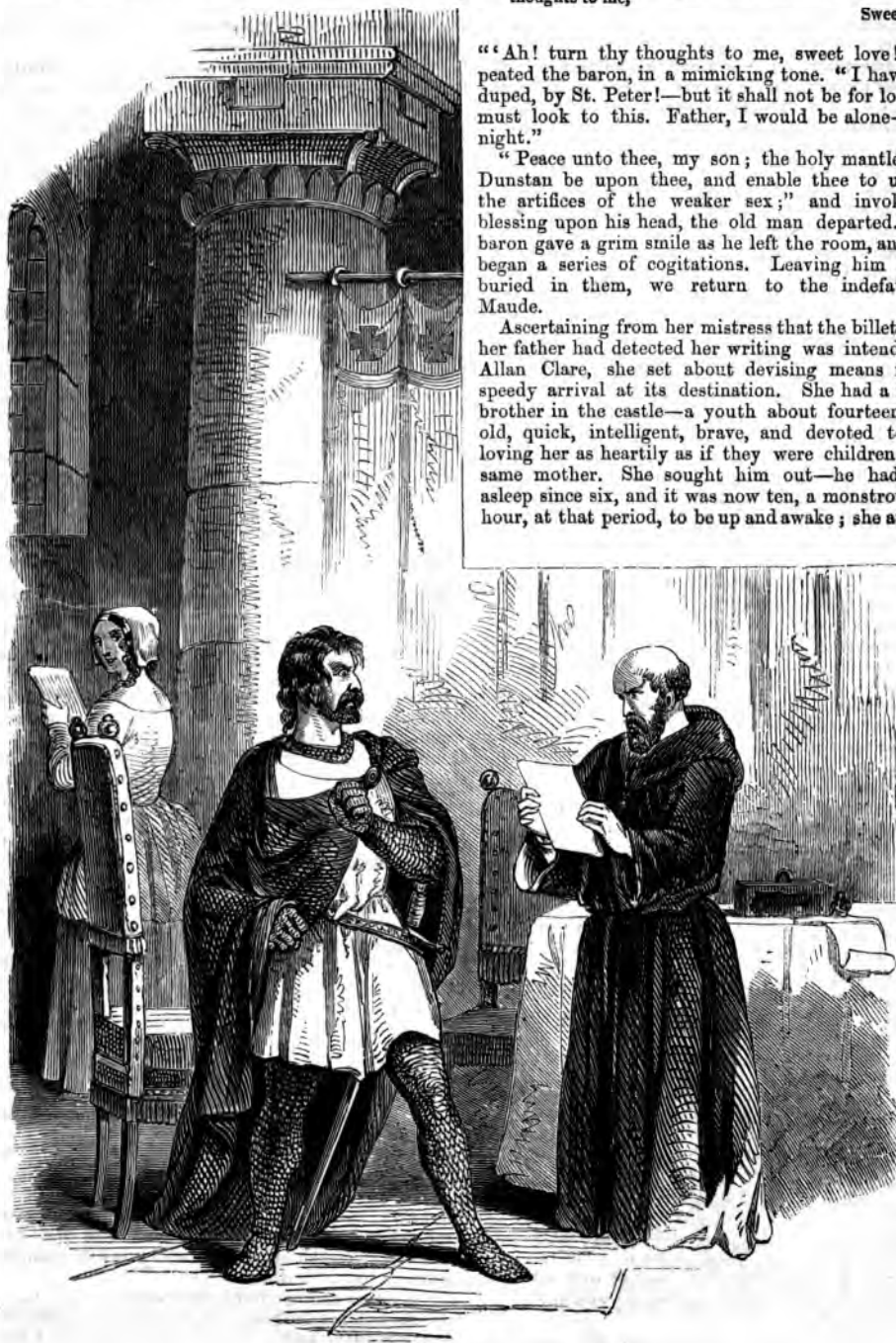
When hearts and looks grow cold and false—ah! turn thy thoughts to me,

Sweet love!

"Ah! turn thy thoughts to me, sweet love!" repeated the baron, in a mimicking tone. "I have been duped, by St. Peter!—but it shall not be for long. I must look to this. Father, I would be alone—good night."

"Peace unto thee, my son; the holy mantle of St. Dunstan be upon thee, and enable thee to unravel the artifices of the weaker sex;" and invoking a blessing upon his head, the old man departed. The baron gave a grim smile as he left the room, and then began a series of cogitations. Leaving him deeply buried in them, we return to the indefatigable Maude.

Ascertaining from her mistress that the billet which her father had detected her writing was intended for Allan Clare, she set about devising means for its speedy arrival at its destination. She had a foster-brother in the castle—a youth about fourteen years old, quick, intelligent, brave, and devoted to her, loving her as heartily as if they were children of the same mother. She sought him out—he had been asleep since six, and it was now ten, a monstrous late hour, at that period, to be up and awake; she aroused



him from his pallet, and when sufficiently awake to comprehend her, she said—

"Hal, I want you to do me a service—nay, 'tis one to the Lady Christabel, of greater value than to me."

"I'll do't," said the lad.

"There is danger in it."

"So much the better: if there wasn't any danger, of what value would be the service?" said the boy, bluntly.

"I may trust you, dear Hal?" said Maude, winding her arm round his neck as she sat by his side on the pallet, and fixing her clear dark eyes upon his.

"To the death, Maude, to the death! or infamy, disgrace, and a dog's death be my portion," said he, earnestly.

"I knew, Hal, I might rely on you," she replied, joyously and even proudly; "you must attire yourself now, get the swiftest nag from the stalls—"

"That's mine, Maude," interrupted the lad; "my little nag, Maude; I named her after you, sister—Flying Maude, I call her, for there is none to come near her: I tell you, Maude, she can—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Maude in her turn, "I know she's the best nag in Christendom. Now, dress yourself, and meet me at the keep; let me see how nimble you can be."

Maude ran out of the little chamber without waiting a reply; the lad rose and donned his clothes swiftly, and departed to the stables, saddled and bridled his mare, and went to the keep; there he found Maude waiting for him.

"Well done, Hal; right good speed you have used," she cried, using a little judicious flattery. "Now, mark me well; when you quit the castle, pass through the town, from thence through the forest till you come to a cottage on the border, near Mansfield-woodhaus; 'tis kept by a forester, named Hood; bid him put this billet in the hands of one Allan Clare—for you will probably reach the cottage before Allan; tell him 'tis for no one else, and to give it to no one else, if he would not peril the life of one who can and will do him service: then give this bow and quiver to his son Robin, and say that he shall speedily learn when the coast is clear, that he may again meet one who will be waiting his coming. You understand me, Hal?"

"Yes, well," was the reply.

"On your way through the forest, be careful to avoid any of the retainers who may be out—"

"How! Maude!" exclaimed the boy in surprise.

"Seek for no reason, you shall know the whereof anon; do as I bid ye—avoid them all; or if you should fall into their company without being able to help it, say anything rather than reveal thy errand. Do this, Hal, as you love me; and should you overtake three persons, one of whom is Friar Tuck—you know him?"

The boy nodded affirmatively.

"His two companions will be Allan Clare and Robin Hood; the youngest and best looking—at least, but never mind that—is Robin; give him the bows, arrows, and my message, and to Allan Clare the missile. If my father asks you, as you pass the drawbridge, what takes you abroad so late, tell him the Lady Christabel is sick and requires a leech, whom you are about to fetch. Do this well, Hal, and I'll say all the kind sweet things I can in your favour to little bonnie Grace May—make her quite in love with you, and she shall pay all the kisses I owe you."

"Will you, though? Maude, will you?" asked Hal, energetically, his eyes flashing with delight at the fond anticipation.

"I will, so true as I hope for a kiss from him I

love," cried Maude, laughing, "and that's an oath nothing should make me break."

"Then, if it's possible for mortal to do this, Maude, I'll do it; I'm only mortal, but a kiss from Grace May, and a kind look from you, Maude, would make me dare anything. Good-bye, God bless you, Maude," exclaimed he, enthusiastically; and leaning over his horse's neck, kissed Maude's cheek, waved his hand, and dashed off on his errand.

"Good-bye, God bless thee, and the Holy Mother speed thee!" said Maude, as she watched his departure. She listened attentively to discover how he would succeed in passing her father; she heard them talk, heard Hal's voice utter the word "leech," then the drawbridge was lowered, the hoofs of the nag clattered over it, and the noise of the return of the bridge to its resting-place caught her ear. She gave utterance to a deep breath, and returned to her mistress.

CHAPTER XI.

LEON.—By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it; but that she loves him with an earnest affection,—it is past the infinite of thought.

D. PEDRO.—May be she doth but counterfeit.

CLAUD.—Faith, like enough.

LEON.—O God! counterfeit! There never was counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion, as she discovers it.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

MIR.—I am your wife, if you will marry me;

If not, I'll die your maid; to be your fellow

You may deny me, but I'll be your servant,

Whether you will or no.

TEMPEST.

ROBIN HOOD and his two companions used their best speed in threading the forest; the bright moon showed them their path almost as clear as if they had had daylight to guide them. Robin felt merry; the fumes of the ale he had drunk had not vanished, and his spirits, beneath the influence of the potent beverage he had somewhat unsparingly quaffed, were at no inconsiderable height; his companions could boast of no such lightness of heart. Allan's ill success had much depressed his spirits, and the stout friar, who really felt lovingly inclined towards the fair Maude, was dull and vexed at her recent treatment of him, and the favour she had shown Robin.

"By the Holy Misereere!" muttered he, "I am, to my thinking, a proper man, stout, and straight-limbed, nor ill-favoured if the mazzard; might I judge by favours already received, I am no small favourite with her, yet her conduct to-day would seem that she cared not a jot for me. Ah! well, if she prefers a slim, beardless boy to me, let her i'faith; bushwre me! I care not to be in rivalry with such as he; if she like him, let her love light on him i' God's name! Yet, perhaps, she did it but to try me. I am a fool to be jealous of such as he."

"Well, jovial Giles, as the pretty Maude calls thee," shouted Robin, with a merry laugh, "Father Tuck, as I shall henceforth call thee, what art thou conning over in that learned brain of thine? Thou art as dull as a homily; thy name, instead of being jovial Giles, should be woful Giles."

"It is the province of the favoured to laugh and be merry, and of the discomfited and deceived to be sad and dull, Master Robin," returned the friar, with a sneer, "therefore let me enjoy my humour—I interfere not with thine, child."

"If by receiving kind looks, bright smiles, sweet words, and tender kisses, from one of the smartest, prettiest little bodies I ever clapped eyes on," cried Robin gleefully, "you call being favoured—and I am not going to deny that it is so—why I am especially

favoured, and thereby entitled, according to your doctrine, to laugh and be merry; but I do not recognise your right to be sad, for I have yet to learn how you are discomfited and deceived."

"Have you?" returned the friar drily; "exercise your wits, boy; if thou'rt not a greater dullard than thou seemest, thou wilt speedily discover it."

"Nay, then," retorted Robin, "that am I; for I can see nought to create dulness in thee, unless it be thy constitution, temperament, and such like; thy sadness can have no relation to your *religion*, the fair Maude, for you are a monk, you know, and must not regard females with loving eyes. St. Dunstan be thy guard and guide!"

"I tell thee, boy, thou hadst better guide us in the open and direct track, than lead us through these mazes and windings," exclaimed the friar, rather angrily.

"Thou'rt cross, good Father Tuck," said Robin, affecting an air of regret. "I have unwittingly offended thee; by our Holy Mother! I am sorry for't. If the pretty Maude is the occasion of it, I tell thee, frankly, that ere I saw her, my heart was given irrecoverably away."

The friar seemed delighted to hear this; he looked earnestly in the youth's face to see whether he might read if he spoke truth, and being satisfied with the scrutiny, he seized him heartily by the hand, and cried—

"No, Robin, I am not offended with thee! Ho! ho! ho! the girl is nought to me, of course not; but that she is pretty, and a kind, merry-hearted damsel; thou mayst wed her, an' thou list—but thou'rt sure thou hast given thy heart away?"

"Most sure, most assuredly," returned he. "And now I'll tell thee why I brought thee along this path. You know the red-hot old baron better than I do, and think ye not that, when he has discovered our escape, a score or two of his retainers will not be sent upon our heels? I have, therefore, chosen this path; 'tis the nearest, and intersects the high road in different parts, being nearly a strait line, while the road is winding; as it is most probable that the fellows dispatched after us will think we have kept the high road for speed sake, they will keep along it, and thus we shall avoid them."

"An apostle couldn't have been more shrewd," replied Tuck, his spirits beginning to mount rapidly. "I do know old fire and bluster well, and should'nt wonder to see him head the pursuers in *propria persona*. Aha! if I'd but the chance of trouncing his hauberk for him, I'd make him skip as high as Haman was hanged—whoo!" And the ghostly friar twirled his staff, which he had brought with him, in an ecstasy of anticipation.

"You are fortunate in having a weapon," said Robin; "you have some chance of clearing your path from briers, as old Lincoln would say; but friend Allan and I are entirely without; and I am loth to confess that, being overtaken and attacked by the Nottingham men-at-arms is not the only thing to be apprehended. This same venerable old wood, dame Sherwood, harbours an ugly quantity of thieving outlaws, from whom there is little to fear while you have a weapon to keep them at bay, but, being defenceless, they will plunder you without remorse or mercy even if you have nothing but a better doublet than their own to lose, and then put their skean beneath your ribs, by way of keeping you quiet after your loss."

"But suppose your doublet worse than theirs, and you have nothing else to lose?" suggested Tuck.

"Then they'll serve you he same for not having anything," he replied.

"Humph!" grunted Tuck; "they'll get nothing from me but hard raps with my staff, and sufficient of them truly as will make 'em more than satisfied, by St. Benedict!"

They proceeded as rapidly as the intricacies and entangled nature of their path would allow, through brake, copse, covert, and underwood; now treading a broad glade, now creeping through the mazes of a thicket. For two hours had they proceeded in this way, when they emerged from their mazy path into the high road, which Robin said they must pursue for some distance ere they could again branch off; he therefore advised that they should make their way along it at full speed, a proposal which met with the entire concurrence of his companions. Ere, however, they put this intention into effect, they thought it advisable to reconnoitre a little; and as Robin was best calculated for this, both from his knowledge of the forest ways, and from being the most agile of the party, he, leaving his companions beneath the umbrageous shade of a widely-spreading elm, glided across the road to the opposite side, and disappeared. Above where they stood, in the direction of Nottingham, the road had a sudden turn, and at this turn was commanded a view of the road for nearly two miles; to this part Robin betook himself, calculating that if no enemy appeared pursuing, he and his companions would have time to proceed along the road, and branch off without being overtaken, even if on the instant of their departure from their concealment, their pursuers reached that part of the road he hoped to find bare. On arriving at the turn, he threw a scrutinising glance down the road, and was pleased to see no one; he was just upon departing to his friends to hurry them forward, when a horseman came in sight, his steed bearing him at a very rapid pace; for a minute Robin watched him, and finding he was not followed by any others, he turned and made for his friends with all his swiftness; he communicated his discovery to them, announced his determination of stopping the horseman, and persuading him to take Allan behind him as far as the cottage, while Tuck and himself would follow as best they could. Allan, however, firmly resisted this arrangement.

"There is danger," he said, "and I'll share it with you. You came with me, and I return not without you."

"But consider the anxiety your sister and my parents will suffer at our absence," urged Robin; "by means of this horseman you can reach the cottage an hour before us, and set their minds at rest."

"No," persisted Allan; "through me you have placed your lives in jeopardy; I'll share the danger—we escape or perish together! Besides, an hour cannot make much difference; if you think it will, why not ride yourself and satisfy them?"

"If I consented to that, who is to guide you through the wood?" asked Robin; "you are quite a stranger, and Friar Tuck knows not the path."

"I have it!" said the friar; "let's stop the fellow, and bid him call and say that we are on our road home."

"Be it so," said Allan; "if there is need to accost the horseman at all, which I confess I cannot see; and if you are certain, Robin, that he is unattended!"

"Of that I am satisfied," returned Robin; "Sherwood has its name, and no horseman, if he had companions, would care to ride on singly. Besides, it is my conviction, that as we heard the tramp of the baron and his men in the chapel, he could not be very long in discovering, even at the castle gates, that we had but a short time quitted; therefore, if his fellows were at once sent in pursuit, they must be some dis-

tance before us, and indeed that expectation was my reason for avoiding the highway; if we had not, you may be assured, we should by this time have been safely domiciled in the depths of Nottingham Castle. My principal object, therefore, in accosting the coming horseman, and desiring you to ride with him, is that some little assistance may be afforded us, should we chance to alight upon our pursuers."

"Your object is a good one, I confess," said Allan, "but, by what you have communicated, you have only strengthened my determination to abide with you."

"Hist!" said Robin, "there is the clatter of his horse's feet; here he comes. Tuck, lend me thy staff;" and he snatched it from him, whispering to them to keep close. Ere they were aware of his intention, he sprang out into the highway to meet the comer.

As the rider approached, which he did at a rapid rate, Robin perceived that he was younger than himself, a circumstance he discovered with much pleasure; advancing, then, to the middle of the road, he raised the staff, and halloed to him to stop—a challenge which the youth quite disregarded, for he galloped on as swiftly as before, and as Robin had placed himself resolutely in the way, there was every prospect of his being ridden over. Allan and Tuck, perceiving, as Robin had done, the rider's youth, disregarded the advice they had received of keeping close, also sprang into the road, and the youth instantly reined in his steed; not that he was cowed at the accession of strength, for he would have dashed through them at all hazards, and have let them caught him if they could, but he perceived the fulfilment of his errand in recognising the form and habit of friar Tuck.

"Soho, Maude, who! Friar Tuck, or my eyes are gooseberries," cried he.

"The same," replied the friar. "And who may you be?"

"Does your reverence so speedily forget Maude Lindsay's foster-brother, Hal, of the keep? By the baron's beard, if my bonnie little Grace May had forty-thousand brothers, cousins, and relations, and had I once winked eyelid on them, I should know them again, day or night."

"Ah, Master Hal, is it you, my bold youth? and what brings you and your gallant nag abroad i' the woods at this hour?" demanded Friar Tuck.

"Nothing less than a missive and a message," replied the boy. "I have a letter from the lady Christabel to a cavalier, named Allan Clare."

"And a message for me," interrupted Robin: "for you have, I see, my bow and arrows."

"Where is the missive?" cried Allan, impatiently.

"Ah," said the boy, "I needn't ask which is which now, you have settled that question by your questions. My sister Maude said I should know you by your good looks, you—Sir Robin, being the handsomest; I' faith she had given me, I thought, a hard task, being, you see, no judge of men's charms, though I confess to some slight skill in damsel's; you have, however, saved me the trouble of a scrutiny—here, Sir Robin, is the bow."

"The missive," again interrupted Allan, in an agony of impatience.

The boy looked at him, and then continued, unheeding him—"and here are the arrows."

"S'death, boy, give me the missive!" cried Allan, "or I'll tear it from thee."

"Give him the missive," said Robin; "my message will do afterwards."

"As you please," returned the youth.

"Nay, boy, I am hasty," said Allan, appeasingly;

"but there is more depends on the billet than you imagine."

"Well," said Hal, "very like, for Maude seemed in a desperate taking about it," and he commenced searching for the note. It was with no little excitement and uneasiness that Allan watched him rummaging his pockets for the letter, but after turning them all out, he said, "Now a plague o' me, I've lost it, cavalier."

In his rage, Allan gave a bitter outcry, and sprang upon the lad, seized him by his neck, dragged him from his horse, and proceeded to shake him. At the same moment, the nag curled up her upper lip and run, open-mouthed, at Allan, but Robin caught the bridle just in time to prevent his inflicting a tremendous bite upon him; the little fiery animal, however, reared up, threw out her fore paws, pranced, kicked, and nearly threw Robin to the ground. Tuck came to his assistance, and helped to hold her, while her master fought, kicked, and wrestled, somewhat in the same fashion, until Allan, being satisfied with the shaking he had given him, hurled him from him; the boy got up, and from the spirit of resistance he had displayed, Allan fully expected he would return to the attack; but, however, he did not—he turned to his mare, who was kicking up rare antics, wrestling her head about in all directions, making tremendous efforts to shake off her captors, and throwing, every second, her heels high in the air. A word, however, from Hal, quieted her in an instant.

"Take your hands from her, good father, and you Sir Robin Hood; she will be quiet. What ho, my Maude! soho! who! steady! quiet!" And the animal stood like a statue; the lad then turned to Allan, and said—

"Look you, sir cavalier; I know myself in the wrong, or I'd have tried the strength of your ribs with this blade, for the shaking you have given me. I am sorry for the loss, but in the hurry it couldn't be helped."

"Have you searched your belt?" inquired Robin.

A light broke over the boy's countenance on hearing the question, and he rapidly replied—

"I remember me now—'twas there I placed it." He searched, and there he found it; he gave it to Allan, and tossed his cap in the air, crying—"Hurrah for my bonnie Grace May!"

"Now, I'll trouble you for my message," said Robin, "as it is by word of mouth, I'm not afraid of your having lost it."

"No," returned the boy, with a laugh, and delivered Maude's words to him.

"And what said she for me?" asked Tuck.

"Nothing, good father."

"Not a word?"

"Not one!"

"Humph!" grunted the friar, with something of a fierce look at Hal and Robin: the latter turned his head aside to conceal his smile, and said—

"My bonnie bow, once again thou'rt mine, and my good arrows too; now, it must be something more than mortal which stays my path to my home."

Allan had assayed but in vain to read his mistress's billet by the moonlight; he communicated his dilemma to Robin, inquiring if he'd the means of lighting a torch. Hal of the Keep had, and he proffered them.

"First," said Robin, "let me know what intrusion we may have to fear, ere we make a light to guide our enemies to us. Did any of your people, Master Hal, quit the castle before you?"

"At what time?" demanded Hal.

"Since the moon rose!" returned Robin.

"I cannot say," he replied; "I stretched myself upon my pallet when the castle bell tolled six, and I was awakened from my sleep by Maude, to come here; therefore I cannot tell."

"That's unfortunate," muttered Robin.

"I must have a light," said Allan.

Taking a few dried leaves, Robin made a heap, and borrowing of Hal a knife—for every weapon had been taken from him at the castle—he cut a slip from a neighbouring pine; with the boy's flint and steel he struck a spark upon the leaves; they soon kindled into a blaze, the pine wood was lighted, and Allan read as follows:—

"Dearest Allan, when you persuaded me so earnestly, so eloquently, and so tenderly, to quit my father's roof for thine, I denied thee, for I truly and sincerely deemed my presence—being the only living creature who bore even a kindly feeling for him—was of some comfort to my father; I felt that I was his sole tie upon earth, and the belief that it was my duty to remain while I could be a solace to him, would have induced me to have sacrificed my dearest happiness, nay, my life. But, dear Allan, judge of my dismay and broken-heartedness, when he, a short time since—since your departure—informed me that he has determined upon my immediately wedding Sir Tristram of Goldsborough, whose hideous form and manners are more than hateful to me. Since my father has resolved to part with me, since he no longer cares to keep me with him—as this unhappy fact proves—I will with thee, dear Allan, with thee and Marian, if you will accept a hand and heart which were ever truly, solely thine. My father sends to the old knight to-morrow; save me, dear Allan, if you still love me; save me, or my heart will break. Contrive some means to see Maude in the morning; she will communicate to thee how to act.

"Thine in life or death,

CHRISTABEL.

"Oh Allan, this paper has had such a narrow escape of being perused by my father, but through the address of Maude it was saved. The bearer, a faithful youth, will tell thee how to contrive a meeting with Maude. Farewell, God bless and protect thee."

"And I will save thee or perish in the attempt," ejaculated Allan, fervently. "Robin, I must return to Nottingham; this letter tells me the Lady Christabel is to be sacrificed in marriage to an old villain—it must be prevented by carrying off the lady. You can assist me; perhaps know a staunch friend that will join thee. Wilt thou meet me at Nottingham to-morrow?"

"You had better return to-night to the cottage—your sister will be more satisfied at seeing you," returned Robin, "and in the morning, with a few friends, upon whom I or you can well rely, will back with you. Hark! the tramp of horses! Away to your covert—'tis the baron's retainers. Hal of the Keep, now you can show thyself worthy of thy pretty sister Maude."

"You mean Grace May," said Hal.

"Well, pretty Grace May, and all the kisses she may bestow on thee, by showing a readiness of wit. Remember you have not seen us, and insinuate to the retainers that the baron expects them back speedily: do not make it a positive command, or you may get yourself and the lady Christabel into trouble."

"I understand," replied the boy. "May the dear blue eye of sweet Grace never look kindly on me, but I'll do thy wish neatly! so, Maude, lass," and he leaped lightly in the saddle, galloping off in the contrary direction to the approaching horsemen. This

was not exactly what Robin expected or wished, but it was too late to call—the approaching footsteps were too near; he therefore could only bid his friends lie down far in the thicket, while he threw himself beneath a short stunted hawthorn-bush growing by the highway. He glanced in the direction which Hal of the Keep had taken, and could not but admire the speed of his nag. He had already gained some distance, when Robin beheld him suddenly turn, and come back at a greatly slackened speed. In an instant he comprehended the manoeuvre, and inwardly applauded it. Almost immediately the clattering of hoofs sounding louder, told him that the expected horsemen were close at hand; and looking round he beheld them turning the wind of the highway at a moderate speed, which, however, on their catching sight of Hal on his nag, was much accelerated. The boy also increased his speed, and the party met exactly opposite the spot upon which Robin was lying.

"Who goes there?" shouted the leader of a troop, whom Robin quickly recognised as belonging to Baron Fitz Alwine, from the fashion of their accoutrements.

"Hal of the Keep, of Nottingham Castle," replied the lad.

"Aha! How came you here at this couch time?"

"And how came you *here* i' this hour?" quickly returned Hal; "do you know the lord baron is sitting in his chamber expecting ye back an hour ago? By our Lady, I shouldn't care to stand with you in his presence, when you get back."

"Was he in a vile humour when you quitted?"

"Oh ho! The errand upon which he dispatched thee ought not to have detained you half as long as you have taken."

"And we have been nearly to Mansfieldwoodhaus. We have almost had a bootless journey, too; two of our prisoners have eluded us, but we have one safe."

"Aye," said Hal, "who is that?"

"A youth called Robin Hood."

Robin started on hearing this, and peered forward as much as he dared, to see whom they had gotten in his place; but the horsemen, of whom there were between twenty and thirty, made such a cluster, that he was prevented.

"Ha!" cried Hal, a little astonished, "I should like to see him; I know Robin Hood by sight, well."

"Do you?" said the leader. "Bring the prisoner forward," he continued to one of the men. The man obeyed. Robin looked eagerly, and saw, bound firmly to a horse, his hands pinioned behind him, a youth dressed like himself, but whom the bright moonlight, shining upon his face, discovered to be Will Scarlet!

"That's not Robin Hood," cried Hal, with a loud laugh.

"No!" cried the soldier; "who then?—it is surely the youth who escaped from the castle to-night."

"No," returned Hal; "you're out there, my bold heart; 'tis not he."

Will Scarlet muttered something inaudibly, and then said loudly to Hal—

"How know you I am not Robin Hood? Your eyes play you false, youngster; I *am* Robin Hood."

"There," said the soldier, a trifle perplexed, "you hear that, Hal; he says he is Robin Hood. Now, none of your tricks, Hal; for the baron has set his mind on this youth's recapture, and unless you wish to be wofully punished, you will not mislead us on this point."

"If he be Robin Hood, then there is two of the same name," returned the youth. "Where did you find him?"

"Returning from a cottage on the borders of the forest."

"Who was with him?"

"He was alone."

"But there ought to have been two others with him," urged Hal; "and besides, if he was returning from the cottage, how could he be the Robin Hood who escaped from the castle but a short time before you left it? He was not mounted, and you were. Therefore, if he used his best speed in walking, he couldn't have been much further than this in the time."

The soldier was certainly perplexed; there appeared much reason in Hal's argument.

"Humph!" muttered he; "pray how knew you there were three quitted the castle? When did your acquaintance with this same Robin Hood commence? And what brings you here at this hour of the night?"

Hal for a moment felt as if he had committed himself; and so, just to look about him and recover breath, he met these questions by a question—

"Why, Lambie, when did you borrow the confessor's gown and office? three questions in a breath; by the Mass! Lambie, an' I were a damsel thou shouldst not shrive me. Methinks thou wouldst be more playful than pious."

"Answer my questions," returned Lambie, with a frown. "I'm not i' the mood for jesting."

"Well, good Lambie, I've heard my foster father say, 'short words make the best bargains,' and so in a breath, I'll answer thee all thou askest. You require to know how I learned that three persons had escaped, when my acquaintance commenced with Robin Hood, and why I am here at this hour. Listen to my replies: firstly, the warder; secondly, to-day; and thirdly, a commission for the Lady Christabel. Are you satisfied?"

"What is thy mission?"

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Hal, with an affectation of surprise; "as if I should tell thee. Beahrew me, Master Lambie, thou hast indeed borrowed the confessor's office, if thou expectest that I shall tell thee that; take care I don't acquaint my lady what you have dared to ask, and if I do, and she inform my lord the baron, he will recount it to you in a manner that will render it to you an unpleasant case of telling. Be satisfied, Lambie, with your present mistake; don't seek to get yourself further in the mire—you have not got Robin Hood, and probably won't get him to-night; of course my lord will storm to no small extent, when he learns that you return empty-handed; but I'll speak a good word for you, perhaps then you will be saved from becoming crows' meat—at least for a short time."

"You? pish!" said Lambie, with an indignant laugh. "All I know is, I have been sent after Robin Hood and another, whom I cannot discover; this lad says he is Robin Hood, and one of the men with me identifies him; I shall, therefore, take him back with me; and as to the other, I must do the best I can to unkenel him."

"Hurrah for Nottingham!" cried Will Scarlet."

The word was given by the leader to advance, and they proceeded to put his order into execution, when Robin, laying his hand upon the arm of Allan, with a sudden grasp, said, in a low voice—

"As you value your life, and the love of Lady Christabel, lie close," and ere Allan could make a guess at his intention, he sprung out into the road, and cried to the departing troop to halt; the unexpected summons, as well as his sudden appearance, had the desired effect; the men instantly stopped, returned, and surrounded him.

"What, Robin!" cried Will, recognising him at once, and thrown off his guard by his unlooked-for appearance.

"Ha!" exclaimed the leader of the troop, pouncing on him. "Now, youngster, are you Robin Hood? Say, Hal, is this Robin Hood?" he cried, addressing Hal of the Keep, but the boy was shrewd enough to guess from what had transpired, that there was a desire on the part of both the Lady Christabel, and his foster sister, Maude, this youth should not be retaken, and at the same time, he did not like to say that he was not; in case of its being ultimately discovered, he might have some disagreeable questions put to him, which might compromise his promise of secrecy, and the safety of the two ladies: he, therefore, affected jocularly, and replied—

"Why, Lambie, how long is't since you gave me credit for sagacity? do you take me for a hound that can distinguish by scent, or for a deer, who can tell kine from a hind by a glance. You are not wont to say, Hal, who is this? Hal, who is that?"

"Cease your foolery, boy," roared Lambie; "you say you know Robin Hood by sight; if you do not tell me at once whether this be he, I'll beat thee to a jelly."

"You must first catch me, Lambie; I'm on flying Maude's back, remember, and your heavy-heeled brute might as well chase a fleet buck as expect to catch Maude? Try it!"

"Speak!" cried Lambie, foaming, "or it shall be worse for thee, Maude or no Maude."

"What if I say no?"

"Tell me!" shouted Lambie.

"Let him answer for himself," replied Hal.

"I am Robin Hood," said our hero; "and this youth," pointing to Will, "is nought but a friend, whose kindness, in the hope to screen me, led him to declare himself to be me."

"Yes," cried one of the retainers, the one who had identified Will as Robin; "that is he—I know his voice now, but the similarity of dress and height, age, and look, made me mistake one for the other; but I know the voice, it is him!"

"I should like to be sure," muttered Lambie.

"Did you not hear me addressed as Robin by him you have bound for me?"

"So I did," exclaimed the leader, a new light breaking in upon him; "then you must be he. Unbind that fool," he cried to one of the men: "who had such a desire for a stretched windpipe, and put this one in his place."

Will was soon unbound. Robin sprung to his side and whispered something in his ear, to which Will replied, "Rely on me, back and edge, Robin," and darted into the covert which concealed Allan and Tuck. Two or three of the men prepared to dismount to follow him, but Lambie prevented them; Will Scarlet not being one whom they had any orders to take, there was no earthly reason why they should not let him go.

This little movement enabled Robin to place his bow and arrows in the hands of Hal, requesting him to preserve them for him, which Hal promised to do. Robin was now bound and placed upon the horse which had as yet borne Will Gamwell, who, in returning with Little John from Gilbert's cottage after the old man had been restored to animation, had expressed his determination of following the route to Nottingham, with the hopes of meeting Robin Hood; the duty of Little John taking him to another part of the forest, and Will persisting in his determination, pursued his walk alone. Hearing the trampling of horses' feet after he had advanced some distance, and the winding of the roadway hiding the coming party from his sight, he immediately imagined it to be Robin Hood returning with his two friends to

Mansfieldwoodhaus, he, therefore, at the top of his voice, chaunted Robin's song; he had barely reached the line "Yet leave them for me, my own dear Robin Hood," when he encountered the troop; he was at once surrounded, bound, and mounted, ere he had time to tell who or what he was, the retainer already spoke: of declaring that he was the youth who had that evening escaped from the castle. Lambie, feeling satisfied that he had got one of the prisoners safe, then proceeded to the cottage, which a party searched, without discovering the object of whom they were in quest, and they then returned towards Nottingham, until stayed by the occurrences already related.

When the operation of binding Robin was completed, Lambie turned to Hal, and said—

"Now, I'll trouble you for that bow and those arrows."

"No trouble, I assure you," returned Hal, with a laugh; "for I don't mean to give them up; they are placed in my keeping, and keep them I will, until I restore them to the owner."

"And if aught of evil happens to him, keep them for yourself," cried Robin.

"Many thanks," said Hal; "now I shall consider I have a double right to keep them."

"You'll give them to me now, nevertheless," said Lambie, rather gruffly.

"Oh, no!" said Hal, with a quiet laugh; "but I'll give you a chance; if you can catch me you shall have them, and cudgel me into the bargain. So-ho, Maude; now, lass, to your mettle. Good bye, Lambie. So-ho!"

Before Lambie was aware of his intention, he gave the nag a sharp switch, and galloped off at a flying speed for Nottingham.

"The fiend seize him!" roared Lambie, "the dog, I'll break every bone in his skin for this. Away after him." Digging his spurs into his steed with such vigour that the poor brute reared with agony, he dashed off, followed by his men, in the same direction.

They were scarce out of sight when the round head of Will bobbed out from beneath the hawthorn-bush, under which he had concealed himself; he looked carefully and cautiously round, and seeing the coast was clear, he stole from his hiding-place, followed by Allan and Tuck.

"Tell me exactly what he said," exclaimed Allan.

"Why he said these words," returned Will. "There are two friends in the covert beneath the elm-tree to my left; get to them, keep them there, or they'll spoil all: but tell them to meet me in Robin's dell by sun-rise, and be thou there with friends to help in case of need, for there will be a gentle one to succour." And I said I would, and so I will, with our Holy Mother's assistance. You had better, therefore, come on to Gamwell with me, and I will rouse some of my brothers, with Little John, to assist us. Hurrah! for a tussle."

"No," remarked Allan, "I must first on to Hood's cottage, to set my sister Marian's mind at ease respecting my safety."

"Is the lady named Marian, who was staying at Hood's, your sister?" inquired Will, eagerly.

"Yes," replied Allan.

"Oh, then, you may spare yourself the trouble of returning to Gilbert Hood, for she is at our house."

"Your house!" exclaimed Allan in surprise. "How? impossible!"

"Ch, yes she is," returned Will; "come along; as we walk I'll tell you *how* she is there. Come along, father."

"Did Robin say one or two gentle ones to succour?" demanded Tuck, somewhat abstractedly.

"One," answered Will; "at least he said 'a gentle one,' therefore he could hardly mean 'a gentle two'—ha! ha!" and he laughed heartily at what he believed to be a witty remark. It met with no encouragement, however, for nobody laughed but himself; they proceeded on their way, the friar muttering—

"There was no message for me, there was for him—there was a kiss for him, and none for me. Is this her love? pish! I'll be in the dell in the morning; if her lady comes, there is little doubt that she will be there, and then I'll tell her that I think her, a false, faithless flirt—a—a—woman!"

CHAPTER XII.

"She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
For there were sleeping dragons all around,
At glorious watch perhaps with ready spears—
Down the wide stairs a darkening way they found:
In all the house was heard no human sound.
A chain-drooped lamp was flickering by each door,
The arras rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,
Fluttered in the besieging wind's uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the dusty floor.

They glide like phantoms into the wide hall;
Like phantoms to the iron porch they glide;

And they are gone."

JOHN KEATS.

RAPIDLY and silently did the troop pursue their path, bearing Robin in the midst of them: they urged their steeds, jaded by their recent exertions, to the best speed they could make, but they did not catch, during their journey, one glimpse of Hal: and when they reached the castle keep, the first question demanded by Lambie of the Warder was—

"Has Hal of the Keep returned?"

"I didn't know he was out," replied the man.

"Didn't know he was out!" pettishly echoed Lambie; "why, man, I tell you I saw him two hours ago—a fair ten miles from this."

"Ah!" said the man, "then he is not returned, for I have been on guard nigh unto an hour, having relieved Herbert Lindsay, and during my guard I have seen none enter or depart; but ere I relieved Lindsay, a guard arrived, bearing some important message to my lord the baron, upon which he is at this moment engaged."

"Well," said Lambie, "when Hal returns, detain him till you see me again."

"The boy's as slippery as an eel when his inclination runs contrar' to one's wishes," replied the man.

"Ay, but he's on his nag," rejoined Lambie; "seize the mare, and you seize him; he'd as soon trust himself in a halter when flung from the ramparts, as trust his nag in any one's care but his own."

"You say right, good Lambie," cried a voice from an open window above the spot on which the conversation was being carried; "I always tend Maude myself. Aha! I got here an hour before you did, Lambie. I say, Lambie, you have not the bow nor I the beating, eh? Now, Lambie, take a friend's advice; when you go to the baron—and he's waiting for you in such a humour!—keep out of arm's way and you'll keep out of harm's way—ha! ha! ha! good night;" and Hal—for it was him—slammed the window as he retired.

Muttering an oath, Lambie ordered his men to dismount; Robin was lifted from his saddle, his legs terribly stiff from having been lashed to the horse's side; he was placed between two men, and marched, attended by Lambie, to the private apartment of the baron.

On entering, they perceived him busily engaged

listening to his confessor, who was reading from some documents which lay before him; immediately he perceived them, he waved his hand to the friar to be silent, and advanced towards Lambie, with a look terribly portentous of evil—his lips worked as if he were about to utter a passionate denunciation, but he remained silent. Lambie, who judged from the moving lips, that his lord was about to give utterance to something, made an effort at good manners and held his tongue; this, although polite, was not politic, as the baron, being in a monstrous bad temper, was by no means prepared to stand like a fool, without giving or hearing a word; he waited a short time—a very short time—for something from the lips of Lambie; nothing came, and then there ran through his mind a rapid succession of associations, connecting Lambie with asses, fools, idiots, and so forth—still nothing came: a worm will turn when trod upon; a gunpowder magazine will explode with a spark; the spark was communicated to the baron, and, raising his fist, with a full swing he dashed it into Lambie's face, striking him violently on the bridge of the nose, from which it drew no blood; it did not, however, fail to produce plenty of water from the eyes, and a gasping for breath. Marry, it is a hard thing to curb one's ire, when it is suddenly and viciously aroused; yet Lambie, who, in hastiness of temper, was a type of his lordly master, restrained the passion which rushed into his brain and knuckles, and tried to cool himself down by grinding his teeth with such vigour that whatever might have been between them would inevitably have been reduced to powder.

"So please you," at length exclaimed the baron, in a tone of unpleasant irony, "I am waxing somewhat weary of waiting until it suits you to inform me of the success of your errand. Trust me, gentle sir, I have somewhat of an account of your transactions at other hands, but would rather, if not too great a call on your good nature, hear from your own lips the detail of what has transpired."

"I waited—" began Lambie.

"So did I," interrupted the baron; "to your story, sir."

"Has Hal—"

"Has me no has's," cried the baron; "proceed at once with what you have to say, idiot; you have wasted time enough, without breaking into more—go on."

Lambie then related the circumstances already detailed, the baron heard him to the end in silence, and then said—

"You have omitted one pleasant little matter, which is the suffering the rogue I principally wished to take, to escape."

"Who? I, my lord?"

"Yes, you, my lord! Did you not capture one first, who declared himself Robin Hood? and then did not a second come forth and declare himself to be Robin Hood also?"

"Yes, my—my lord," stammered Lambie, in confusion, for he had omitted that part of the story.

"Well, most wise and sagacious trooper, your wondrous wit informed you that *both* of them could not be the *one* of whom you were in search—it did help thee to that conclusion; but it could not suggest to thee that though both could not be Robin Hood, yet that together they might be the two whom I sent you to capture, thou king of dolts! thou immeasurable blockhead! and therefore you quietly let him slip through thy fingers, thou ass of long standing! Are thine eyes so sightless, thou beetle! thou bat! as not to remember the form of him thou hadst in thy custody this day?"

"My lord, I had him not in my custody at all," said Lambie, rather gloomily. "I had the western wing to guard this afternoon, and was scarce relieved when I attended to your lordship's summons to the dungeon, from which the prisoner escaped. I did not see either of the prisoners, but I have one of them, and I know this was one that was here to day."

"Indeed," sneered the baron; "bring him forward—let me look upon him."

Robin was thrust rudely forward, and confronted with the noble, who gave a grim smile as his eye lighted upon his youthful prisoner.

"Ay, ay! this is the young cur that barked so lustily to-day; this is the foul-mouthed imp of a base-born churl who wagged his filthy tongue in such rude insolence at me erewhile. Now, boy, I have a few questions to put to thee, which I am assured thou canst answer—answer them well and truly, and thou shalt have no need to complain of my clemency; refuse to answer, or lie in answering them—and—and—and—no matter, but tremble, do you hear?"

"Commence your questions," returned Robin, coolly.

"How did you escape?"

"By getting out of the dungeon."

"I could have guessed that, and not have been much puzzled either. By whose connivance, contrivance, and assistance?"

"By my own."

"Who else?"

"No one."

"A base lie—I know better; the door must have been unlocked; you could not have squeezed through the keyhole."

"No, but I did through the bars, passed through an open doorway, down stairs, through sundry chambers, and so got out."

"Humph! and your companion in flight, how did he escape?"

"I cannot tell."

"It's false; you can and shall."

"I do not know, and therefore cannot tell; we met after I had escaped, and passed from the castle together."

"Indeed! where did you meet?"

"I know scarce anything of this castle, therefore cannot answer the question."

"Where was the fellow when you were taken?"

"I cannot say; we were not together."

"Was it he who was mistaken for you?"

"No, most certainly not."

"What has become of him? where is he?"

"Who?"

"Who, fool? who should I mean but Allan Clare?"

"I do not know."

"Thou'rt yet a greater liar than idiot. I suppose you can guess where he is?"

"I do not indulge myself in guessing; it is not a pastime of mine."

"But I'll make it a matter of moment to you," shouted the baron, losing by rapid degrees his assumed calmness. Every question he demanded meeting with a quiet repulse, he came to the determination that Robin's powers of fabrication exceeded by far all that he had ever encountered—surpassing, as well as he recollected, his own juvenile capacity in that art: there was something passionately gnawing and aggravating to him in the position in which Robin stood with regard to himself. He had done nothing which could justify his death; he was but little more than a boy, too, although his manners, language, and actions bore strongly the impress of youthful manhood.

upon them, and therefore all his harsh conduct seemed like breaking a butterfly on the wheel. He was not a man accustomed to consider this; but in the present instance he did so, and when he had exhausted every question that bore upon the subject,

he dismissed the men and consigned the custody of Robin to Lambie, with the strictest injunction to guard him closely and watchfully; observing that, if he escaped a second time, nothing could or should save him from a sudden and violent death.

"If he escapes from me," said Lambie, hazarding—a little fearfully—a slight laugh, "I will cheerfully abide by the conditions."

"Most assuredly you shall," said the baron, "whether you do it cheerfully or not; and now, be-gone."

Lambie obeyed, taking Robin with him.

Accompanied by two retainers, one bearing a torch, they perambulated for some time the intricacies of the castle, gradually descending flight by flight, until at length the cold air which pervaded the places they

were passing through told that they had reached a considerable depth; they stopped before a door situated in a gloomy passage. Unlocking it, with a grim smile, Lambie took a torch from him who bore it, and ushered Robin into a wretched cell: a bundle of straw was thrown into one corner, and Lambie held up the torch to enable Robin the



better to survey its wretchedness. The water trickled down the walls, from the excessive dampness of the place, the very torch burnt pale and sickly in the humid air, and Robin shivered as his frame encountered the chill atmosphere of the dungeon. It was very small, comparatively a box; and as he cast his eyes round he felt a perfect conviction that escape without assistance was utterly hopeless; but he had a strong presumption that there were those who could and would render him aid in his need, and drew fresh hope from suddenly observing the face of Hal of the Keep peeping in the doorway, and as immediately, after giving him a friendly nod, vanish.

"There," ejaculated Lambie, "there, you may be very comfortable there, if you can make yourself so, and it's no use giving way to despair. Keep up your spirits, boy! we must die some day you know, and why not to-morrow as well as next week? and dying, after all, is but dying, and so what signifies in what manner you die? you may as well be hung as shot, or die in your bed—it's all the same in the long run."

"Very true, sir gaoler," returned Robin, with a slight sneer; "but there's a taste i' these matters. I confess that it would be the same to you to die a dog's death now as a better at any future time, but I would rather defer mine until I am rather better prepared to meet it; besides, I should prefer choosing the manner of my departure, if I could—if not, come when and how it may, I shall try to meet it as becomes a man and a Christian."

Lambie laughed. "As to a Christian," said he, "that may be all very well; but as to meeting it just now as a *man*, why that's another matter. I' faith, boy, when thy chin has strength enough to bear a beard, then speak of thy manhood."

"If I had you in the greenwood, with nothing but a quarter-staff and fair play," cried Robin, a little angrily, "I would make your thick skull acknowledge my manhood."

"Pish, boy!" returned Lambie, somewhat fiercely; "when I come to thee i' the morning with thy pap, thou wilt cry for thy mammy."

"She'll come when I do," returned Robin, with a proud toss of the head. "But good Master-manliness-out-manned, boy as I am, you fear me, or you would not lock me in a dungeon deep i' the earth, with my arms bound, as if you expected I should run off with the castle and all it contains."

The taunt had the desired effect. Lambie removed the cords with a savage laugh. "I think of you but as a bird in a cage," cried he; "you can't get out unless the door is left open, and I'll take care that is not done."

The instant he felt his arms free, Robin gave a rapid glance round at his chance for a sudden escape—there were only three men to prevent him; he had noted every place through which he had passed. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he darted like an arrow upon the man who held possession of the torch. Like lightning he snatched it from his hand, and dashed it in the face of Lambie, who had sprung after him the moment he observed his movement. Uttering a cry of agony as the blazing torch came burning and flashing in his eyes, the wretched man put both his hands to his face; at the same moment Robin thrust the torch against the ground and extinguished it. In an instant all was utter darkness; Robin felt that now was his time to make the effort; accordingly he darted along in the darkness to the end of the passage, pursued by the two men, while Lambie followed, roaring with rage and pain, uttering the fiercest imprecations upon Robin, groping along, his eyes smarting and pouring with

water. When our hero reached the end of the passage, he mounted the stairs which were at the end, flew up them, dashed down the passage at full speed, trusting to outstretched arms to preserve him in case of anything which might be in his way. He heard the voices of the fellows behind him, and he bounded along; he came to another flight of steps; he recollected the locality and expected them; he raced up them, pursued the passage to which they led. Along he ran at his swiftest pace; he remembered a turning to the left, another flight of steps, and a long passage; he found the turning—was up the steps and along the passage in an incredible short space of time. The voices of his pursuers broke now very faintly upon his ears, and cheerfully told him that he had distanced them; he still, however, kept on his speed, hoping to come to some chamber which might have light enough to guide him in his future movements. Suddenly his hands encountered the back of a human being; it was too late, and he at too great a speed to stop; his arms gave a sudden impetus to the person before him, but his speed being greater than that he communicated to the person before him, or the resistance being greater than the impelling power—we will not stop to enquire which—he ran over the impediment, and they both rolled to the ground together.

"Hollo! who's that, in the Holy Virgin's name?" cried the voice of the impediment.

"Ha!" cried the impelling power, rising up quickly, "is that Hal of the Keep?"

"Yes," returned the voice.

"And I am Robin Hood. I have just broken from Lambie and the two soldiers—they are in hot pursuit after me."

"Ho, ho!" chuckled Hal, rising. "Lambie done again! give me your hand, Robin. Now, I'll wager they don't catch you again. Come along—don't speak till I tell you, and don't be afraid to run along swiftly. I'll take care that you don't run against anything; I know my way as well as if it was daylight. Aha! here come the fellows—not a word for your life, and don't fear to use your legs."

Firmly grasping Robin's hand, Hal darted off at full speed, Robin offering no drawback to him.

It is no joke to run at full speed, in utter darkness, along a place with whose locality you are utterly unacquainted; but Robin had essayed it with some success alone, and it was not likely that he would flinch now, when he had the assurance of being conveyed along without the least danger of encountering anything hurtful. On the pair went running, the silence only broken by the light sound of their feet—and to do them credit, they made very little noise that way—occasionally a word from Hal "up," "down," "turn," and so forth, conveying the necessary directions without stopping. The voices of the pursuers, which had, after the interruption, gained considerably, had again grown fainter and fainter, until at length they ceased altogether; still Hal kept on. At last, for all things have an end, he stopped and tapped at a door; it remained a little while unanswered, then a soft low voice enquired who tapped.

"Brother Hal," was the whispered reply.

"Ha!" said the inmate of this room, and drew back a bolt which fastened the door; "what news have you, dear Hal? what have you brought us?"

"Something better than news, Maude; look here!"

A lamp was elevated, and Robin and Maude gazed on each other. The lady nearly screamed, and exclaiming with a voice teeming with emotion—"What! Robin Hood! have you; escaped then? Thank heaven!" flung herself on his neck, and burst into

tears. Robin felt surprised and pained at this burst of feeling; he had shrewdness enough to detect what it disclosed, and he felt a pang as the thought crossed him, that there was disappointment in store for her. He raised her head from his shoulder and tried to say something, but in spite of all his endeavours he could think of nothing. Hal spared him the necessity.

"Why, what a strange girl you are, Maude," he observed. "I thought you would have been so delighted at his escape, and now you are crying; how foolish of you! Hang it, Maude, I don't like to see you cry; come, look up."

"Aye, Maude," said Robin, finding his tongue, "look up, smile, and look as you did when I saw you in the afternoon."

"I shall never look so again," she said mournfully, shaking her head.

"Nay," said Robin, trying to console her, and imprinting a kiss on her forehead, whose coldness almost startled him; he looked more earnestly at her, and found her eyes were swollen, as if from severe weeping. "Come, come, this is unlike you, Maude; what has caused this sudden change in you?" he asked kindly.

"Nothing! do not ask; I will tell you some other time, not now; I shall be better presently," she replied, rapidly and evasively. "The Lady Christabel wishes to see you; we had resolved to liberate you, whatever the cost, but you have saved us the trouble. Hal has told us that Allan Clare received my lady's missive; is he near? or what is his message?"

"He gave no message," returned Robin, "for he was not aware of my intention of returning, until unable to send one; but I can make a shrewd guess that the contents of that letter was a consent of the Lady Christabel's to join her fortune with that of Allan Clare; for I accidentally overheard a conversation in the chapel touching that circumstance, and likewise Allan Clare, immediately on perusing the missive, stated that he proposed an immediate return to Nottingham. I therefore at once concluded that some fresh ill-usage on the part of her father had induced the lady to alter her previous determination of remaining with him."

"You are right, so far," said Maude.

"The unexpected appearance of a friend, who had been seized, bound, and mistaken for me, led to the sudden thought that if I declared myself, and was brought here, I might be enabled, by your assistance, to escape from the castle, and lead the lady Christabel to Allan. I know every foot of the forest between this and my home, and I warrant to convoy the lady safely."

"I will to her at once, and communicate all you have said," exclaimed Maude. "Remain here, quietly, no one will think of looking here for you, and I will soon return. Hal, come with me, I want you yet—you can still serve me."

"Whatever it may be, Maude, I'll do't heart and soul," said Hal, earnestly.

Maude smiled, and patted his cheek affectionately. She turned to Robin, and saying, "I shall soon be back," quitted the apartment with her foster-brother.

Robin sat him down to speculate.

We have said, that although he was a youth of sixteen, yet he was so much in advance of his age in thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, that he acted and felt as one ten years his superior; one important reason for this had been the system of education Gilbert Hood had employed in bringing him up. By education, we mean not book learning, but action; he had, from a child, been taught to think and act for himself, and this self-reliance shone out in all his

words and deeds. Thus, therefore, his acts, his language, or imaginings, must not be measured by the present youths of sixteen—(save the mark!)

As we have said, Robin sat him down to speculate, and it was upon Maude's conduct. He felt morally sure that she loved him; he drew not this conclusion from the kisses and flirtations which during the day passed between them, but from her act of kissing his hand with such fervour as he quitted the castle gates, and from her recent burst of tears on ascertaining his second escape. His speculations led him to think he had, by his attention to her, induced this feeling to arise, and he much questioned, now it had arisen, whether he was not in duty bound, having been the cause, to return it to the best of his ability.

But there was Marian! 'Twas true he had seen but little of her, but then he had seen no one like her—ah! not even the Lady Christabel, beautiful as she was; such an eye, such a smile, and such a musical voice! But, alas! her station was above his; her brother was mating with a baron's daughter, and according to Allan's confession, though he and his sister were reduced in circumstances, they came from a noble family.

And what was he, the foster-son of a humble forest-keeper, of unknown parents, perhaps base born; and the hot blood seemed to scorch his brow and chest as he thought this. Could he aspire to the hand of Marian? The services he might render her brother in saving his life, or helping him to the possession of the Lady Christabel, he proudly resolved should be no stepping stone to her hand, and without an equivalent of that nature, he felt the distance immeasurable; besides, he had yet to discover that Marian had, or was likely to have aught more than a kindly feeling towards him for favours received. She had looked on him, it was true, with something more than mere friendliness as they parted that morning, and the look dwelt in his memory, and the slight pressure of the hand seemed still to dwell there as strongly as when given; but his wishes might have exaggerated these trifles, and most probably nothing more was meant than the sweetness of conduct she exhibited to all. And then Maude, poor Maude! her weeping face rushed full upon his memory. Ah! pity is akin to love—but it is *not* love; yet for the moment he felt as if he could have clasped her in his embrace, that her head might rest on his bosom, and he soothe and console her.

She was very pretty; a light-hearted, mirthful, joyous piece of nature; a kind-hearted, free-spirited thing, who seemed to light up places by her presence, as the sun does when bursting from gloomy clouds in dull weather. She was in a station equal to his own; there was no disparity in years, for she was but sixteen, although she seemed nearer twenty; and she loved him. Why, therefore, should he not return it? Why should he not accept the homage of a heart that he knew *would* cling to him, 'stead of waiting for one who only *might*? Yet there was a strange feeling which seemed to measure his affection for Maude into a simple return of kindness, while to Marian it appeared as though he must mingle adoration with the love he bore her, and, unlike his feeling towards Maude, it depended on no return. Kindness begets kindness—such feeling did Maude's conduct give birth to in his heart; but with Marian he felt to love her ere she had shown even a disposition of kindness towards him—this was a powerful consideration. "I would love Maude and wed her, and be to her all she could wish or desire; but—but I cannot—I cannot!" he burst forth. "I cannot govern my inclination."

He paused, for his quick ear caught the sound

of approaching footsteps, by far too heavy to be those either of Maude or Hal: they drew nearer. A small lighted taper had been left with him; he immediately, from a prudential motive, blew it out. He quickly found it was a caution he did right in adopting, for the footsteps stayed at the door; presently there was a tapping. Robin did not see the necessity of answering, therefore he remained silent; the knocking again ensued, still no answer was returned to it; and again it was resumed, with the addition of being louder and more impatient. Robin remained silent as death. "Maude told me to remain quiet," thought he, "and quiet I will remain; if I am discovered it shall not be for the noise I make." The knocking having been persisted in for some little time longer, at length gave place to the opening of the door. Robin, in blowing out the light had neglected the precaution of fastening the door, and the figure of a man intruded itself into the room; for a moment it remained stationary, then a low voice uttered—

"Maude! hist, Maude; S'death! I'll swear I saw the glimmering of a light through the crevices of the door! Maude, I say, why do you not answer? I know you are here;" and the person immediately commenced groping about the room.

It was a small room, and there were various pieces of furniture decorating it. Robin, consequently, felt rather awkwardly situated, for if he attempted to avoid the stranger, the chances were that he would stumble over something, and his efforts to elude might lead to his discovery. He was seated on a sort of form—a very small edition of those in which school-rooms delight—it was just large enough for two, behind him was a corner of the room, and that completed his knowledge of the locality. Scarcely knowing how to act, he noiselessly raised himself from his stool, stepped over it, and then lifting it up, backed himself quietly in the corner. The room was too dark to distinguish an object, but he could tell by the sound of the footsteps, and the heavy breathing of the stranger, at what part of the room he was; presently he made for the corner which held Robin. Immediately he heard him approach, he raised the form and held it out horizontally; the stranger's arm just cleared it reaching over it, and our hero, giving it a sharp lunge, it caught the stranger in the chest, and tumbled him flat backwards. He fell heavily, but raised himself so as to sit upright upon the floor, and muttered some smart oaths respecting furniture being stuck carelessly out for honest men to break their necks over.

"Where can Maude be?" he continued, "she ought to be snug in bed: I have felt all over, and she is not there. By my halidame! I shall begin to think that Caspar Steinkopf told me somewhat of the truth, although I did dash my fist in his mazzard, for saying my daughter kissed prisoners as freely as her tongue wagged saucy words. The varlet! to dare to speak thus of child of mine. Um! but it's very odd she isn't here; she can't be waiting on the Lady Christabel at this hour, and if she isn't, where can she be? Phew! I feel in an infernal heat. The girl's a thought too lively, with scarce any but rough boys and ruder men to companion with. By the Holy Mother! if she should have been led astray! Phew! I should be a miserable old villain if I thought so. Ah! by the Mass! I remember Hal told me that the Lady Christabel was ill, and that he was gone for a leech. Ha! ha! I'm glad I thought of that; I will not be ready to think ill of her, even though Caspar Steinkopf should speak slightly of her. A curse upon him! if I hear him repeat that again, I'll knock every tooth in his head down his throat, and that will be a meal he will

not relish. If the poor child should have suffered her affection to get the better of her prudence, why the blame is not all hers: she has had no mother to guide her, and I have never supplied the place; therefore, why should I curse her—and in my anger I thought of such a thing—for that which has been produced by my own negligence? No, no! Besides, I remember her mother, a young, fond, foolish, and fond-hearted thing, was, when young, more kind than wise, and perhaps it runs in the family."

He ceased, and sunk into a reverie. A dead silence ensued, which was broken by the light footsteps of Maude swiftly approaching; her father (for the intruder was Herbert Lindsay) heard her, and raised himself to his feet: he groped for the door, and having found it, walked out, and met his daughter just at the threshold.

"Maude!" he cried, rather loudly and sternly.

"Good heavens!" cried Maude, startled. "Father! Why, in the name of mercy! what brought you here?"

"I have something particular to say to you, girl."

"Not now, father, in the morning; it is late; I am tired; I want to go to bed."

"But I shall say what I have to say now."

"You have been drinking, father; tell me in the morning. Good night."

"No, no; not good night yet—I am not gone, nor am I so easily got rid of; tell me where have you been at this hour? and why you are not in bed?"

"I have been waiting on the Lady Christabel, who is ill."

"So Hal told me, or I should not have believed it. But, pray how comes it that you are so free of your kisses to prisoners? are you not a shameless hussy to kiss strange men as freely as if they were sisters?"

"Kiss strange men, father!" echoed Maude, in surprise; "who told you such a thing?"

"Who should tell me so but he who saw you!"

"Indeed! and who was that?"

"Why, Caspar Steinkopf!"

"Caspar Steinkopf told you that, did he? then he tells a gross, wicked falsehood. Confront me with him; and tell him also, father, that the next time he endeavours to entice me into wickedness, to basely deceive me and wrong you, not to give utterance to such unmanly lies, if he should meet with a second indignant repulse."

"Did he do this, did he?" almost roared Herbert Lindsay.

"He did—he did! and threatened me if I scorned him," cried Maude, bursting into a passionate agony of tears.

"Then the Holy Mother of God have mercy on him hereafter, for none will I have here!" said Herbert, through his clenched teeth; "if I don't measure his hauberk with an ell of stout steel, I am neither father nor man. Good night, Maude! to thy rest, my child; never heed him; I believe him not, and will trounce him well for his villainy. Good night: come, dry thy tears—kiss me, girl; God bless thee, and the Holy Virgin keep thee!" With this benison upon his lips, he staggered away. The noise of his retreating footsteps having ceased, Maude called lightly to Robin, who answered her; she struck a light, and relighted the taper. She turned to him with a sad smile, and said—

"My father did not discover you, did he?"

"No," answered he. "Who is that Caspar Steinkopf—have I seen him?"

"Oh, never think of him! The lady—"

"But, dear Maude, I must: have I ever seen him, tell me?"

"Yes; he had the charge of you in the cell on the eastern wing of the ramparts."

"And interrupted us," said Robin, "when we were—um—talking?"

"Yes," said she, blushing.

"I know him now, and shall not forget him; nor shall he me, if he remembers aught after our meeting."

"Do not waste a thought on him, dear Robin; he is unworthy of it. The Lady Christabel waits to see you; and ere you go, I wish to—I wish to say a few words to you. I am—very unhappy—" A burst of tears interrupted her.

"What is it, dear Maude? speak!" said Robin kindly. "If there is any way—if there is aught that I can do to serve thee, name it, and see how readily, how cheerfully I will make any effort to accomplish thy wish. We have known each other, Maude, but a few short hours, and yet it seems as if our acquaintance had been one of years. Say, how can I serve thee? Think of me as a loving brother. Thou'rt unhappy; what is the cause?"

"My situation in this horrid place. My mother died when I was very young; my father never married again, and are were scarce any females in the castle, and none out of it that we know. My mother attended the Lady Christabel's mother, whose death preceded that of my parent but a month; the Lady Christabel and I were children together, brought up together, and I do believe, notwithstanding the distance of our station, loved each other as sisters. During the time we were resident in Huntingdon, I knew of her youthful love for Allan Clare; I used to contrive walks for them, the means of their being together, and ever since have contrived the transmission of their letters. But although much with the Lady Christabel, and even with all the kindness she has shown me, it has still been but the handmaiden attending the mistress: I have never had the heart to ask her counsel, and have had none of my own sex here but a very few with whom, ugh! I could not mix. There are the Mays, of Nottingham, but it is seldom we meet; and I cannot turn for such advice as I need to my father. I am, by nature, of a lively, mirthful disposition, with a head not sufficiently cool to guide the warmth of my heart. If I have ever been merry, and I have had none to be merry with but the retainers, I have usually been insulted by some horrid remark or vile request. I cannot bear it, indeed I cannot; 'tis that which makes me unhappy. The Lady Christabel has resolved to leave her father: Robin, will you take me with you?"

"Maude!" exclaimed Robin, somewhat surprised.

"Do not refuse me, I implore you," she urged passionately. "If I stay here I shall become what I shudder to think upon; I feel a horrid foreboding that I must, for I have not strength of mind to destroy myself. Take me with you—do not deny me—I care not in what way, but take me; I know you do not love me; you may press my hand, kiss me, and say you love me, but I know you do not; even short as our intimacy has been, I have discovered that. To-day, when you were asked by Tuck to give the health of her you loved, you uttered the name of Marian; your eyes flashed, your breast heaved, and oh! your cheek glowed as you breathed the name; I noted it, and I knew your heart was given away. I therefore look not for your love—do not expect it—do not ask it: all I ask is, remove me from here."

"You forget, Maude, I am but in my boyhood; I cannot take you to my home. But there is Tuck," said he; "I am convinced he is attached to you; he

has the means of removing you—to make you comfortable."

"No, no, no!" cried Maude hurriedly, "not him: he is no better than the rest; perhaps worse, for he used religion as a weapon to overcome my scruples—he would have granted me absolution for sin, he said. No, no; to you only can I appeal; take me with you, to work, slave, anything rather than to remain here alone. Do not refuse me, on my knees I implore you do not! I care not what I do if you will; be it as a slave, a drudge, even as thy leman. God help me! I know not what I say, but all men seem to me to need an equivalent of that nature for a kindness," and she buried her face in her hands, weeping almost frantically.

"Not I, nor ever will, as I hope for mercy!" said Robin, fervently. "Rise, dear Maude, say not these strange things; you shall go with me, and live with my foster-mother, and thou shalt be as a sister—a dear-cherished sister, to me, Maude; and may my right hand fail me in my hour of greatest need, if I do aught of wrong to thee. Come, dry thine eyes; we will forget what has passed, and believe we are brother and sister—there, that is well—smile, so come, dear sister."

"Heaven bless you!" uttered Maude, feebly, yet fervently, and leant her head upon his bosom, quite overcome by her ruth.

"There, you are well now," he said, cheerfully. "Come, we will to the Lady Christabel; she waits for us. Have you my bow and arrows, sister?"

"Yes; Hal placed them in my care for you; they are here," she answered faintly, reaching them, and giving them into his hands.

"That's a sweet sister," returned Robin, assuming a gaiety he decidedly did not feel. "Come, cannot you say dear brother?"

"Do not speak such kind words to me, Robin," returned she, in a voice full of emotion, "if you do, I feel as if 'twill break my heart."

"You must not give way to such weak thoughts," he exclaimed. "We shall have need of our best energies to escape from the castle; come," so saying, he endeavoured to lead her along.

"For your sake, Robin, I will endeavour to shake off this terrible heaviness, this weakness of heart which oppresses me. I have never felt thus before," said Maude, parting her curls from her forehead. She drew a long breath, pressed her blanched hand against her bosom, as though to keep down her sorrow, and then, with an effort, but yet somewhat in the old tone, she said, "I must extinguish the light, or it would betray us, were I to carry it;" so saying, she blew it out. "Now, Robin," she continued, "step fearlessly but lightly; a shuffling step may awaken suspicion, and in our path there lies nothing to produce a broken shin—so step lightly, brother."

"That is well, Maude—sister, I mean. I am glad to hear you talk thus." And with this kindly feeling in their two young hearts, they stepped lightly forward to the Lady Christabel's chamber; they entered, and found her awaiting their coming with deep anxiety. She was enveloped in a mantle and hood, like a Benedictine friar; at her side stood Hal, fully equipped for a journey. "Maude, Maude, why have you tarried thus?" she cried, as her maid entered.

"I have not tarried, sweet lady; it is your impatience which makes the minutes pass so slowly," returned Maude.

"Good youth," said the lady, addressing Robin, "you can guide me safely to Allan Clare?"

"Even so, madam," replied he; "he will meet us at a spot not far from hence."

"Will he so?" said Christabel. "Heaven be

praised! Oh! Maude, my heart almost misgives me; I fear I never shall have courage to go through with this undertaking."

"Think of Sir Tristram, my lady," said Maude, "when you feel your heart fail you—I'll warrant it will stir up your courage."

"That dreadful old man!" said Christabel, with a slight shudder. "Let us away," and she prepared to depart.

"A moment, if you please, sweet madam, and then all will be ready," cried Maude, and disappeared from the room. In a minute she entered again with a mantle and head gear, saying—

"Now, madam, let us depart—we have not a moment to lose."

"We! us!" echoed Christabel in surprise, "why you surely do not mean to accompany me?"

"I do, most certainly. Do not delay a moment by attempting to dissuade me, dear lady; I am immovably determined. Let us away; run along, Hal."

Hal obeyed; she followed, taking Christabel by the hand, and Robin brought up the rear.

"I never shall be able to proceed in the dark," said Christabel.

"Fear not, madam," said Maude, with a precautionary hush; "all is safe; it is the presence of light we have to fear; but speak not, for heaven's sake!—a whisper may betray us."

Obedying her injunctions, they all, led by Hal, went on in silence. The galleries, corridors, and unoccupied apartments were traversed and passed through uninterruptedly; stairs were descended, passages entered and left behind; ultimately a passage was reached, and they had not passed along a great distance ere they were stopped by a door, which upon essaying they discovered to be fast; this was an unexpected hindrance, a disaster quite unlooked for. What was to be done? Every one had a try at it, then all tried together, but vainly—the door was immovable.

"Is there no other outlet than this, Hal?" whispered Maude to her foster-brother.

"Yes," he replied; "there is one, but it is much longer, not so safe, and I do not know it so well as this."

"What are the fastenings of the door?" asked Robin.

"I do not know," returned Hal; "I never recollect it to have been fastened before."

"Oh for a light!" cried Robin; "we might then be able to see our difficulty and surmount it."

"I have the means of getting one," said Hal; "but sometimes the people are about here at all hours, and a light might draw their attention."

"It's worth the hazard," said Robin; "I have my bow and arrows. If any one saw us, and sought to give an alarm, I would send a shaft through his doublet ere he could accomplish his object!"

"Be it so," was the reply, and Hal struck a light; they passed it along the fillet, and saw that it was fastened by massive bolts, and fortunately on the side on which they stood. It was soon opened, and they passed quickly through, extinguishing the light; they had not got far ere they were in the chapel. This was the most dangerous part, for the principal entry to it led from the grand staircase, at which a sentinel was always on guard; a footfall even, at that hour, was sure to be heard by him, and challenged as something unusual. The greatest precaution was therefore necessary; but, as it often occurs, where every effort is made to preserve the completest silence, some little cursed accident is sure to step in and render all the caution useless. Hal, in his haste to gain the panel, through which Maude had conveyed Robin, Allan, and

Tuck that evening, tripped along, his toe caught in the corner of a tomb, and precipitated him with a loud ring on the stone floor. He scrambled up like a deer, and crying—"Away! hide behind the tombs, we shall be discovered!" disappeared, leaving his companions aghast at this disaster. But there was not time for reflection upon the consequences of this misfortune. Robin hastily pulled the Lady Christabel behind a huge Gothic pillar; but ere Maude could follow their example the light of a torch was suddenly thrown over the chapel, and a voice cried—

"What! my pretty Maude at chapel so late! What penance hath thy director imposed, eh? midnight prayers? Don't believe all he says, Maude; it is not all gospel, although I thank him for this, for now I shall have a companion in my watch—eh, Maude?"

So saying, a soldier walked quietly up the entry and reached her side, sticking the torch in one of the ornaments of a tomb. Maude saw there was no chance of escape without rendering the Lady Christabel's chance also hopeless, and so she did not attempt to fly, but with presence of mind seized the suggestion his speech conveyed.

"And if I have come to night-prayers by my confessor's award, it will not become thee, Caspar Steinkopf, to interrupt them."

Aha! muttered Robin, "that's Caspar Steinkopf, is it?" and proceeded to fix an arrow to his bow-string.

"Aye, you say so, but do not think so, bonnie Maude," said Caspar; "and for my part I think 'tis folly to throw an advantage away; so we will begin at once with a few of those little favours you so kindly bestowed on the boy we caged to-day. Ho! ho! pretty refreshment, truly; I need some of it. Come, Maude, hold up thy pretty lips, lass;" and he placed his arms round her waist. She flung them from her indignantly, and with eyes flashing fire, cried,

"Keep off, thou churl; thou dastard! thy touch to me is poison—ugh! dare again to repeat thine infamous attempts of this evening, and, by the mother who bore me, I swear you shall not live to make a third insult. What! because I spurned thee from me as a loathsome thing, even as thou art, thou must to my father, sneaking like a mongrel cur, and utter base lies, to make him curse a child to whom he never before uttered an unkind word. Faugh! I spit upon thee, reptile! Begone, nor defile this holy place with thy polluted carcass."

"Death, thy scorn shall bring its punishment with it. I will have thee in spite of thyself, and make thee a finger scorn after;" and again he attempted to seize her, but she eluded his grasp, saying with intense energy—

"Touch me not, I charge thee, or my screams shall ring through this place with such sound as shall bring the whole of the castle inmates on thee. Stand off, or you, who best know what you have to fear from death, will best understand how you will meet a cleave from crown to chine."

"Were death in thine arms, I'd clasp thee," cried Caspar, springing on her, and seizing her. She struggled violently, but screamed not, but he had not her a second in his grasp, ere an arrow went crashing through his eye and brain. With an unearthly shriek he staggered back, spun round in intense agony, and fell dead on the ground, at the moment that Hal of the Keep had sprung from his hiding place with drawn sword, to assist his foster sister.

Robin and the lady advanced, and Maude, turning to Robin, exclaimed, "Dearest brother, you have saved me from a fate worse than death!" fainted in his arms. Here was a fresh dilemma; but they were

obliged to act without waiting to resolve—they laid her upon the cold stone flooring, and Robin, running to one of the stone basins, dipped his hands into some Holy Water, crossed himself, and then, taking some in the bottom of his hands, after crossing the fainting maiden with it, sprinkled it over her forehead. She was not long recovering, and when able to walk, they proceeded on their way, leaving the body to take care of itself, and to tell what tale it pleased. They passed through the panel, and instead of pursuing the same passage which Maude had led them along previously, they turned abruptly off. The darkness was intense.

"Now I can light the lamp with safety," said Hal; "there are no eyes to watch this path but those whom a particular purpose brings hither, and that's ourselves."

"That torch would be of service which yonder scoundrel brought into the chapel," said Robin.

"So it would. Stay here, and I'll run back and fetch it," cried Hal, and darted off; in a short time he returned with it.

"I was just in time," said he, "for I heard the tramp of the guard coming to relieve; as I closed the panel I heard the challenge, but I'll be bound Caspar will be in no hurry to return it."

"Hush, Hal," said Maude, "make the distance as short as you can. You are sure you know it?"

"To be sure I do," returned Hal; "besides, haven't I taken you along it several times, and—and—also—"

"Grace May," suggested Robin.

"Yes!" quickly uttered he.

"Then for heaven's sake," said Christabel, white with excitement, "pray take us to the end as swiftly as you can!"

"Where does this passage lead to?" inquired Robin.

"These passages," answered Maude, "lead beneath the hill to the border of the forest."

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "is it so? that is well. But I prithee bestir thyself, for we shall soon have daylight, and 'twere as well to be in the forest before the sun."

"It shall be done," said Hal decisively, assuming a manly tone and air. He ran on first with a torch, and they followed as swiftly as the rugged path would permit; occasionally they descended rough steps, then a long passage on an inclined plane. The whole of the cutting, for it was cut out of solid rock, was chill and damp; the passages, which for years had scarce ever been trodden by human foot, were encrusted with damp mould and mosses; here almost a pool of stagnant water; there a wet slimy bed of moss and short dank grass. For three quarters of an hour they wended their way along this dreary place, the whole time descending rapidly; at length Hal said—

"Here we are at the bottom; now for it—we shall see if it is our fate to get off undetected."

"Pray heaven we may!" said the Lady Christabel.

"Does Hal come with us also?" asked Robin.

"For a short time, yes," replied Maude; "have you any objection?"

"Oh no, I am glad of it. I will tell you why presently," he replied.

"Here is the door," said Hal; "on the other side it is enshrouded with low hawthorns and stunted trees. Three steps, and we are in the forest."

The door was gained, opened, and extinguishing the torch they entered the fresh air; day was just breaking, and they stopped therefore not a moment in the open way, but sought the friendly shelter of the forest trees. Directly Robin ascertained the quarter of the forest he was in, he turned to Maude and said—

"Maude, I have a request to make which, perhaps, you will be kind enough, as soon as you see its necessity, to comply with. I have agreed to meet Allan Clare at a certain place; as it is some distance from this, and out of the route to Mansfieldwoodhouse, you will accompany your brother to my home at once, and I will with the Lady Christabel to the meeting place agreed on. By doing this you will be enabled to reach my father's cottage with less fatigue, and prepare him for our coming; we can with additional speed proceed on our way, and with less likelihood of being discovered, being two only instead of four."

"I do not know any way except the highway," said Hal.

"Ah, but you must not take that, for if any of the baron's people are out they will inevitably discover you. No, follow my directions exactly, and you will reach my foster-father's cottage in a far less time, without, in all probability, being discovered. You see this path: follow it, and always keep a *single* beech tree on your left hand; swerve not in the least, and you cannot make a mistake. You will ultimately come into an open glade, in the centre of which stands an enormous oak; there is an alley to its left, pursue it, and you will find at its termination Gilbert Hood's cottage standing before you. Say to my father that I have sent you, and you will meet with a hearty welcome. Will you do this?"

"Whatever you think best, certainly," returned Maude; "but I would rather accompany you. Still, as you seem to think it most advisable to separate here for a time, it shall be as you wish, and Hal and I will on alone."

"Thanks, Maude, thanks! it is for the best, or I would not have proposed it," answered Robin; "besides, I hope, ere the morning sun has passed its meridian, it will see us again united. We must haste: this spot bears dangerous proximity to the castle, and the sooner we quit its precincts the better."

Warm and earnest farewells were exchanged between them, and then Maude and her foster-brother took the path pointed out by Robin, while he and the Lady Christabel pursued the way to Robin's dell. Their route lay along the skirts of the forest, in the direction of Nottingham; the castle still being disagreeably in sight. Robin, however, hoped to gain that part of the forest where he should strike into its depths ere there was a chance of their being seen or overtaken in case of a pursuit. A considerable proportion was accomplished; his heart began to grow lighter, and his step freer, for the most dangerous distance was nearly passed over. He turned to the lady with cheerfulness, and said—

"If the Chevalier Clare but keeps his appointment as truly as there is every prospect that I shall keep mine, we have no need to fear not meeting. If your courage and strength but serve you, dear lady, an hour and a half hence you shall seat yourself with him beneath a broad oak tree, growing on the banks of the sweetest little stream in Christendom."

"I pray heaven I may!" ejaculated Christabel. "The desire to escape from such a misery as there was in store for me, had I have remained, will, I am assured, give me strength to accomplish this, to me, very bold effort: of strength of mind or body I cannot boast; yet, I trust, the emergency of my situation will enable me to surmount my natural weakness. You shall not, at least, my good friend, have to complain of a deficiency of will on my part—the Holy Virgin make my strength equal to it!"

"Amen!" said Robin. "The will is the herald of the way, and I have little doubt that we shall be successful. I consider myself highly fortunate in pos-

sessing my bow and arrows, for, in case of danger, they will prove my trustiest friends. I can hit a small object at a hundred yards, and it will be vastly odd if I cannot line a fellow's doublet with an arrow, if he comes too close to be agreeable."

"I hope there will be no necessity," said Christabel.

"I hope not," rejoined he, "for then our journey will have no let or hindrance."

They had now reached the highway from Nottingham to Mansfield, and, as they proceeded to cross it, Robin threw a hasty glance along the road, in the direction of the town, with the hope of seeing a clear space; but in this hope he was disappointed. He uttered an exclamation, and drew an arrow from his quiver; he fitted it to the bow-string, and half bent the bow on the impulse of the moment; but Christabel laid her hand upon his arm, and said, "For Heaven's sake! good youth, what is it you see and fear?"

"Why, lady, my eye detected a horseman in the costume of your good father's honest retainers, coming in this direction at full gallop. He is hidden now from your sight, by yonder clump of elms. In less than a minute you will have a full view of him, and he of us, if we stay here. If his errand is one which I suspect, I must stop him, even at cost of his life—"

"No; no! oh, no!" hurriedly exclaimed she; "one has already fallen—no more bloodshed, it is too horrible."

"Indeed, lady, I am loth even to think of it," returned he, "and am even sick of the thought of sending Caspar Steinkopf to his account, rascal as he was; but if this man is allowed to proceed, he will reach my home before Maude and her brother can arrive, and, capturing them, return with them, and be back with a whole swarm of his fellows—probably intercept us. The consequence of which will be, that you will be returned to your father, and Allan, Maude, her brother, and I, sent a party of four into the other world together."

"But is there no way besides spilling blood?" demanded Christabel, anxiously.

"He must not proceed. Ha! here he comes. Behind that tree; for your life, stir not—move not, or you are lost! I must trust to Providence to guide me, and whatever I do, you may be assured I shall do it for the best."

Christabel did as he desired, and stood trembling with fear and apprehension behind the trunk of a large beech tree growing near. Robin took up his post beside another, and in silence they awaited the horseman's coming. He drew nearer. The wind brought the clatter of his horse's hoofs with, to Christabel, horrible distinctness: she drew her mantle close round her, covered her head with her hood, and watched with an agony of excitement and expectation the tree behind which Robin disappeared. No part of him was visible. She could not have believed he could so completely have hidden himself. On came the horseman, the sound of his horse's approaching footsteps growing still louder: still there was no movement from Robin. The minutes seemed as hours. The noise of the stranger's approach increased with frightful indications of proximity; she felt choking; her heart palpitated violently; she thought she must dart from her place of concealment, and shriek as she ran. The rattle of the hoofs seemingly denoted the horseman to be on a level with the spot on which she stood, yet she saw him not, nor did he pass: she bit her lip and held her breath convulsively. Where was Robin?—was he still behind the tree? or was he there at all? He had not deserted her? Oh, heaven! surely not; if he had it would be death to her. These thoughts crowded through her mind with ter-

rible rapidity; she gazed at the tree screening Robin from her sight, but nothing met her gaze to indicate the presence of aught human. This suspense was horrible; she could not bear it; her senses seemed failing her; she strove against the weakness vainly; even the idea of swooning in that solitary place, dreadful as it appeared, could not check the sickening sensation of faintness; her sight grew dizzy; there was a thronging of sounds in her ears; the place seemed to fly round with her, when suddenly her eye caught something moving by Robin's tree. She pressed her hands to her throat, struggled violently, and, by the greatest exertion, endeavoured to keep herself from swooning; she succeeded, inasmuch as she was restored to a consciousness of Robin's presence, and the excitement of endeavouring to ascertain his intention gave her a species of mastery over this bodily weakness; she watched eagerly and anxiously. All at once the horseman swept past. A second elapsed, to her almost an hour; then she saw the figure of Robin glide from his hiding place, extend his left hand, which held the bow, and draw the bow-string until the nock of the bow almost touched his ear—twang went the string, and the arrow sped like lightning to its destination. A strange shriek, an unearthly cry, rose on the air, and then all was still. Robin remained in the position in which he had discharged the arrow, and bent his gaze earnestly in the direction it had flown; while Christabel, sick and fainting, and unable to bear the excitement, tottered from the shadow of the tree towards him; she reached him, placed her hand upon his shoulder. Light as was the touch, he sprang round as he felt it, and then she said—

"Boy, boy, have you stained your soul with blood? Is he killed?"

"If you mean the horseman, lady, no. But I scarce think his steed will bear another rider; my sight must have failed me if I have missed a vital part; but I fear it not, I saw the poor beast rear like a stricken deer, and heard his death-wail; I would his rider were as harmless as he is now. I must ascertain what he is about; we must have none on our track, no, not even an eye to mark our path, which may find an echo in a babbling tongue to set others on, where its owner might singly fear to follow. He whom I have just unhorsed, if used to forest skirmishes, will not sit to weep over his horse's body; he will crawl through covert and brake in order to discover from whose hand the arrow sped, and should he succeed in his object, we must be the sufferers in all ways. I am satisfied that he is not the only one sent in pursuit, and an alarm from him to any of his companions who may be near, will effectually prevent our escape. There are also several other ways in which his discovery of us would prove distressing; I must, therefore, for our own welfare, use every means for preventing him. I have no doubt I shall succeed; do you, therefore, dear lady, cheer up your spirits, keep quiet beneath the shade of yon tree; stir not, let not the flutter of your white garments in the wind betray you—the accomplishment of your escape depends upon it; draw your mantle quite round you, keep close, to the trunk of the tree, and you will be safe. For myself, I will find out where this fellow hath bestowed himself, and try if my single arm cannot make a silent tongue. Cheer up, lady, I will soon return, and all will be well."

"I tremble to be left alone in this desolate place," timidly uttered Christabel, glancing round apprehensively.

"Fear nothing, sweet lady," returned he, "if you follow my directions, you have no cause for alarm;

should there be, a cry from you will bring me to your side in an instant," and he led her to the tree as he concluded.

"My heart fails me," she ejaculated, while the tears rushed into her eyes. "Oh, Allan, Allan, would to heaven you were near me!"

"I pray thee, lady, place faith in me. It doth not, perhaps, become my lips to utter praise of mine own skill: but were even that noble cavalier, Allan Clare, here, he would stand thee in no better stead, lady, than I—nay, I do well believe he would not be of such service. That I can excel him in the use of the bow I dare assert; that I know the fastnesses of old Sherwood intimately, while he is in utter ignorance of them, will not admit of dispute. I fear no living foe; and, lady, I will cheerfully peril my life to lead thee



replied the Lady Christabel. "And, though I doubt not thy courage and thy skill, I think—I feel that I could bear up more bravely were Allan Clare by my side, to allay, with this cheering words, the sad forebodings of evil which now so heavily weigh down my spirit."

"Courage, lady, courage!" said Robin, cheerfully, "he is near you, you will soon meet. Fear not; no harm shall reach you while there is a breath of life in this frame; keep quiet and still, and all will be well;" so saying, he glided from her, and disappeared beneath a group of hawthorn and furze bushes, forming a brake close to a cluster of beech trees. The lady drew her mantle round her, and offering up a prayer for a safe deliverance from this strait, sunk weeping at the foot of the beech tree.

safely to thy destination. Believe, therefore, dear lady, that although Allan Clare be not by your side, you are not the less devotedly guarded and guided."

"I do place faith in thee, thou brave-hearted youth; but I cannot keep down the terror which oppresses me,"

CHAPTER XIII.

"His eyes did hurl forth sparkles fiery red,
And stared stern on all that him beheld,
As ashes pale of hue, and seeming dead:
And on his dagger still his hand he held,
Trembling, through hasty rage, when choler in him swell'd."

Of his hands he had no government,
Nor car'd for blood in his avengement:
But, when the furious fit was overpast,
His cruel acts he often would repent;
Yet, wilful man, he never would forecast,
How many misdeeds would ensue his heedless haste."

SPENSER.

"BRA.—It is too human evil; gone she is:

—Cut more tapers!
Raise all my kindred—

Some one way, some another.—
Do you know
Where we may apprehend her, and—"

SHAKESPEARE.

MARTING with pain, foaming with rage, in an agony of half blindness, from the effects of the blazing torch dashed in his eyes, Lambie followed his men, as they, not very conversant with the path, pursued Robin. When he fled from them many were the blows they received by running foul of projections, and many were the oaths and execrations which they uttered in consequence; they kept very well on the track for some time, but at last the two who led the way were at fault, and they halted for Lambie to come up.

Nottingham Castle, at the period of which we are writing, possessed an immense number of subterraneous passages, cut through the rocky hill upon which the castle stood, for purposes of escape, should the castle, in any attack, be carried from the town, or for the obtainment of supplies in case of siege. These passages were very numerous, intersecting each other in all points, some leading to dungeons, others cut like the paths of a labyrinth, only for the purpose of bewilderment; a perfect knowledge of their intricacies was possessed but by few, and even these few required the aid of a torch to thread them with accuracy. As the two retainers who pursued our hero were unacquainted with these paths, it may be easily imagined that, having quitted the only one who could have guided them, and having passed at tolerable speed a turning which they should have taken, that, when they stopped, they found they had lost themselves.

We have said they halted for the approach of Lambie, but it was not until some time after they had passed the right path, and threaded half a dozen wrong ones, that they did so; they awaited his coming at first a little patiently, making allowances for the painful situation in which Robin's act had placed him, and then, as he did not come, not a little impatiently. One tried a stentorian halloo; he was answered by the reverberating echo of his voice from the dismal vaulted passages; he tried again with a like effect; his companion seconded him with a most vigorous yell; still they met no reply from Lambie. They yelled together with all the power their lungs enabled them, and they had a suitable echo from the vaults, but none from human voice.

It should be understood that there were horrible and dismal stories afloat among the retainers and servants of the castle respecting these same passages. The bravest men are occasionally the greatest victims to superstition; men who will fearlessly face the cannon's mouth, be the first to leap in a breach, or be exposed to the hottest fire of the enemy, without winking an eyelid, who readily and cheerfully volun-

teer as one of a forlorn hope, fearing nothing human, will yet stand, tremble, and grow pale at the idea of ghosts, haunted places, or aught supernatural.

Thus was it with these two men. In the broad daylight, exposed to foes of their own stamp, they would have fought to the last gasp, nor budged an inch; yet here, from having heard of ghosts, hobgoblins, and wicked sprites in abundance, they were miserably alarmed, and shouted in concert as loudly and fiercely as was possible; they were startled at the echo of their own voices, and each moment expected a frightful phantom to start up at their feet, and scare them to death by its hideous distortions. Although they individually felt this excessive alarm, yet they endeavoured to keep each other ignorant of it; and one of them, in a voice decidedly tremulous, proposed to retrace their steps in search of Lambie. The other assented, and they set about putting it into effect; but, instead of accomplishing their object, they wandered about the passages, enduring a succession of cold shudders, as the echo of their footsteps led them ever and anon to believe they were followed by some horrible and fantastic object. Leaving them in this unpleasant predicament, we return to Lambie. His weak eyes, which still rained water, as he proceeded, aided by the darkness, became less painful; and being better acquainted with his road than those who preceded him, he took the right path, fondly believing that his men had been equally fortunate, and hoping that, by the time he overtook them, they would have Robin safely in their clutches.

The reader will perceive that it was a fond but a vain hope. But Lambie was naturally sanguine; and, by the time he had reached the spot where Robin had encountered Hal, he had already, in his mind's eye, seen the youthful captive struggling in the air, suspended from a very high gallows.

Instead of following the path which Hal led Robin, he diverged to the left, and, being partly recovered, increased his speed. The hopes he had formed began to diminish as he neared the body of the castle, for there was no sound or sight meeting his eye or ear betokening the recapture of the fugitive. He went on; he descended the grand staircase; he encountered Caspar Steinkopf; here he ascertained that no one had, for near an hour preceding, passed that way. He immediately conjectured that his men had taken Robin before the baron, for it never presented itself to his imagination that they had not captured him. Inwardly cursing their stupidity for so unnecessary an exposure of the near escape of the prisoner, he marched to the baron's apartment. He stopped at the door, and listened, in hopes to hear if the men were with his lord, and at the same time ascertain what sort of a reception they were meeting with. He clapped his ear to a crevice, and heard the baron, in rather a hoarse and gloomy tone, utter,—

"The purport of this message is, then, that Sir Tristram is suddenly called to London, and he wishes me to join him there immediately?"

"Yea, on the morrow, my lord," replied a mild voice.

"Um! Why 'tis well, nay better, than I had determined. It shall be so!"

A silence ensued for a minute, and Lambie was satisfied that the captured and captors were not there. He heartily hoped that they had not yet caught the baron's presence; and, with the desire of preventing them if they intended it, he quitted the spot, and retraced his steps in the direction of the subterranean passages. He had no light, neither cared he to endeavour to obtain one, as it might beget a spirit of inquiry, which he had no desire to raise. In the

darkness, therefore went he on, without encountering a solitary item which might create a hope that he should be successful. He reached the dungeon from which Robin had escaped. No soul was near—he halted—he was replied to by the echo of his own voice; he concluded that the retainers had visited, and been dismissed the baron's presence, ere he had reached the apartments. Now it was, however, necessary to be assured of this, and also to ascertain whether the youth had been taken.

He did not like to encounter the baron, as he had been so decided in his expressed determination of treating him to a sudden death, and he recollected his own consent, if he permitted Robin to escape, to cheerfully abide by the conditions. He hesitated, as these conflicting emotions by turn agitated him; but then he reassured himself, by believing that the men would have fully explained to the baron how the affair had taken place, and he trusted that his lord would, when he learned the agony he had suffered from the burning torch, deem it punishment sufficient, and acquaint him with what had been done, and what was to be done, with the prisoner. Arriving at this conclusion, he resolved to seek the baron, and get through it as well as he could. Once he thought he heard a faint hallo; but as it was not repeated, he believed himself mistaken, never dreaming that his two followers were wandering about like the ghosts of unquiet spirits.

He arrived at the door of the baron's chamber: all was quiet. Suddenly the idea struck him that his lord might have retired to rest; and if so, he had better attempt to rouse a ravenous tiger than awaken him, particularly under such peculiar circumstances. He applied his ear to the door, and bending all his faculties to the task, heard the low hum of a voice speaking low and continuously. He suffered this to proceed for some time ere he could raise courage enough to knock at the door. At last he summoned resolution, and gave a faint knock, startled at the same time by the sound which he had himself made; it remained unanswered, and then he began to wonder if there was really anybody within. Tired of waiting, he thought he would softly open the door and look if any one was there. He put his resolve into execution, and had no sooner done it than he almost frantically wished he had not. By the table was seated the confessor, bending his head to catch the low-breathed words of the baron, who was upon his knees, with his front facing the door, in the act of confession. He might have just finished, or he might not, it is hard to say which; but, be it as it may, the visage of Lambie protruding through the partly-opened door met his astonished gaze, and brought him to his feet in an instant. With an expression of sudden anger, he cried,—

"How now, varlet! what brings thee here thus rudely and abruptly? Marry! is the castle thine or mine, that thou ebbtrudest thine ungainly carcass into my chamber without requesting the accustomed permission? Speak, fool! what is thine errand?"

"I knocked at the door, may it please you, my lord," returned Lambie, humbly; "and not receiving an answer, I thought no one was here, and so thought —"

"You would see what you could lay your ungodly claws on?" interrupted the baron.

"You wrong me, my lord," returned Lambie, with something of the expression of wounded dignity a shoemaker might feel at being called a cobbler.

"I can measure your honesty," returned the baron, with a sneer; "nor be troubled with a want of a cloth yard staff, or an oil wand!"

"Your lordship cannot call your faithful retainers thieves?" deprecated Lambie.

"My lordship can and will call his faithful retainers whatever it pleases him. I have not to learn the virtues of my faithful retainers. However, as I suppose you did not come here for the purpose of discussing the merits, the virtues, amiability, and general good qualities of the knaves who are of more annoyance than service to me, may I be put in possession of what you did come for?"

This was a question Lambie by no means relished; it at once created a doubt whether the baron knew of the last half hour's occurrences, and he was awakened from the train of thoughts and fears it occasioned by a question his lordship put to him, without waiting for an answer to the preceding one.

"What, in the name of all that is hideous," demanded he, "have you been doing to your mazzard?"

"My mazzard!" echoed Lambie, putting his hand to his face, and feeling he was on tender ground.

"Aye, thy mazzard!" repeated the baron. "I have long recognised it by its supreme ugliness, but it now exceeds by far all I have ever beheld. Speak, dolt! into what grimy grease barrel have you thrust it?"

"It was the torch, my lord, as you are probably aware."

"The torch! What torch?"

"Does not your lordship know?"

"Speak, gull! how should I know? An' I knew, thou ugly blockhead, should I ask thee?"

Here was the verification of Lambie's fears; by this it was plain the intelligence of Robin's escape had not yet reached him. Lambie felt packed up and booked for the next world; he was in a miserable hobble; what could have become of the pursued and pursuers? He was perplexed, and scratched his head vigorously in his strait, quite forgetting the baron's question. He was not long left in forgetfulness; he was roused to consciousness by receiving from a truncheon, which in his sudden passion the baron snatched up, a blow which filled the room with its sound. A change passed over the features of the poor wretch, and if he looked serious before, he looked now ten times more so; added to which, he rubbed his head more vigorously than ever.

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded the baron, with glittering eyes, a red visage, and dilated nostrils.

"Yes—no, my lord!" confusedly returned Lambie, who felt more what he did than heard what he said.

"I will once more ask thee; what made thee bring that atrociously hideous grinning countenance into my presence? If thou dost not answer me speedily, I will make thy skull so tender with this staff thou shalt not bear to touch it for months to come!"

"I want to know what your lordship purposes doing with the prisoner; the youth captured to-night called Robin Hood!" answered Lambie, quickly, for he saw the staff raised at right angles with his head.

"Let him remain in the dungeon until I have made up my mind as to his disposal!"

"Which dungeon?" asked Lambie, in rather a low tone.

"Which dungeon?" reiterated the baron; "the one he is in!"

"Which is that?" inquired the retainer in a still lower tone, with an overwhelming conviction that the whole affair would soon out.

"Why, thou incomparable idiot, why dost thou ask me? thou knowest thou had'st the placing him in a dungeon—keep him in the one where thou hast already confined him!"

"That was where he thrust the torch in my face;

has he returned to it, my lord?" uttered Lambie, hesitatingly, casting an anxious glance over his shoulder to see if there was a clear space for retreating, but the door was closed—had been closed by the confessor during his colloquy with the baron; he was aghast at this discovery.

"Has he returned!" repeated the baron, in somewhat of the faint tone Lambie gave utterance to; and then a thought flashing across his mind, he exclaimed fiercely—"Ha! hell and death! a thousand fiends!—has he again escaped? villain, is this thy news?" and he sprang upon Lambie with a tremendous oath. He was like a bull-dog, he always made for the throat when attacking. He was successful in this case; he squeezed the poor fellow's windpipe till there was an expansion of the eyes awful to behold; a gurgling in the throat; a spluttering; until it grew beyond endurance, and then the bearer struck down the baron's arms as though they had been reeds. He retreated to the corner of the room. The baron picked up his truncheon, which he had thrown from him a moment or so preceding, and followed Lambie close up into the corner.

"Tell me," he roared, "all you have got to disclose, quickly, and then prepare for a short shrift and a tall gallows!"

"I could not help it! Indeed, my lord, he thrust the torch into my eyes!"

"Ass! to let him get the torch. Well?"

"Then—as far as I can judge, for I was blinded with pain—he dashed the torch to the ground, and put it out; he darted past, and two men followed close at his heels. I fully expected they had caught him, and brought him before your lordship."

"No, they did not. If he has escaped, you shall swing for it. Where did he run to?"

"Among the passages beneath the castle."

"Do the fellows following him know them well?"

"Why, not very well, my lord."

"St. Benedict, St. Peter, St. Paul keep me! I shall kill this knave out of hand. Thou egregious insufferable block! thou consummate essence of idiocy! why didst thou not get a torch and go to their assistance? They will miss him and lose themselves, thou hideous gull!" and with that his lordship dealt him such a blow with the oak truncheon, over the ear, that there was at once created such a terrific dinging as to effectually shut out all other sound. Lambie felt very unpleasantly vexed on receiving it; he saw another coming, he gave a brisk leap to avoid it—it came whirling with all the force the baron could throw into it. Two consequences ensued from the dexterous jump given by Lambie. First, he leaped backwards without taking into consideration who or what might be behind him. It so occurred that the reverend confessor, who saw an evident indication on the part of the baron to repeat the very hard and very loud blow with which he had favoured Lambie, deeming it his duty, stepped forward to interfere, at the very moment the retainer leaped back: a violent concussion ensued, and the result was, they both fell heavily to the ground together: while, if the passionate baron failed in hitting his servitor, he succeeded in giving a handsome vase, filled with flowers, a tremendous blow, and shivering it to atoms with a frightful crash. The baron viewed his own act with a feeling somewhat approaching to frenzy. The table upon which it had stood was, with everything upon it, saturated with water. There were a quantity of important papers, which the confessor had been reading to him; he seized them as they were floating away, vowing ten-fold vengeance upon the unfortunate cause, who, having scrambled to his feet, prepared to

make a desperate effort to decamp. As he gained the door, a loud and hasty knocking startled him, and ere a reply was waited for, a retainer entered, who exclaimed, hastily—

"My duty and service to you, most honourable lord. A strange affair has just occurred, and I am here to consult with you upon it."

"What is't? quick, say at once—no roundabout story."

"Your lordship shall have it in as few words as a story can be told with. A good soldier should act, not talk; and as I consider myself a—"

"Fool! to your tale!" roared the baron, interrupting him.

The man bowed, and proceeded with a very quick utterance—

"I went to relieve guard at the chapel entry five minutes or ten minutes since; no one challenged me: knew there ought to be sentinel on duty there, because there always is one—else shouldn't have gone to relieve guard there. Receiving no challenge, I advanced at once to the post—oh oh, thought I, something wrong here—sentry drunk or asleep—began to think what punishment he should receive, but on going to his post found no one there—oh ho, thought I, deserter—aha, I thought—"

"Curse your thoughts!" cried the baron, foaming; "come to the point at once, thou prolix dog."

"Prolix dog!" muttered the man; "I never heard of a hound o' that name before."

"Will you proceed, wretch!" yelled the baron, almost frantic, and flourishing the truncheon in a manner which induced the soldier to continue his story rather hastily.

"I sent," he continued, "a party of men up the staircase, while with the remainder I searched the chapel, and found stretched upon the ground quite dead—"

"Ha! who?" cried the baron, with startling energy.

"Caspar Steinkopf. I don't know whether your lordship knows him; but if you don't, it is all the same—I knew him: he was—"

"How was he killed?" impatiently interrupted the baron.

"By an arrow through his brain. I extracted it and here it is, my lord!" So saying, he presented the bloody arrow: the baron seized it, and after gazing upon it for a moment, he said—

"Know you any one to whom this arrow belonged?"

"No, my lord, returned the man.

"With all respect, my lord, that arrow is one of a quiver-full I saw Robin Hood put into the possession of Hal of the Keep to-night," said Lambie; "I could swear to it by its length and make."

"Ha!" said his lordship; "haste, send the boy here. There is something strange in all this."

"If I mistake not," interposed the soldier, "I saw Hal with Maude, proceeding towards the Lady Christabel's apartments."

"When?" demanded the baron.

"Not half an hour since."

"I will look to this myself; bring a torch!" So saying, he left the room, followed by Lambie, while the soldier ran and fetched a torch from some of his men, who were a short distance from the spot. The little baron trotted on, at a good pace, until he reached his daughter's apartment; he knocked at it, and waited an instant; no answer was returned; he knocked again; he scarce waited ere he knocked a third time; there was still no answer, and in a paroxysm of rage, he thumped vigorously with both hands at the door, and then, no one replying, he opened it,

poked his head in, then seizing a torch, rushed in from the sitting apartment into the bed-room. They were empty. He bounded back again, and roared in a tremendous voice—

"She is gone!—she has fled! Ha! death and fury! Lights! Call up the men!—search the castle!—leave not a stone unturned!—away to the postern! Hell and all its fiends! am I to be cheated thus? Ha! send Herbert Lindsay to me; it is his vile Jezabel of a daughter, that witch's brat, who has concocted all this. He shall answer for it. Lambie, away to the warder; ascertain if any one has recently quitted the castle; bid a party of the men saddle their steeds, and wait my bidding on the instant. Look how you attend to this, knave; your head may pay the forfeit, else, of your negligence. Away!"

Lambie needed no second command—he was off like a shot. The soldier bringing the news of Caspar's death was also dispatched to gather a party of men to traverse every part of the castle, with the hope of yet unkenning the fugitives, as a faint idea crossed the baron that they might be still within its precincts.

How the old gentleman roared, stormed, raved, and swore! He expressed his determination, garnished with round oaths, that if it was proved his daughter had eluded the vigilance of the various sentinels, and succeeded in escaping from his roof, that they should be hanged, every one of them, as high as Haman had the misfortune to be. He made another strict search of the suite of apartments, which his daughter had occupied, without finding her. He gnashed his teeth, and as he returned to his own sanctum, he revolved every mode of punishment in his mind, to pick out one more terrible than another, which he proposed inflicting on all the delinquents, great and small, who had induced his child to leave her paternal roof.

"I'll exterminate them all! I'll sweep them away—there shall not be the ghost of the shadow of one left, who shall say, 'I helped to deceive her father!' No, I swear by the Holy Apostles, and my Father's beard!" he ejaculated through his teeth, as he entered his chamber, and flung himself heavily into a chair. He rested here scarce a second ere he was up and pacing the room with rapid strides. Presently Herbert Lindsay entered.

"Your lordship summoned me hither. I await your pleasure," said he, quietly standing on the threshold. The baron leaped at him, and dragged him by the neck into the centre of the room.

"Villain!" he roared, "what has become of my daughter, the Lady Christabel?—answer me quickly!—speak without equivocation, or you shall not be in this world a couple of minutes longer."

"Your daughter, my lord, the Lady Christabel!" ejaculated Herbert, reiterating his lord's words with astonishment; "I do not know."

"Liar!" shouted the incensed baron, furiously; "you both know and shall tell, or unshriven, unanointed, you shall instantly be sent to your account;" and out he whipped his broad-bladed dagger, raising it gleamingly in the air. Herbert Lindsay winked not an eye-lash, but said quietly and coldly—

"If your lordship will give me to understand what you mean by supposing me to know where my young lady is, and why you do so, I shall most respectfully answer any after question you may put to me. But understand me, my lord, I am, if humble, an honest man, with no more sins than honest men may commit, and no act of my life to blush for; I therefore fear not being suddenly sent to my account, even unshriven, albeit as a good Christian I would rather not do so of the two, had I a choice; and in consequence will tell

you, so far as my knowledge serves me, whatever you may demand, not through fear of my life, but out of the duty I owe to you, being my lawful and liege lord."

The composure of true courage will always have its influence on the hasty ebullition of a passionate temper. The baron loosened his hold of Lindsay, and said—

"You did the warder's duty to night; who passed within these two hours?"

"I have quitted the gate, my lord, two hours ago!"

"Is this so?"

"It is, my lord. I did double duty from two o' the afternoon until ten, and was then relieved by Michael Walden."

"Did any one quit the castle-gate before you were relieved?"

"Yes, my lord, Hal of the Keep. He told me the Lady Christabel was sick, and he was going to fetch a leech; he returned as I was relieved."

"Ha! the young imp; 'twas he who told me that Lambie suffered Allan to escape. A curse on my stupidity, I never thought to ask him what took him abroad so late."

"To fetch a leech, my lord," said Herbert.

"To fetch the devil!" bellowed the baron; "it was to concert some means of escape. Where is he? Send him to me, and thy daughter also, unless she has accompanied my ungrateful girl in her flight; and by the mass! I can well believe she has concocted it all, as well as accompanied her."

"My daughter Maude do this!" uttered Herbert, surprisedly.

"Aye; that compound of insolence, pertness, wickedness; that Jezabel, whose sauciness, had she not been my daughter's woman, and herself a female, would have brought her a halter many a time and oft. She has counselled Christabel to rebel; I know it; and once in my power, I'll make her confess the whole plot, and punish her afterwards. Send her to me, if you can find her, but I expect it is a bootless errand."

Lambie at this juncture entered; he looked heated, and panted for breath. "My lord, I have been to the warder," he cried; "none have passed out, young Hal only has entered, and I have been everywhere to seek for him, but cannot find him. There is a party of men in their saddles at the hall-door, awaiting your lordship's commands."

"So, it is well. You were at a cottage on the borders, near Mansfeld, to-night, Lambie?"

"I was, my lord."

"If they have passed from the castle by the means I suspect, I doubt not they will there at once, being the nearest rendezvous of the villain who has decoyed my child from me. Do thou with thy men enter it; if they are there bring them back, and every one you find, and burn the hut to the ground. If they should not be there, no matter, burn it the same; leave not a stick standing—away!" Lambie disappeared. Herbert, with a gloomy brow, was about to follow, when Fitz Alwine stayed him.

"Hold!" he cried. "Herbert Lindsay, I must not forget, spite of my passion—and I have had cause for it—that our boyhood was passed together on almost brotherly terms; that you have also thrice saved my life in the midst of fierce strife in the Holy Land, at the imminent hazard of thine own. I owe you something for this. I must also remember that if I love my child, undutiful as she has turned out to be, you must also love yours. If, likewise, she has incited my daughter—or even assisted her to thwart my views; if she has proved wanting in respect in

tongue and conduct to me, love for my daughter has been the occasion of it. I will, therefore, if I succeed in recovering her, forgive her what she has done, on that account; but I trust to you for not having a repetition of it; therefore think not of what in the violence of my rage I may have uttered respecting Maude—a Jez—a—I mean not to carry it into effect."

"I thank you, my lord!" said Herbert, moved by this show of kindness; his honest nature little dreaming that the craftiness of his noble master had led him to assume this form of speech for the purpose of carrying into effect an intention which, without Lindsay's aid, he would have been unable to accomplish; it quickly disclosed itself, though Herbert discovered it not.

"Herbert," he said, as if almost indifferently, and apparently calling to his recollection whether such a place did exist; "is there not an outlet through the subterraneous passages leading to the borders of the forest?"

He well knew there was, but was unacquainted with the means by which to distinguish it from the numerous winding and intersecting passages beneath the castle; he also knew that few in the castle were acquainted with it, and Herbert was one of them. He had, therefore, cunningly devised his speech so as to draw out the required intelligence from him, whose daughter he had inwardly promised, if he caught, to oblige with severe punishment. The bait took; Herbert felt scandalised at the idea of his daughter having shown a want of respect to the baron, and that she should have conspired against his peace, by even assenting to the Lady Christabel's departure under such peculiar circumstances; he, therefore, felt it his bounden duty to assist in their recapture, by every means in his power; especially as, despite her impropriety, the noble baron had evinced such extraordinary kindness in speaking of her delinquencies; he, therefore, said readily—

"Aye, my lord, there is, the which I know to a turn. I will guide you that way; and if they have attempted it, I warrant me I'll tread on their heels in a short time."

"Does your daughter know the path?" interrogated the baron.

"No, my lord, I should think not."

"Do you know any one else who does?"

"There's old Michael Walden, Guipert Franklyn, and for that matter, my foster-boy, Hal of the Keep, as he is —"

"Ha! that is it," interrupted Fitz Alwine, quickly. "That young brat has achieved it, then, if they have escaped. Ho, there—a torch! Call some fellows: we will there this instant, as swift as may be. On, on—lead on, Herbert—quick, man!"

Herbert obeyed. A couple of torches were obtained; six men accompanied them, and they descended through various corridors into the chapel. Here for a moment they were stayed by the sight of the dead body of Steinkopf.

"Steinkopf dead!" exclaimed Herbert, holding a torch so as to examine his features. "I have been saved the task, by the Holy Virgin! But he who has done this shall have my thanks, and the first service I can render him," he muttered.

"On with you!" shouted the baron, impatiently. "Let us waste no time loitering over this carrion; they may get clear while we are fooling the minutes here."

Herbert pressed the spring, the panel already mentioned flew on one side, and they passed through. They traversed the passages, and descended the flights of steps at a swift pace. They had not been long ere a distant hallo broke on their ears.

"Aha!" joyfully cried the baron, "we have them. Oh, ho! my dainty rebels! once again raine—raine, aha!"

"That shout comes not from the passage leading to the forest," said Lindsay. A second hallo broke loudly on their ears, as though the utterer was a trifle distracted; in a second it was repeated, with the assistance of another voice.

"Ah!" said the baron, "it must be them—on to them!"

"Then have they mistaken the path," urged Lindsay.

"So much the better, for I have them now in my grasp," chuckled the baron.

"Hum!" muttered Lindsay. "If young Hal had the leading of the girls through this maze, he would not mistake, I wager my head. These shouters are none of those we seek, I warrant me!"

"Lead to them," cried the baron, impatiently.

"We are leaving the right path," suggested Lindsay.

"I care not. What matters it to me?" roared the baron. "I must have the fugitives—lead on!"

"As your lordship wills, I obey," answered Lindsay, leading on. The shouts redoubled almost frantically; and, as the baron and his followers advanced, the sounds grew louder, until the noise of approaching footsteps coming rapidly towards them rather astonished his lordship, who hardly guessed that the fugitives had a decided wish to run into his arms. His speculations were in another minute set at rest by the appearance of the two retainers, who had lost their way in pursuing Robin. Their features were haggard, pale, and bore evidence of fear and exhaustion. If the baron had felt some astonishment at anticipating the approach of his daughter and her companions, he decidedly felt a much larger proportion of it upon encountering the two men who joyfully had once more rejoined their fellow-beings.

"How now, knaves!" sternly demanded Fitz Alwine, enraged at his disappointment. "How came ye here?"

One of them related, in a few words, the whole history of their disagreeable predicament.

"Heard ye, or saw ye, any one while here?" demanded the baron.

"No, my lord. Once we saw, as we thought, the gleam of a torch," said one of the men. "We hallooed and ran in the direction, but found we were mistaken. We had a fearful idea we should be left here to starve, and each minute we expected the foul fiend, or some of his impish sprites, at our shoulders. Holy Mary keep us!" and the man crossed himself.

"Pish!" cried the baron, with disgust. "Lead on quickly, Lindsay; we must make up for lost time."

Lindsay led on; and without further interruption they gained the terminus of the passage leading to the forest. The door was unbolted and ajar.

"It is as I suspected," exclaimed Fitz Alwine. "This way have they escaped. Four of you men spread yourselves along the borders as rapidly as you can, and endeavour to trace them: they cannot be far off. A hundred marks to him who brings them to me, and fifty to him who brings satisfactory intelligence of their hiding-place. Away with you! Lindsay, we will return as we came. See that door securely fastened—so. Now lead the way to my sitting apartment."

This was done, and then he gave orders for another party of men to arm and saddle their horses. When he was given to understand this was accomplished, he called for his own steed, equipped himself for a journey, mounted his barb, and bidding Herbert Lindsay yet farther to satisfy himself that his daughter, or the Lady Christabel, were not still in the castle, rode off

at the head of his men in the direction of Mansfield-woodhaws.

CHAPTER XIV.

* * *
That trot became a gallop soon,
In spite of curb and rein.

So stooping down, as needs he must
Who cannot sit upright,
He grasped his mane with both his hands,
And eke with all his might.

His horse, who never in that sort
Had handled been before,
What thing upon his back had got,
Did wonder more and more.

* * *
So like an arrow swift he flew
Shot by an archer strong,
So did he fly—

COWPER.

ROBIN HOOD, on leaving the Lady Christabel, had thrown himself beneath a cluster of hawthorn bushes and tall gorse. Many times, when he had been outlying in the wood to shoot deer, had he practised crawling and gliding beneath the stunted heaths and gorse, with the purpose of seeing how silently and near he could approach the timid deer unobservedly: he excelled in this facility, as he did in all in which skilfulness was required. He had now a double motive to put his powers to the test, both as regarded his safety in remaining undiscovered, and of ascertaining unchallenged in what the stranger was employed, and the possibility of passing him unseen, or of rendering him powerless in preventing such an attempt. He took a wide circuit, with the hope of keeping from popping too unpleasantly suddenly upon him; he gained, as well as he could calculate, the limits of the boundary in which the fellow must be concealed, then commenced narrowing his circle until he got sight of the object of which he was in search. It was the rider of the steed, upon his hands and knees, gazing earnestly in the direction in which Christabel was stationed; he had his head close to the diverging branches, or rather stems, of an ash tree, and appeared quite absorbed in the contemplation of the object upon which he was gazing.

Robin could not ascertain, from the place where he lay, what the object was which appeared to fascinate this fellow so completely; but he came at once to the conclusion that now was the time to strike the blow for his deliverance. He therefore glanced rapidly and scrutinisingly round, looking for anything which might turn to his advantage, even as regarded a knowledge of the locality; he had no desire to shed blood, or it was in his power effectually to silence the fellow by sending an arrow through his heart—the accuracy of his aim making such an act fatally sure. He noticed, in observing the stranger's means of resistance, that his weapons consisted of a short spear resting by his knees, and a quarter-staff leaning against the huge trunk of an immense oak. He came to a resolution how to act, and immediately proceeded to act upon it; he crawled upon his breast as near as he dared, then he raised himself up, and noiselessly approached the tree, against which leaned the quarter-staff; of this he possessed himself, and getting quite close to the prostrate fellow, he raised his foot, and giving it a thrust with all his strength against the fellow's posterior, jerked him forward with such sudden power, that his head forced itself between the stems of the ash, violently, and they closed round his neck, completely imprisoning him, as though he had been held in a vice. It was so unlooked-for, so un-

expected, on the part of the unhappy horseman, that for a moment, he was paralysed; but it was no situation to remain long silent in, and as he conceived it to be the work of some forest sprite, he gave utterance to such a grievous roar, as made the forest echo for some distance.

Whack came the quarter-staff over his back and sides: it was, perhaps, an unfair advantage which Robin took, but he believed that, under the circumstances, he was perfectly justified in applying any means of advantage which might lie in his power to his own particular profit; he therefore laid the staff upon the other with right good-will, producing a bruise and a yell from every stroke, which, to do them justice, were most vigorously bestowed. This beating went a long way to satisfy the captured spy that it could be from no source but a devilish one that he received this treatment. He could not see his chastiser—the stems holding his neck with such force that he was utterly prevented; and although he struggled with all the strength he was master of to free himself from this unpleasant embrace, yet he found his strength unequal to the task, and therefore, being unable to do any thing else, he gave utterance to a series of roars, interspersed with "Ave Marias" and "Paternosters," besides exordiums for the discomfiture of evil spirits.

As it would not answer Robin's purpose to suffer him to continue this uproar, he hastily proceeded to put a stop to it: he unclasped the fellow's belt; his steel cap had fallen when his head was thrust between the trees—this Robin picked up, thrust over his face and mouth, and passing the belt round it and the stems of the tree, buckled him to it. Picking up his spear, which he thought might be useful, and keeping the quarter-staff, he went back to the Lady Christabel: he found her not very implicitly obeying his directions, for she was standing out in the glade, her hands clasped, and gazing distractedly round her. As her eye lighted upon Robin, she looked at him steadfastly, hesitating for a moment whether to fly or approach. Robin, observing this, said gently—

"Sweet lady, fear me not; all again is safe, and for the present, we shall journey on unchallenged."

"What meant that terrible outcry?" she enquired, tremblingly. "Oh! youth, youth, I have no strength to bear this excitement; I am weak beyond my own imagining."

"Nay, lady, cheer up! there is no harm done," said Robin, soothingly; "let us on quickly, and the danger will soon be over. I was right: this man is one of the baron's retainers, and his appearance betokens there are more abroad. Come, lady, come."

She took his hand, and he led her on. They had to pass the tree to which the fellow was bound, and Robin ascertained on reaching it, that he had committed a grand mistake, for in binding the fellow's mouth, he had forgotten to bind his hands, and he now perceived the fellow had used them to set his mouth and eyes at liberty, while he was struggling to so separate the ash stems that he might liberate his head, but in that he had not yet succeeded, and our hero determined, if possible, not to give him a chance; he sprang on him, and seizing his arms, forced them, notwithstanding the other's struggles to the contrary, behind him, and then used the belt to fasten them; this accomplished, he tore a twig from the tree, and thrusting the cap to its former place, fastened it with the withe; he then rejoined the Lady Christabel, and they proceeded on their way, avoiding the highway, and threading their route through the masses of the old forest.

The reader must understand that the old wood

now contained nearly the whole of the *dramatic persons* as yet included in this history. It has just been stated that the Lady Christabel and Robin were taking their way "beneath the forest solitude," in the direction of Robin's dell; the baron had dispatched one of his retainers the direct road to Mansfield-woodhaus; he was one of the men who had been well thrashed at Hood's the night preceding. This fellow knew the path well, and had been sent on first, with the idea that if he had taken that path he might detain them until Lambie, who was following with a troop, should arrive, and make them prisoners; with his success the reader has just been made acquainted. The irascible father, accompanied by a score or so of retainers had also thrown himself into the pursuit; he had chosen a somewhat circuitous route, and spread his men rather widely, with a certain conviction that his cunningly-devised scheme for the capture of the fugitives would succeed. Leaving him in full gallop, cogitating upon what he'd say to his daughter when he caught her; what he'd do to Maude, Hal, and Robin when he had made them prisoners; and how high he'd hang Allan when he had him in his power, we proceed to lift the curtain hiding the remaining actors in this ballet of action, and show that Allan, accompanied by Little John, Friar Tuck, Will Gamwell, and his six stalwart brothers, were speeding to Robin's dell, while Maude and Hal were wending their wearied footsteps towards Hood's cottage; the two latter personages followed Robin's directions implicitly, and with all prudent speed, but his absence had a material effect upon Maude. While in his company, or acting in her mistress' service, she was bold and light of heart; she would have gone treble the distance she was then pursuing, nor wasted a second thought upon it; now she was sad; over-excitement had left its consequent depression, and even though her foster-brother, Hal, was with her, and used all his powers to cheer her, it was to little purpose; the way seemed long and toilsome, her imagination had already converted one mile into four, and she asked with a kind of faltering voice, conveying an idea that she would receive an answer which would consign her almost to despair—

"How far have we yet to go?"

"Oh! no distance, Maude, only a step or so; a short ten miles will cover it."

"A what?" she faintly articulated.

"Nay, nonsense, Maude, 'tis not far for a morning's ramble, and particularly when we are doing the Lady Christabel a service. Come, throw off this sad humour, Maude; it's unlike you to be so very dull; I should like to know what has made you so. Ah, Master Steinkopf had something to do with it, I know."

A slight shudder passed over Maude's frame.

"I tell you, foster-sister," continued he, "I am Robin Hood's friend, heart, soul, hand, and body, for sending that rogue headlong to his father the devil; there's only one thing—I'd rather have done it myself. The iron-hearted villain, the filthy sneaking cur! were there no screech-owl birds of his own tribe, that he must be ruffling the feathers of a gentle dove like thee? When I saw the scoundrel seize thee so roughly, I felt as if I was red hot—as if I had been plunged in boiling water!"

"Ah," said Maude, with something of a smile illumining her pale features, "if it had been Grace May?"

"Why, look you, Maude," returned he, rather excitedly and very earnestly, "I'd do any thing in the world for you—a wrong to you is a deep one to me; but with Grace May it's a crime nothing can repair but extermination. If Steinkopf had done so

to her, I'd not only have destroyed him, but I'd have found out if he had any relations—I wouldn't care how distant—and have treated them to a taste of the same retaliation for their relationship—I would! The ban of the accursed cling to him—a foul—"

"Hush! Hal, peace!" interposed Maude; "we will speak of him no more; he has paid for his unmanliness with his life."

"And so he has, Maude; thanks to—Hark! there are footsteps; who comes here. Ha, mass! 'tis Tuck, Maude, and that cavalier the Lady Christabel was to meet. Ho, sirs, well met!"

Hal was correct; it was Allan and their party on their way to meet Robin at the dell. They quickened their steps as their eyes encountered the forms of Hal and his sister, and very soon they formed one party. Many questions were asked, and Maude, as briefly as she could, detailed the past events to the impatient Allan; it was then agreed that they should all proceed at once as quickly as they could, to meet Robin and his fair charge—Maude most resolutely persisting in making one of the party, in spite of all the suggestions as to the prudence of her proceeding on to Gamwell Hall, and preparing for her mistress' arrival there, as well as its being a path in which she was not likely to be discovered. She proved an obstinate little puss in this affair, and would have her own way. When Allan and his companions found this to be the case, they considerably yielded the point and she accompanied them.

Friar Tuck endeavoured to make himself very amiable to her; he smiled, he talked less boisterously than usual, he grew witty; and all to no purpose. There was a marked change in her demeanour to him; she treated him gently but coolly; there was kindness in it, yet it was of that nature which repelled familiarity, preserving respect at the expense of affectionateness.

How quickly he detected it! he made several earnest efforts to set it aside in vain, and then his heart failed him. He talked less; at length he ceased, and was silent and thoughtful, Maude being scarcely less so.

But there was another one who strove to make himself agreeable; one who, after he had gazed a few minutes upon her, smoothed his hair down, altered the set of his cap, and glanced at his attire to discover a stray disorder—who should it be but our friend Will Scarlet.

There was a style of beauty in Maude's features which perfectly corresponded with his ideas of feminine loveliness. She had an oval face rather small, bright dark eyes, dwelling in long eyelids bordered with a deep fringe of silken hair; they were laughing eyes to a turn, would laugh outright ere the lips could accomplish a smile. And yet, too, they were rare lips! To behold them was like looking on rich and tempting fruit; you were sure to think of your own mouth, and do your best to make a close friendship between them. Her nose was long—not too long—thin, and slightly curved, peculiarly adapted to the shape of her face; and then she had beautiful dark hair; and this collection of charms was set upon a figure of most pleasing proportion; slim, without appearing thin; rather above the common height, without appearing tall; a figure which would draw from an observer who possessed the taste to form a judgment, an exclamation respecting its perfect completeness. Will Scarlet possessed sufficient taste to satisfy himself that Maude was one of the prettiest girls he had ever clapped eyes on; he thought that he would, therefore, cultivate her acquaintance; no one could challenge him with bashfulness—he did not

know what it meant. He accordingly hesitated not in addressing her, nor felt at a loss how to commence.

"You know Robin Hood?" said he.

"I do," she replied.

"And you like him, I am sure?"

"I do indeed," she replied with a faint smile, and then continued, "You know him well, probably you have known him long. How lives he in your liking?"

"Why, maiden, even as my right hand, which I would rather lose than his friendship; he has the truest aim of any one who can wield a bow in the country, and his heart's as true as his aim; the boldest and the gentlest spirit; has the most to be proud of, and is the humblest of his merits. Robin Hood for my friend, and I defy all the world beside."

"You are very earnest in your praise!"

"And utter truth, as I am one of God's created things!"

evening in the castle, that my lord the baron had received a summons to London, with all dispatch; he was to have started early this morning, and I know



"You have reason to believe, Maude, that the baron will discover Christabel's flight soon after her departure?" asked Allan, interrupting the conversation.

"Yes," replied Maude, "for it was rumoured this

he purposed taking my lady with him; he will, therefore, if he is not already, be soon aware of her absence, but not of the route she has taken. Pray Heaven she may rejoin us, without being discovered

and dragged back by her father. I almost dread it, for as soon as he finds she has gone, he will dispatch the people round in all directions."

"Hark!" cried Little John, "there's the tramp of horses rising on the wind—a troop is coming this way; if they be of the baron's retainers we had better give them a wide path, and if they be not, no harm can come of our keeping out of sight; follow me quickly, lads, here's a covert at hand will hold us all snug and quietly, and if any prying knave among the comers should pop his eye upon our covert, and be in haste to proclaim it to his companions, why we must send him to his home, short of his nose; in with you, friends! here they come, and, marry, at a huge pace, too. Ha! what means this!" Well might Little John have given utterance to that exclamation, for, on turning his eye down the pathway, he saw a horseman come at a tremendous pace, followed by four others at the top of their speed; upon the back of the first horse was seated, or rather squatted, a rider who had evidently lost all control over his steed; he had lost his cap, and his hair streamed in the wind as he flew along, "grinning horribly a ghastly smile" of horror and terror at his situation; he soon reached the spot which contained our little party, and as he dashed by, Little John saw that the horse had an arrow sticking in his neck; he was past in an instant, and his followers also.

"Heaven deliver us, it was the baron! It is the baron! The Baron Fitz Alwine!" ejaculated Maude, Hal, and Allan, in a breath.

"That should have been one of young Robin's arrows. Will, did you see it?" said Little John.

"It looked like it," returned Will, "as well as I could gather from the hasty sight I caught of it; it was of the length and thinness of his make."

"If such is the case, then mischief is abroad," said Little John; "Robin and the lady are in some strait; he is not the lad to throw his weapons away in sport when he has need of them in earnest. We must on and do our best for him; I know a path which will lead us to the dell, quietly and secretly, if we ourselves are not indiscreet; so, Master Will use your discretion if you'd serve your friend, bridle your tongue, no snatches of ballads nor use of your bow and quiver until we stand in need of their service. Follow me."

Concluding thus, Little John stole stealthily from his hiding-place, and leading through an entangled copse, closely followed by his little band, was soon lost to sight amidst the profusion of forest things.

Poor Baron Fitz Alwine! hot, hasty, impetuous Baron Fitz Alwine! What a series of disasters had he suddenly encountered. His temper, naturally violent, had for a short time previous to his becoming acquainted with Allan's intention of paying him a visit, been in a kind of lull, a species of quiescence arising from an entire harmony of circumstances existing at the time by some strange coincidence; it was but the calm which precedes a storm, for when that intelligence reached him, he began to swell, grow angry, and break up the existing peace. He, however, determined to purchase a renewal of his quiet by the most effectual means within his power; a determination which developed itself by his employing Ritson, then in his service under the name of Taillefer, to kill Allan ere he could reach Nottingham, and bade him employ another, if necessary to assist him, which Ritson did, in the person of the same outlaw who was buried with him beneath the oak and beech tree. To make assurance doubly sure, he dispatched a party of men, soon after Ritson had departed on his vile mission, to aid him, but the scheme, though conceived so as to make

its execution almost certain, turned out an undoubted failure. Ere he knew this, however, the morning commenced by giving him the racking pains of the gout in his shoulder. In the midst of a paroxysm of the disorder, in walked—to his undisguised astonishment—Allan!

From this point onward, as the reader knows, he had met with nothing but defeats, disappointments, and discomfiture. These successive annoyances, added to pain and want of rest, had made him really in a burning fever. He had arrived at that frame of mind, that state of fury, which produced a settled determination to consign to death, without a hope of mitigation, any one of the fugitives, except his child, who might fall into his power; and, also, the stern resolve to scour every foot of the forest, rather than not track them to their hiding-place, even if he spent a week in the search; and the consequence of this determination was, that he was led into fresh disasters.

Poor old baron, of cayenne composition! he little expected what would shortly befall him. In his pursuit, he had, by chance, taken a route, which in its circle comprehended his daughter and Robin; a disagreeable fact for the latter, of which he became aware by first hearing the tramp of horses, and then by cautiously advancing beneath the underwood, beholding the baron reining-in his steed. He heard him despatch the greater portion of the men in different directions, while he, with four of them, purposed staying just where he was, until they should bring him an account of their good or ill success.

It so happened, unfortunately for our hero and his fair companion, that the spot Fitz Alwine had chosen commanded every outlet in the direction he wished to pursue. Unless, therefore, he could, by any stratagem, induce him to quit his favourable position, he would either be inevitably discovered, or he must retrace his steps, and take a longer and by no means safer way. The Lady Christabel, who was timid to a fault, he had been compelled to quit for the purpose of making his present discovery, and fearing that her alarm might lead her into some indiscreet act, which would disclose their proximity to her father and retainers, he returned to the spot where he had left her. It was with no very agreeable sensation that he perceived, just as he arrived, two of the men despatched in search of him, having dismounted, beating the bushes and gorse close by the clump of furze and hawthorn which concealed him and Christabel. They approached nearer and nearer, narrowing at every step the distance between them.

Robin saw that a few steps more and they must be discovered. There was one alternative, which was by shooting them both; and on the impulse which the necessity for employing that alternative produced, he strung an arrow, but Christabel clasped her hands, and whispered that she would rather be discovered than be the cause of more bloodshed. He held his hand, and said it should be as she desired, although, at the same time, he felt assured that if they were discovered, his share of life would be a small one. He knew that the lady would be treated with respect and care by these men, if they captured her; and, therefore, if he had the chance of escape, he might leave her and shift for himself, with a good grace. As discovery seemed inevitable, he determined to give them a chase, and communicated his intention to her, at the same time observing, he would not leave her until the last moment. He was, however, spared the necessity, for one of the fellows, who stood within three feet of him, said—

"It's of no use our wasting our time here, we shan't find them crouching like snakes in the grass; if they

are anywhere, it's in some of the glades nearer the open path-way than this; besides, I care not how soon I get my horse out of this rough road—I shall have my head off with a blow from some of these low branches. Come along!"

His companion did as he was requested, and they disappeared in the depths of a thicket; leaving those of whom they were in search just at the precise instant that they were almost within their grasp. Robin did not think it advisable to remain in the same place long; so, leading forth Christabel, he renewed his journey, still gliding from bush to bush, and tree to tree. The very great danger they were in of being discovered rendered such precaution necessary.

It was a matter of peculiar annoyance to him that the baron would keep in the position he had assumed; for, unless he departed, and left the coast clear, it was utterly impossible to proceed without detection; and when Robin had arrived with his charge as far as he durst, he paused to consider what line of conduct to pursue. He was but a short distance from the place of meeting, and, once past this glade, he had little doubt of performing the remainder of the journey undetected. He could see his pursuers, although they saw him not. He perceived the old baron trotting up and down the glade, peering here and there to catch a glimpse of anything in the shape of those he sought; but he quitted not the glade. The truth was, he gave Robin the credit of being expert in the use of the bow, and rather too ready with it. Steinkopf's death had given him an unpleasant proof of this, and he, therefore, thought it quite as well to keep where he was, and let his men be the seekers, and, he hoped, the finders.

His steed was one of rare mettle; it pranced and curvetted, threw up its head and champed the bit, with the proud air of perfect blood. Robin had been thinking of doing the very thing the Baron had given him credit for, but hesitated; for though he believed he should be doing Christabel a favour by sending her father into the other world, it struck him she might not like the manner of doing it; and as he watched him riding up and down with such an evident intention of remaining there for a long time, he wished all sorts of things, the least of which was, that his horse would run away with him.

Then suddenly the thought struck him that such an event might be produced by very simple means, and accordingly, after the baron had galloped to the end of the glade and was half way back, doing his best to beguile the time, an arrow from Robin's bow pierced his steed's neck, delivered just with strength enough to insert itself firmly without proving fatal at once. As Robin expected, the horse reared and plunged violently the moment he received it, and very nearly unhorsed his rider; he then bounded madly forward at the top of his speed to the affright of the startled and dismayed baron, who uttered a shout of terror as the unexpected event occurred; he tried to rein in the stricken steed, but all such efforts were futile. His four retainers, who witnessed the sudden flight of the horse, and heard the shout of their lord, without being near enough to decipher the cause, had nothing left them to do but, after performing a stare of wonder, to gallop after him in pursuit. This was exactly what Robin wished; he took advantage of it to cross the glade, and in a short time had led Christabel to the side of the small stream, and there they seated themselves beneath the shade of the old oak tree at the appointed spot.

In the meanwhile, away flew the horse which bore the baron, dashing through glades, tearing through coverts, brakes, and thickets—now grazing the baron's

legs against the trunks of trees, then putting his head in danger of a blow from a straggling branch. They came to a deep hollow, where the small stream had widened into a sheet of water, something more than a large pond; slash plunged the steed through it, throwing up a sheet of foam, which succeeded in soaking the baron, and nearly depriving him of his breath. But how firmly he kept his seat! He clung convulsively to the pommel of the saddle and the rein, with an energy which seemed to defy all attempts to unseat him. The stream was left behind; a thicket was dashed through, and he left his cap upon a twig as he passed.

They arrived in the highway, flew by Allan and his party, and the baron began to think the horse meant to keep on for ever. As, however, he had no ambition to do so likewise, he entertained serious opinions of throwing himself off, and cast his eyes anxiously on either side, to see for a soft place to accomplish it; but it happened that every spot appeared to be exceedingly rugged, and he deferred attempting until a better opportunity offered.

Presently he became aware that his horse was taking a deliberate aim at an oak tree, which, among other peculiarities, had a branch shooting straight out, rather low, and bearing an extraordinary resemblance to a candelabrum, placed horizontally. He looked at it, as he approached, with an eye of misgiving, and prepared to make a low bob, in strong hope to pass under without collision; but, unfortunately, beneath the tree lay the extended trunk of an oak, felled in some storm of wind. The horse, who noticed not the extended arm, did the trunk; and, upon reaching it, leaped high over it with such a sudden bound, that he jerked the baron out of his saddle; and the branch, catching him beneath the chin, left him suspended in a grievous state, Absalom-like, roaring for help.

His steed, who stayed for nothing, kept on; and the baron's retainers, who were not exactly "blithe and gay," but had a decidedly large share of stupidity, instead of attempting to rescue their lord from his unfortunate dilemma, kept on at full speed after the flying steed, leaving him like a ripe plum, ready to drop to the ground. This, indeed, his first impulse was to attempt, but the height was too great to hazard it rashly; he did not like jumping; he had bruised himself the night before in such an attempt, and he thought that it would be perhaps advisable to ascertain if there were not easier and safer modes of descent.

While agitating this, and his arms beginning to ache with his weight, to his intense horror and dismay, a wolf marched out from beneath a quantity of gorse, and trotted deliberately up to the tree from which he was hanging. He broke out all over in a cold sweat; his eyes rolled; his teeth chattered; he gave utterance to a lamentable yell, which had not the effect of disturbing the wolf, who licked his chops, and seemed to be thinking about an early dinner. He raised himself on his hind legs, but could not reach high enough; he therefore took a spring, and his nose just reached the baron's toes. The affrighted Fitz Alwine uttered a roar, and convulsively jerked up his legs, but he could not keep them up; they would come down, and immediately they did so, the wolf took a second spring; but up went the legs again with agonised action, and down dropped the wolf. The legs lowered, and the wolf, who appeared not to dislike this species of *cherrybob*, was up again; and the baron performed his part; but he felt this could not long continue; his arms were aching even to agony; the strength was leaving his wrists, hands, and, like

Bob Acres' courage, was fast oozing out of his finger-ends. He made several desperate efforts to throw his legs over the branch from which he was suspended, in order to obtain a seat *à la cheval*; but in this he was doomed to be disappointed; he unfortunately had lived too luxuriously, and had succeeded in getting rather an extensive portion of stomach. It seemed that every addition to the stomach had caused a subtraction from his legs. He himself wondered how the deuce they could have grown so short; and he came to this knowledge, too, at a time when such a discovery was peculiarly and painfully awkward; bringing his toes any where near his hands he found quite out of the question; and again he was obliged to become a perpendicular line. The wolf, who had quietly awaited the result of the baron's exertions to place himself beyond his reach, no sooner beheld an attack on the feet practicable, than he attempted it, and succeeded in getting a tolerable nibble at his toes. Fortunately for Fitz Alwine, his legs and feet were enclosed in mail, and therefore comparatively safe from the brute's fangs; and now an event happened which produced a change in the state of things—the baron was utterly exhausted. He felt that he must drop—nothing could prevent him. He grew dizzy; the forest trees appeared to perform an Indian whirl; he muttered Ave Marias; began at last to think of other things; suddenly his hands released their hold from the branch;—down he dropped with tremendous force, falling upon the wolf, burying him in the act, and dislocating his neck at the same time, thus killing his foe without being conscious of such an agreeable circumstance; for his own head came in contact with the trunk of the oak lying upon the ground, and added to the insensibility which fear and exhaustion had tended to produce.

CHAPTER XV.

COMUS—"I knew each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell of this wild wood;
And every bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood.

I can conduct you, lady, to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest.

LADY—"Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest offered courtesy."

MILTON.

"His limbs with horror shake,
And as he grinds his teeth, what noise they make!
How glare his angry eyes, and yet he's not awake.
See! what cold drops upon his forehead stand,
And how he clenches that broad bony hand."

CRABBE.

UPON the struggling roots of the "brave old oak," on the margin of the small cool stream in Robin's dell, was seated the Lady Christabel; and by her side, resting upon the spear obtained from his entrapped foe, stood Robin Hood. Here they awaited the coming of Allan and his friends, patiently, yet anxiously. Robin sought in all ways to beguile the time. In the best manner he was able, he related the little sad history which gave the name to the dell they were seated in, and he pointed out the tree beneath whose shade slept the brother of his foster-father. He spoke of many things, and at last the conversation turned on Marian. How earnest, how kind and fond, were the praises Christabel bestowed on her! and with what undivided attention Robin's ears drank in every word she uttered respecting her. At first he thought it strange, that when a pause occurred in the conversation, although he had fifty questions to ask her, not one would find its way

from his mouth, and his heart all the while beat with extraordinary violence. There was one thing he wished to discover, and for the life of him he knew not how to broach the subject. That the brother of Marian had given his heart away, he had living evidence before him; but had the sister—had Marian followed the brother's example, and bestowed her love upon some youth equally deserving it, as Christabel was of Allan's? His heart sickened as he thought such might be the case, and then all hope for him must vanish; for what chance had he, he thought, a rough child of the forest, to attempt to rival some well-favoured, accomplished, happy villain in her affections. Then he fancied he might try what accomplishment there was, he would be glad to know, he could not make his own, if he attempted it, and for her sake too!

"Marry," thought he, "there are few manly requirements which I do not possess. I can play the quarterstaff, use the sword, bend a bow, and hit my mark with any archer in the world. I can angle a trout, or fly a hawk, or falcon, with the best. I will foot it, race, or wrestle, and fear not the first fall. I can stride a steed, or walk a distance, and it must be something more than a short one to tire me. There are many other sports, also, I would cry second to none in. In what, then, can this fellow excel me? Is it in person, forsooth? By my halidame, I may not show so well-turned a limb, but it shall be as straight and as strong as any he hath; and for my face, why, that is God's handiwork, and I think not of it. He may be handsomer and pleasanter to gaze upon than I am, but he is not truer to his trust, or honester in heart and purpose, the Holy Mother be my judge!" he concluded with earnestness; and then he laughed impatiently at himself for indulging in such reflections. If she loved another, what had his own personal qualifications to do with the matter? Had she really given her young heart away, truly and sincerely, why, his personal charms, had they excelled those of Apollo himself, could not have had the slightest influence in producing a change, and, therefore, it was idle to indulge in such imaginings—but did she love another? Ah! He turned to Christabel, and said in rather a hesitating voice—

"It must have been a task of some pain to the gentle sister of Allan Clare to have quitted her nearest and dearest friend, and undertake a journey fraught, if not with danger, at least, with difficulty and toil."

"She is unfortunate—or, perhaps, for that matter, fortunate—in not having any but her brother and myself."

"I could scarce imagine one so fair, so faultlessly beautiful, should not possess a friend—an earnest and devoted one, such as you, lady, find in her brother."

The Lady Christabel understood his meaning instantaneously, and blushed, but she would not appear to do so, and therefore quietly replied—

"Strange as it may appear, she has not, so far at least, as my knowledge serves me;" and then, having said this, she changed the subject. Robin had no objection; he was quite satisfied with the result of his questioning, and easily suffered his conversation to be led into another channel.

The sun now began to peep over the tops of the trees, plainly showing that an hour had elapsed since the sun rose, and, as yet, there was no sign of Allan, Scarlet, nor any of the party. Robin grew impatient, and began to fear some unpleasant circumstances were the cause of the delay. Suddenly a voice broke on his ear, a loud, clear halloo rang through the air; it startled both him and the lady. He at first con-

jectured this might proceed from his friends, and was about to respond to it; but a moment's reflection told him that Will Scarlet and Little John, both knowing the path well, were unlikely, under existing events, to be too free with their lungs, when secrecy was so much to be desired, and therefore he waited to see what might follow. The shout was repeated much nearer, with the addition of a man on horseback breaking through the intricacies of the straggling trees, and dashing across the dell. Robin had barely time to place Christabel and himself behind the tree, when the fellow reined up his steed, and repeated his stentorian call; it was shortly answered by the appearance of two of his companions, mounted and habited like himself, riding leisurely in the direction in which he stood; they were three of the baron's people upon the scout for the fugitives. The two, upon perceiving their companion, quickened their pace and joined him; they held a short conversation, and then dispersed in different directions. As soon as they were gone, Robin turned to Christabel, and said, "Lady, this is no place for us; there is too much daylight, and it is too near the castle to rest here securely; we must on; if our friends should come after we have left, they will ascertain that we have been here and proceeded, by my leaving an arrow pointing in the direction we have taken—a common method with us forest folks, and one which Will Scarlet or Little John will easily recognise and understand."

"I trust myself entirely to your guidance; I am sure you do all for the best, and have little doubt and every hope that we shall yet escape."

"Whatever can be done to insure it, dear lady, shall be, rest assured; if you can only keep up your spirits and courage, and so surmount bodily fatigue for another hour, I shall hope to be able to obtain a point from which I can guide you to my father's cottage with a certainty of proceeding unmolested and undiscovered."

"I will do my best," answered Christabel, with a faint smile.

"Many thanks," exclaimed Robin; "and now, lady, our path is beset with difficulties, which will require the exercise of the soundest discretion and coolest judgment to overcome. We must, therefore, be silent, and I must entreat of you, lady, to follow my directions implicitly and upon the instant, for we shall have no time for consideration when the necessity for action arrives."

Christabel promised to obey his counsel, and after having ascertained that no impediments at present existed to prevent their departure, Robin led the lady forth and with all their speed they crossed the dell, which having accomplished in safety, they glided beneath the underwood, now through thickets and coverts, and then resting beneath the widely spread branches of an elm or oak, as occasion served.

Robin chose the route least likely to be under the surveillance of their pursuers, and in so doing, passed the party he was in hopes of meeting. Allan and his friends had been detained by the presence of a party of retainers in a glade through which they desired to pass, and deeming it the wiser plan, for the sake of the lady of whom they were in search to escort back to Gamwell Hall, to succeed first in getting her into their possession, and then, if necessary, to fight their way back, they suffered these men to stay in the glade, and then depart, without in any way molesting them; albeit, Will Scarlet and one or two of his brothers were very desirous of having a bout; but Little John, pointing out the necessity of not bringing a greater number upon their back than they could

hope successfully to cope with, they restrained their ardour, and awaited the departure of these men with all the patience they could muster. This event occurring, they succeeded in gaining Robin's dell, not a very long while after Robin and the lady had quitted it. Thus, both acting for the best, they had accomplished that which they were striving to avoid, and so missed each other at the very time they were using their best efforts to effect a meeting.

Christabel exerted herself to the utmost of her ability to assist Robin in his task, and although she began to feel faint and weary from her efforts, she strove to conceal it. Robin could not but perceive it, and did all he could to lighten her path, remove difficulties, and cheer her, by telling her any little circumstance which took place in their favour; and so they went on, he beginning fondly to anticipate a successful termination to their journey, when an event occurred which had a most material influence upon it. Having quitted the mazes of a deep thicket, they reached an open glade; this they passed swiftly along, and as they were about to dive into the recesses of a covert of young trees and underwood, they were stayed by the sight of the body of a man stretched lifeless upon the ground by the side of an extended oak. No sooner did Christabel catch a sight of it, than she uttered a piercing shriek, and exclaimed—

"Merciful Heaven, it is my father! dead! dead!" and she prostrated herself upon the body, while Robin stared aghast at this discovery. In an instant he attributed this unfortunate catastrophe to himself, in having shot the horse, and so, through its throwing its rider, had been the cause of his death.

"Holy Virgin!" he muttered, "this is unfortunate. Is he dead or only stunned?" he added, as he looked close to the baron. There was a graze upon the forehead, from which the blood was slowly trickling. "I did not that," said he as it caught his eye; "he has struck himself against this fallen tree, and is but stunned. Lady—Lady Christabel, look up, madam; he is not hurt!" he cried, bending over her, and making a gentle effort to raise her. "Lady, there is nought to fear—but our discovery! Let us away, he is only in a faint. Holy Mother, she has swooned! This is an awkward predicament, truly. What's to be done—we must not stay here. Ah! he revives!" he muttered, as the baron began to stretch forth his hands and give utterance to strange ramblings. "This will never do—Lady—Lady! by Heaven! she is as senseless as the old tiger was a moment since—I must carry her away;" and he tried to lift her up, but the baron, who began to have a dim sense of the wolf's presence, and imagining that the weight of his daughter was that of the animal, clutched tight hold of her drapery, and resolved to sell his life dearly; he thereupon began to struggle, to rend and rive, to mutter oaths and Ave Marias in a breath, much to the admiration and astonishment of Robin.

"No, no, vile monster, ravenous wretch, not this time!" he roared; "I have still some strength left in my old bones—no, no. Hah!" he shouted; "what, another? then I am lost! *Pater noster qui es in celis, sanctificetur nomen tuum*, oh, oh!"

He struggled violently with his eyes shut, and what he conceived to be another of the tribe, was Robin, who, seeing the attack the old fellow made upon his daughter, thought it highly necessary he should interfere, and therefore, knelt upon the old man, and seized his arms, hoping the lady would shortly recover, even while he held him; but she still lay without life or motion; and the baron, surprised at this silence, for no growls met his ear, and his arms when extended, were quietly held there, began to

wonder whether he was the victim of beasts of prey or not; he essayed a lunge, and Robin met it by pressing his knee upon his neck, and muttered something in as gruff a voice as he could assume, which Fitzallan's fright conjured into the growl of a ferocious blood-thirsty wolf. He groaned in spirit—

"Oh, my time has come! Oh, if I escape with life, I'll cause a mass to be offered up every day for three years; I'll give a new altar to the Convent of St. Benedict; oh, *Libera nos quasumus Domine, ab omnibus malis, præteritis, præsentibus, et futuris, &c.*" and then he gave another lunge, which met with the like treatment from Robin, who was growing very uneasy that the lady would remain this long while in her swoon.

"*Domine exaudi orationem meam,*" continued the baron, "*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*" Here he strove to strike his breast, an act which Robin, would, on no account, permit, and as the baron was shouting all this in a voice more forte than Robin deemed essential for his own welfare, he bade him be silent.

On hearing a voice, the baron pricked up his ears and thought for a moment.

He kept silent; yet, as he never recollected hearing wolves speak, or having heard that they ever did so, he thought he'd just open his eyes—he did it as soon as think it; and it was with no small surprise he saw Robin Hood's face within two feet of his own, while extended upon his chest lay his daughter. This was a sight which restored him to his senses. No sooner was he fully conscious of it, than he commenced shouting and struggling to get up; roaring, chuckling, and swearing, in a breath, that he had the fugitives oncemore safewithin his grasp. Robin bade him be quiet in a voice which, from contention, speedily became as loud as the baron's, and thus they engaged in struggling and shouting until our hero fully expected to have the whole forest about his ears. It was evidently of little use to continue struggling there; for the baron had rolled, and turned, and struggled, until he had disengaged himself from his daughter's body; and then Robin sprang up, and passed his bow from his shoulder to his hand, strung an arrow, and to the horror of the baron, took a deliberate aim at his head as he raised himself to his feet.

"Ha, aha!" cried he, in an agony of terror, "coward, would you—an unarmed man?" and he darted behind a tree; in his haste his toe caught in one of the straggling roots, and threw him with some violence sprawling upon the ground, but fright lent him aid, and he scrambled up again in a moment, and ensconced himself behind the trunk of the oak, from a branch of which he had so short a time since been suspended. As soon as he had attained his position, Robin called out to him—

"Keep you there; show but a limb, a portion of one, the tip of your nose, eye, an eyelash, and an arrow shall quiver through it."

The baron shook his fist out, and in a second an arrow tore the flesh into strips, and broke two of the fingers. A yell of agony burst from him; he roared and danced with pain, swearing horribly.

"Keep close," cried Robin, in a loud voice, "or, by the Holy Virgin! your neck, instead of your hand, shall taste my skill."

The baron let loose a round of anathemas, but he kept close—did not even attempt to peep round, his imagination placing Robin with extended bow and arrow, ready to take advantage of any such act; but our hero was not so employed, he raised the lady, placed her upon his shoulder, and commenced a retreat, but he had scarcely attempted it, when

suddenly there was a tremendous shout from the baron, and the four retainers who had left him hanging, came galloping up to the spot, having failed in their efforts to recover the baron's steed.

"Ha! knaves!" shouted their lord, "upon him, that is he and my daughter, seize them!" In the excitement of the moment, he quitted his covert, and pointed the couple out to his men. To place Christabel upon the ground, to fit an arrow, and aim at the baron, was but the work of an instant to Robin. "Keep off, villains," he cried with all his energy, "keep off, or by the Almighty Power! I send this arrow quivering through the baron's heart!"

The words were hardly uttered when the baron darted behind his tree, crying out to the men to advance.

"Hold off!" exclaimed Robin, "'tis certain death to one of you if you advance one footstep. Let me depart with this lady in peace, and I will not harm you; but offer to prevent me, and your blood be upon your own heads."

"Upon him, knaves, rascals, cowards!" roared the baron, still keeping very close, "the ruffian has already shot me in the hand. Why do you loiter, villains?"

But the "villain" did not like advancing, with the exception of one, who laughed, and said—

"The young cock crows loudly; put down your bow, boy, and surrender quietly." He dismounted with the intention of seizing him.

"I warn you keep off—to let me depart in peace," cried Robin, with intense excitement; "if you offer to stay me, by finger or foot, I swear by the Holy Mother! your life shall pay forfeit."

The man gave a disregarding laugh, and advanced; it was the last laugh he ever gave—the next instant he was seen to leap quivering in the air, and fall to the earth, with an arrow through his heart. The men gave an unconscious shout as they witnessed it, and turned their looks again upon Robin; he was ready with another arrow, and his eyes gleamed like balls of fire.

"Your blood upon your own heads!" he shouted; "which is he will stay me now?"

"Upon him, dogs!" bellowed the baron. "Out upon ye, curs! because one of your mates is scratched, fear ye that boy? Upon him, nor leave the degrading task to me!"

As the men could easily see the scratch was too deep to heal; as they also saw that Robin's aim was fatally true, they hesitated in advancing, but they all dismounted, and that was doing something; besides, their horses were of no use just now, for if they attempted to ride Robin down, they might also kill the Lady Christabel, an event which they were aware was not at all the baron's wish or intention; therefore, they dismounted, and thought about advancing in a body with their spears levelled, but there was the bow distended, bearing death in its very aspect, and they hesitated; suddenly, there was a great clattering of hoofs, which increased, and then a party of retainers, twelve in number, with our old acquaintance, Lambie, for their leader, burst into the glade, and galloped up to the party, who gave a joyful shout of recognition. The baron again took heart, and left his tree, seeking the shelter of his troops, by whom he was surrounded. Immediately they recognised him, Lambie was very eager to unburthen his success, so much so, that on seeing his lord, he was so engrossed by what he had to communicate, that he did not notice the position of Robin.

"My lord baron!" he cried, "we could not find my lady or the others, but we burnt the place down."

"Tell me of this anon. Look you 'there'" impatiently interrupted the baron; look how that young forest whelp keeps my hounds at bay! There is my daughter with him; bring her carefully to me, and take him prisoner."

Lambie turned, and then saw Robin.

"Ah! my young nimble-legged colt, we have you again—eh? I have been to your stall to find you, and put a torch in the roof; there's not a stick standing, and your dam caught an arrow in her side, which has sent her to—." He interrupted himself by uttering a frightful shriek. The shaft which was extended on Robin's bow, was discharged by him as he heard this distracting intelligence, and it found its home in Lambie's throat. The wretched retainer tumbled from his horse, and fell beneath its feet a corse.

The men seemed paralysed by the sudden death of their leader, and Robin, who was in a frenzy of excitement from the intelligence he had just heard, resolved to perish rather than suffer the author of this wrong to gain a triumph to which he was looking with eager, anxious expectation. Taking advantage of the irresolute conduct of his foes, he suddenly slung his bow across his shoulder, re-exerted his utmost strength, and raising the senseless form of the Lady Christabel, threw her across his shoulder and dashed into a thicket.

This act restored the men to consciousness. A shout from the baron of rage and surprise quickened the pace of several of them, who had dismounted and followed in pursuit. It was now that Robin felt the full value of a knowledge of the forest's intricacies; for what he lost in speed, in having to bear the weight of Christabel, he gained by a knowledge of his path. He kept on at a swift pace, avoiding those places where the path was entangled by briars and thick clusters of young trees; at the same time choosing those which offered a facility of passage, combined with the advantage of being encompassed by shrubs and trees sufficient to screen those who pursued the path without impeding their progress. Still the odds were against him; he had so short a start of his pursuers, that even that circumstance would have told to his disadvantage, had he been unencumbered, but, as he was situated, his chances of escape were very few. Of this he was perfectly aware, and rightly attached to it its full importance and amount of danger. He, however, maddened by Lambie's words, powerfully excited by seeing his hopes of successful flight dashed from his lips, at a moment when he believed he was safe, resolutely determined to make every effort, in spite of all hazards, to carry his point. Under the influence of these feelings Christabel seemed scarce any weight; it was only in doubling as he fled that he found the inconvenience of his burthen; but he kept on bravely—he knew if he was captured his life would be taken, if it was only to retaliate Lambie's death; he therefore resolved to persevere to the last, and if then the worst came to the worst, to sell his life as dearly as he could. He heard the shouts of the men in pursuit, could hear them tear the branches aside as they dashed after him, could hear the pattering of a man's feet close behind him, even fancied he heard his hard breathing,—yet he neither stopped nor flagged—he was light and swift of foot, and he tested his powers to their fullest extent.

It was not possible, however, for human nature to sustain much longer this excessive exertion; and this disagreeable fact presented itself to him with greater force when he ascertained that Christabel was being restored to animation. The fellow on his track appeared fast gaining upon him; his shoulders were

aching, his breath spent, Christabel uttering feeble moans; and there appeared nothing now for him to attempt—as he felt he could not continue the flight—but to turn and face his pursuers, and endeavour to keep them at bay until they stretched him upon the greensward lifeless.

Every step he took, the distance between him and his pursuer was being lessened; so he deemed it advisable to stop and get the most favourable position he could. Had he been alone he would not have feared—even doubted making his escape; would have glided from tree to tree, covert to covert, discharging an arrow when an opportunity offered to send it with advantage. But having Christabel in his charge, and sternly resolving rather to die than quit her, his determination being strengthened by the dreadful tidings of the burning of his foster-father's cottage, and the murder of his foster-mother, he could not avail himself of capabilities which, under other circumstances, he might have successfully applied. He had now no alternative, but to act in the best manner his situation would permit of; to resolve with speed, and act as quickly; having then come to the knowledge that he could proceed but a short distance farther with his burthen, he cast his eyes from side to side in search of a favourable spot to cover him and his companion; and at the same time, enable him to make use of his bow and arrows.

Perhaps it is here necessary that the reader should understand, that, at the period of which we write, the feuds and petty warfare carried on between nobles whose estates joined, and who often sought a pretext to quarrel on some trifling question of trespass, in order that the stronger party might possess himself of his neighbour's property—rendered bloodshed a matter of small account, and its frequency contributed still more to lessen the abhorrence which might be supposed to be created by its presence. Incursions, inroads, sudden descents of bands of marauders in the night, ravages, and the fearful enormities which were constantly transpiring—although Henry II. made strong efforts to put a stop to them—induced every male member of a family who had ought to lose, or indeed who might at any time be placed in jeopardy, to apply himself to the use of arms, and to seek the destruction of his foe as the best means of avoiding the danger, or preventing its repetition. Thus, when one man caused another's death by killing him during any encounter as foes, skirmish, flight—it was thought of no more import than killing an animal in a hunt. It was, in truth, the policy to teach this to the youth of the male sex; and Robin Hood had the same ideas inculcated in him by Lincoln, his foster-father's serving man; he was made to believe the best and surest way to clear his path of brambles and briars—to use old Lincoln's language—was to root them out, and then they were not likely to grow again; to kill his enemy, ere he had the chance of doing the same to him. The great barbarism of the time counselled this reasoning; and this will account for Robin Hood's readiness—though yet a boy—to use his weapons to slay his foe. It was a custom of the period, which the unsettled times made necessary, and as such treated lightly; the reader will, therefore, easily perceive, that Robin Hood, brought up in a situation where he was likely to be an actor in these frightful scenes, would naturally—as he had been taught—think the destruction of an enemy a meritorious action, and still possess the best attributes of a kindly nature. This digression has been made, in order that our hero may not lay under the odium of being deemed sanguinary in his nature, but rather a follower in his emergency of a disgusting custom,

which, though it is painful to contemplate, is yet far from being obsolete.

But to our story. Robin having espied a spot, which appeared to be as likely a place to serve his purpose as any he might chance to meet, resolved at once to avail himself of it. An elm tree, whose trunk was of tremendous dimensions, stood before him; it was flanked by a thicket or copse, crowded with young trees of all species, thickly interspersed with under-wood, shrubs, and tall gorse. Directly he saw it, he thought if he could but keep it until Christabel, restored to life, could, by his directions, work her way through, they might yet escape, and he be at the same time enabled to repay, with fearful interest, the outrage upon Gilbert Hood's cottage. He gained the tree; beneath it he gently laid his scarce-breathing charge, and then prepared himself to meet his nimblest pursuer, who came bounding on with a shout of anticipated triumph, to seize the boy who had defeated, as yet, all efforts made to capture him. But Robin was ready with his bow extended, and as the retainer came leaping, he discharged the arrow, and the stricken man bounded several feet in agony, and then fell, with a tremendous oath, mortally wounded. He was closely followed by another of the band, who immediately upon seeing the fate of his companion in arms, sought the shelter of a tree's stem, with a prudence and sagacity by no means to be despised; there he enconced himself, determining to await the arrival of his following friends, and then hold a council how to capture the fugitives; for be it understood they were none of them such very expert marksmen as to insure, if they fired at Robin, killing him, without also running very great risk of doing the same to Christabel, and their orders were to capture the pair without harming the lady. Most of them were armed with crossbows, which they were unable, from the reason just given, to use, and our hero took care not to let them come near enough to use their spears. He saw the fellow obtain the cover of the tree with some misgiving, and witnessed the arrival of two or three others, who at the call of their fellow-soldier, also sought the cover. He surmised instantly that, if they had any sagacity, they would do their best to surround him, which, from the nature of the ground, was possible, without his being able to prevent them. The baron now, with a quantity of the men, appeared; and never did any one feel a more longing inclination to gratify some pleasant desire than did Robin to send an arrow to the old man's heart.

"For the Lady Christabel's sake," he muttered, "I will hold my hand; but if he has caused my father's cottage to be destroyed, and with it any of their lives, no consideration shall induce me to spare him, if an opportunity place him in my power. Holy Virgin forgive me! but this is bloody work; and I, who ne'er before took human life, have had my fill to-day already, and yet it seems as if it is not to stop here; but cost it what it may, I will escape, if it is to be accomplished—if not, I will not fall unrevenged." His attention was suddenly drawn to the Lady Christabel, who had awakened from her long swoon, and now demanded, in faint accents, to what place she had been brought. By Robin's assistance she arose, and would, had he not prevented her, have walked from the trunk of the tree towards the spot which contained her father and his bold men, who were doing their best to keep from exposing themselves to the aim of Robin, which experience had told them was terribly accurate; but our hero, who rather sought to escape by stratagem, and to husband his weapons, by not wasting an arrow until he was sure

it would tell with effect, was racking his brain how to commence a retrograde motion without its being discovered. Christabel was enveloped in a black mantle and hood, similar to those worn by Benedictine monks, and he thought this might tell in their favour.

"My dear lady," he said, "a short distance from hence are hidden your father and a body of men; they are aware we are here, and have not the courage to make a rush to capture us, for they know one life will be forfeited if they attempt it, but if we remain we must be inevitably taken; at the same time, our chance of escape rests on our quitting this spot without being discovered. It may be done, I believe, with caution, backed by a good heart and hope in the Holy Mother; but you must commence the retreat, which I am satisfied you can accomplish unnoticed, by drawing your black mantle completely round you, shrinking down, and gliding beneath the brushwood. I will follow you as soon as I can find I may do so without affecting our safe departure, and I do yet trust we shall join your friends in safety. So, courage, sweet lady, for you have need of it, and all will yet be well."

"Oh, no, no, it is impossible," muttered Christabel, whom fright, fatigue, and the swoon had rendered so weak that all power seemed taken from her, and she wept without being able to restrain her tears, from sheer exhaustion, bodily and mental. "I cannot proceed," she continued, sobbing; "let my father take me back, since it must be so; I have no strength to help myself; I have no courage; this continued state of terror and anxiety will kill me before I can get free from this dreary forest. I am not used to this exertion; I have scarce ever been from my chamber, and want strength of mind to support me. No, good youth, do you fly, save yourself—think not of me, I can die here; you have done all to save me that could be done, for which my earnest thanks are thine. Fly, and heaven bless you for your exertions in my favour! Leave me to my fate. Delay not, good youth; each moment endangers thy life. Fear not, I shall not long be in my father's power, my heart will soon break; it is broken—heaven help me!" She concluded in a tone so woe-begone and spiritless, that it went to Robin's heart.

"It will help you, dear lady," said he, soothingly: "it will help you; do not doubt it; be not cast down. I will not leave you until you are torn from me, or till I place you in Allan's hands!"

"Oh!" burst forth Christabel, in a passion of tears, "Allan, Allan, why are you not with me?"

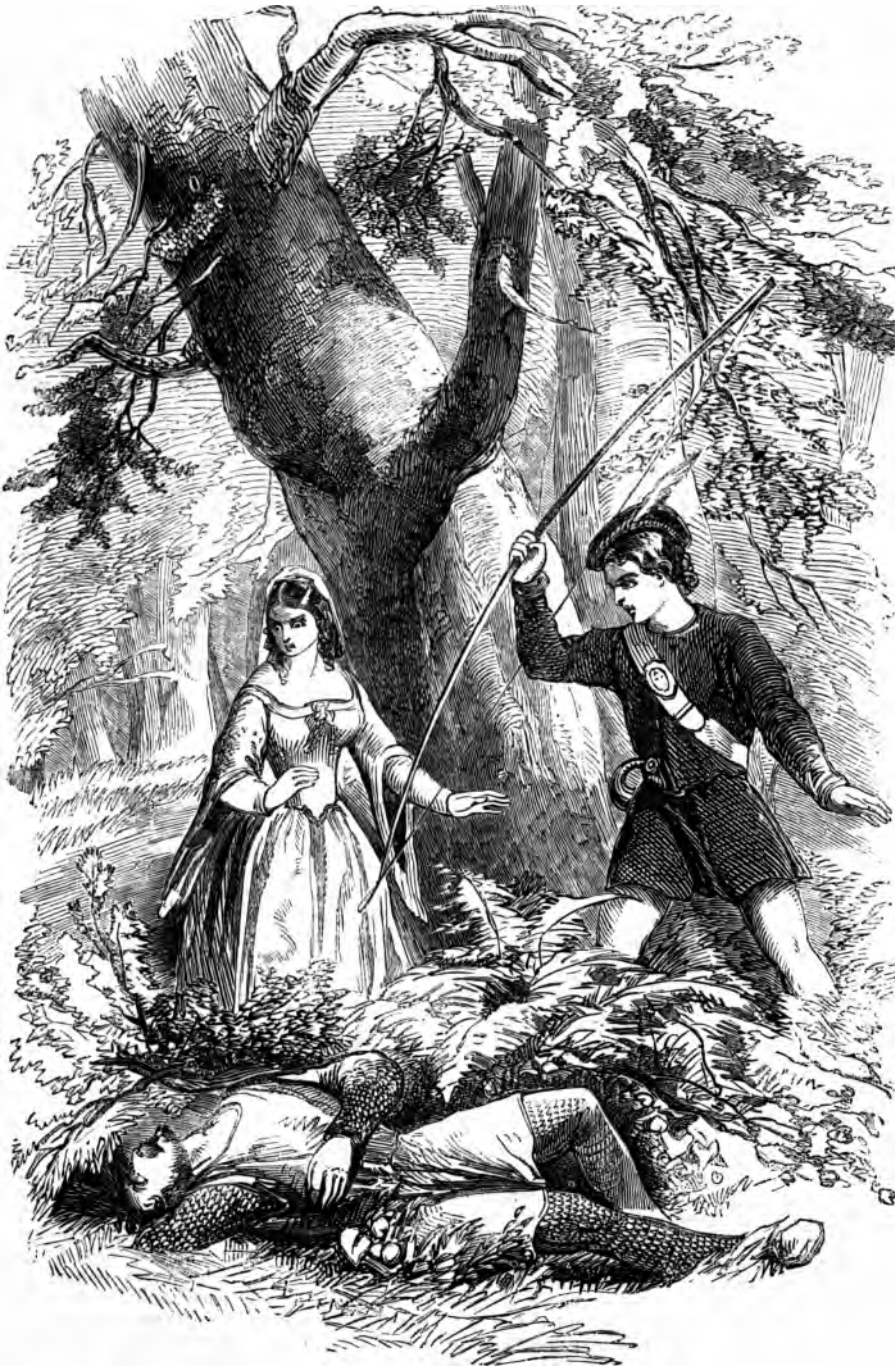
At this moment a sound rose in the air as of the prolonged howl of a wolf; and Christabel was startled by Robin returning the cry with intense energy, and then breaking out in a joyous tone—

"Cheer up, sweet lady, help is at hand; our friends are near; we shall yet escape, trust me. You see heaven will not desert us, for at your wish Allan is but a short distance from us. I will let our friends know we are in danger, and need their speedy assistance." He raised his hands to his mouth, and produced an imitation of the frightened screech of a heron pursued by a falcon, with a clearness and accuracy which was amazing; it was responded to ere the sound had died from his lips, and he cried—

"Bonnie Will Scarlet, you're a friend in need. Now, lady, were the number behind that tree thrice its amount, I would keep them in check till our friends come to our assistance, I warrant me. Your father's retainers will make a sally ere our friends appear, and I must be prepared to meet it. Can you not glide gently beneath the gorse behind us, and remain there out of the way of a stray bolt, for the dogs may grow

desperate, and treat us to a taste of their weapon. Fear not to make the trial, lady, help is at hand."

Poor Christabel's heart beat almost to suffocation, but her hope of yet escaping, and the cheering news Robin had conveyed, lent a degree of courage to her



Drawn by W. H. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.

sufficient to put in practice his advice; and enshrouding herself in her mantle, she glided beneath the underwood and gorse, but not without a thrilling horror of snakes and reptiles mixing itself 'up with her conflicting emotions; but that idea was not without its utility, for as she felt no desire to arouse any

sleeping reptile, she made her way with a degree of caution which perfectly coincided with Robin's wishes, for it was less likely to draw the attention of the enemy. At the same time he prepared to distract it, if any unfortunate accident might occur to call it that way. He suddenly bobbed out from behind the tree to the front, and gave a shout which made the glade ring; in an instant he was back to his place, and at the same moment a bolt from a cross-bow struck the tree. He answered it by a shrill laugh of scorn; then he saw one of the men spring from his covert, utter a wild cry, toss his arms high in the air, turn madly round, and fall upon the ground bereft of life.

"Here come my friends!" he muttered; "that's a good beginning for our side."

He saw several men dart from the tree which had sheltered them from him and gain others, while several arrows followed them ineffectually.

"That's wasting weapons," he muttered again.

He saw an arrow fly across the glade, and from behind the tree which had already sent forth several, there issued our friend the baron, pushing before him, as a sort of screen, one of his men, who already had an arrow sticking in his shoulder. There appeared a very evident, indeed a very strong, reluctance in the retainer to be placed in this situation, consequently there was a considerable amount of struggling, which ended in both coming to the ground, at the precise instant an arrow was on its road to pay them a visit, but which, however, in consequence of their sudden fall, just cleared them.

Perhaps the baron thought it unwise to lie there still, and counterfeit death, as his soldier did, so he jumped up and trotted off at full speed, calling for a reinforcement most lustily. He was encased in mail, which was unfortunate, for it prevented him running so speedily as he might otherwise have done; and it was fortunate, because the arrows, for which, during his progress, he formed a tolerable target, found no resting place on his person. He was shot at all the way he went, and he was hit, but not wounded; it helped him on his journey, as a spur might a horse; it served to quicken his speed without much damaging him. Presently he was lost to sight.

Then there was a sudden shout, and Little John, with his seven cousins, Allan, and Tuck, emerged from their concealment, divided and dashed full speed at the different places holding the soldiers in cover, unkenneled them, and a smart fight commenced, at close quarters, with spears, staves, cross-bows, and weapons which came most readily to hand in the sudden mêlée. But it was of short duration, for Little John's party were the strongest in numbers, as well as the readiest at the use of their weapon, and the men opposed to them quickly found it to be the case. They threw down their arms with one accord, and called for quarter. This was granted, and they were bound as soon as it could be accomplished.

It was then, when Robin saw there was nought to be feared from a stray arrow, he gave a joyful shout, and darted after the lady Christabel, who had followed his directions, and disappeared in the underwood. But she had not attended closely to his request; for, instead of stopping, she went on, looking anxiously right and left, expecting to see the gleaming eyes of a wolf or snake in every nook near her, until almost all other feelings became absorbed in this. Robin easily followed the track she had made, and not finding her so near as he expected, he called loudly to her, but received no answer; he increased his speed and voice, and was startled by hearing a loud shriek; he dashed on, almost frantically, and broke

into an open way, just in time to see Christabel lifted on to a swift horse by a mounted retainer, placed before him, and then carried off at full gallop; an arrow was strung to his bow in an instant, but he stayed his hand just as he was about to discharge it; he reflected that if he shot the retainer, the horse would continue his pace, and Christabel be endangered by its unguided progress, and he could not insure, in the position they were to him, hitting the horse in a vital part; there was one chance, and he resolved, at all hazards, to attempt it.

The forest, at this part, was so covered with thickets, stunted trees, brushwood, copse, underwood, &c., that it was only by circuitous routes a horseman could make a road; he glanced his eyes round the place; he had been in this quarter of the forest so many times, that he knew every inch of ground; he remembered that the way the horseman had chosen was winding, difficult, and so rough in parts, that he could not proceed at full speed along it, while there were narrow parts for those on foot, intersecting the wider path, his hope was therefore that he might, by proceeding along one of these narrow paths, intercept the horseman, and do the best circumstances might offer to rescue the lady from the clutches of her captor; he flew at the top of his speed to put his resolve into action, leaping over heaths and hawthorn bushes, treading the gorse down to keep as straight a path as he could, without showing one symptom of flagging or noticing any obstruction as a difficulty. To think that at the very moment he was assured of having fulfilled his task, it was rendered as doubtful as ever, was maddening to him, and still further determined him to persevere to the last in every effort to accomplish his object.

The path he had chosen was shorter by a fourth to a point which the horseman must pass in pursuing the road he had taken, and as the impediments were greater than those Robin had to surmount, our hero succeeded in reaching the spot as the horseman was working his way with all the speed the road would permit of, up to the same place. Robin drew two arrows from his quiver, kept one in his hand, and the other was placed ready to fire the moment he could use it to advantage; that moment came, and he used it with terrific effect, the arrow went quivering into the broad chest of the coming horse with such tremendous force, that it was half buried in the poor beast; with a mad plunge it bounded in the air, staggered, drew up its legs, and fell with a deep groan; its rider disengaging himself as speedily as he was able, lifted Christabel, and then turned to see from what quarter the death-blow had come, but it was also to meet his own. Robin's second arrow did its work upon him, and placed Christabel once more in his power; this time he was destined to be more successful, and his trembling charge, half dead with fright, was again led by him to meet their friends.

In answer to his enquiries of the cause of her falling into her late captor's hands, she could scarce give utterance to her words, to such a state of agitation and nervous excitement had she been reduced; but he gathered that, upon her issuing from the copse which he had counselled her to pursue, she encountered this retainer, who recognised her instantly, seized her, lifted her upon his horse, and galloped off. The exertion it required to relate this, somewhat restored her, and enabled her in turn to question Robin how he had succeeded in rescuing her, for being almost in a swoon while borne away, she saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing, but that she was once again with a friend. In reply to her

interrogatories, Robin evaded the truth, and merely said—

"By the assistance of the Holy Mother, and my own good fortune."

He found the path much longer in returning than it had appeared in coming, but it was passed over, and he at length gained the place where he had left his friends, but saw nothing of them. He still deemed it advisable to keep hidden, and without quitting the copse, he gave the same cry Will Scarlet had given some time previous, and had the satisfaction of hearing it answered, and of seeing Will himself dart from a short distance, and come running towards him, followed closely by Allan, Little John, leading Maude by the hand, the six Gamwells, and Tuck bringing up the rear. Robin led forth Christabel; with a cry of joy Allan extended his arms as he rushed towards her, and with scarce the power to articulate his name, she sunk weeping on his breast, powerless as an infant, and entirely overcome by exertions, exaggerated by apprehensions. It was painful to witness the passion of tears she gave way to, and how she clung to Allan as if they were to separate that moment for ever; no one spoke, but scarce one there felt unmoved at the sight. Maude came up to Robin, and placed both her hands in his; she smiled, but her lips quivered, and a large tear, stealing from the eyelid, rolled like a pearl down her cheeks. Robin pressed her hands, and spoke huskily; he longed to ask about home—and then he knew she could not have been there. Perhaps some of the others knew the miserable tidings; he looked round, and disengaging his hand from Maude, he beckoned Little John, who answered the summons, and Robin said to him—

"Little John, did you see my father, Gilbert Hood, ere you commenced your journey this morning? or have you heard aught which you like not to tell me?"

"Nay, Robin, there has been a few strange things happen in thy absence, which you will learn in good time; but there was nought of harm to either father or mother up to an hour or so before day-break, at which time I quitted them," replied Little John.

"Nor since, I hope, Robin," remarked Will Scarlet, not having the least objection to get near to Maude. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because, in coming here, I had a skirmish with the baron and his people—"

"What, the old boy we drew bow at as he trotted down the glade a little while ago?" interrupted Will Scarlet.

"The same," continued Robin, "and one of them told me he had fired my father's cottage, left not a stick standing, and my mother he had shot with an arrow."

"And your answer was one of your cloth yard shafts, I hope, Robin?" said Little John.

"Aye," returned he, "and i'faith my answer stuck in his throat—too poor a revenge if he spoke truth; but he could not, I would not believe it. I—I must know, and having safely delivered my charge, I will to home at once. So, sister Maude, for home!"

"That your sister?" asked Will with surprise; "I never knew you had a sister before."

"Neither had I, but I have one now, you see," replied Robin, with a faint smile.

"I wish my sisters were as nice," said he.

Robin looked at Maude and laughed, but she did not return it.

"Where is Hal?" he enquired; "he has not surely left you, and returned to Nottingham, although Grace May does live there?"

"Oh, no," replied Maude, "he was here a short time since; I thought he was still—"

A horse's footsteps now drew their attention, and Robin's question was answered by the appearance of Hal galloping down the glade on the back of a spirited steed; he drew up to them and cried—

"See what I have found! if I haven't fought I have filched. When you marched off those fellows with their hands bound behind them, and all fastened together in a line, I followed to see if they had any friends at hand, or if I could see any thing of the baron, and I met with this fine fellow of a horse fastened to a tree, so I begged leave to borrow him without asking anybody's consent, as I thought he might be useful—and here we are. I only wish I had flying Maude as well."

"Hal, you are a useful friend," said Robin.

"Ho, ho," cried Hal, on seeing him, "you have got here safely with the Lady Christabel—hurrah!" and up went his cap.

It was proposed that as Christabel was so weak and faint, she should ride to Gamwell, that being the safest place; that Allan should accompany her, and the rest should proceed on foot; Little John, Will, and his brothers, to Gamwell; and Robin, Maude, Hal, and Tuck, to Gilbert Hood's cottage; albeit, Will Scarlet made most strenuous exertions to induce Maude to visit Gamwell Hall first, if it was only to wait upon the Lady Christabel, a proposal which Christabel seconded, and Maude being appealed to, gave a reluctant assent that it should be as they wished; when it was finally arranged, Allan came to Robin Hood, and taking his hand, said—

"Robin Hood, you have done me a service nor gold nor words can repay; you have several times this night risked your life in my service; my more than brother, my dear friend, I pray earnestly and sincerely at some time I may be enabled to show you how I appreciate your conduct to a stranger, one who has no claim on your kindness, one who from the first was your debtor as a partaker of your hospitality, whose life and that of one most dear to him, even his sister Marian, was held sacred beneath your father's roof against the attack of evil-minded ruffians. Robin, my heart, my soul, are in my words when I say I thank you deeply and sincerely for the Lady Christabel, whom you have successfully led through toils and dangers; she feels your services as deeply as I do, and renders her thanks with equal earnestness and sincerity."

Robin returned the warm pressure of his hand, but could say nothing in reply; he raised the hand which Christabel offered him respectfully to his lips, and then turned the subject by advising their speedy departure, and giving special directions which path to take; but Will Scarlet disagreed with him, advised them to keep in the direct road to Mansfieldwoodhaus, and when they came to a certain point which he described, turn off to Gamwell—it was the nearest and most direct.

"But not the safest," suggested Robin; "you forget the lady is to go." He was, however, overruled; and well armed, Allan, with Christabel seated before him, started off upon the steed at a good speed for Gamwell.

CHAPTER VI.

"My lady she is all woe-begone,
And the tears fall from her eyne;
And aye she laments the deadly feud
Between her house and thine.

"He mounted himself on a steed so tall,
And her on a fair palfraye,
And slung his bugle about his neck,
And roundly they rode away."

THE CHILD OF ELLA.

"Then fayntinge in a deadly swoone,
And with a deep fette sighe
That burst her gentle heart in twayne,
Faire Christabelle did die."

SIR CAULINE.

IT is not too much to say that the heart of Christabel beat with tumultuous rapture when she found herself seated with Allan—even in his arms. The change from the difficulties and dangers she had encountered in her progress to this meeting, to the comparative safety of being with him whom she now, having quitted her father and her home, loved dearer than ever, whom she clung to as her only stay on earth, was certainly very great, and received much of the intensity of its pleasure from the previous perils and mental anxiety. She wound her arms fondly round his neck, and gazed in his eyes with looks of profoundest happiness, sighing in the very fullness of her bliss. Allan pressed her to his bosom, and returned her gaze with rapturous delight.

"My own beloved Christabel! mine, now and for ever! not the whole world in arms shall again separate us," he ejaculated, in the full tones of earnest feeling.

"I fervently trust not, dearest Allan. I have taken a step perhaps reprehensible, and for which, were it not for the full reliance I place in thee and thy dear sister, I should painfully feel to be a dereliction from maidenly delicacy—from that bright position which every maiden should maintain pure and unstained. But I do place my entire faith in thee; and to save myself a fate worse to me than death itself, I have thus committed what may be deemed a grievous error, and abandoned the last tie who should have preserved, for the sake of his own high-prized honour, my station inviolate; for thee, Allan—for thy dear sake, have I done this; and in doing so, I fear to think I may have lowered myself, not alone in my own esteem, but in that of thine and thy dear sister's—"

"Christabel!"

"Hear me, Allan! I cannot but feel that it is, great as my strait, an unmaidenly effort to render null the cruel purpose of my father; and, dearly as I love thee—dearly, as I do truly believe, that thou lovest me—yet I have strangely painful misgivings that in thy soul thou dost think so too, and in later times may wish thou hadst rather won me in thine own gallant way, than I should thus alone, undowered, friendless, homeless, have thrown myself in thine arms."

"Christabel! an' thou would'st not alloy the deep happiness which now is mine, thou wilt not speak thus—think thus. How should I look upon the step which thou hast taken, but as the greatest boon with which mortal was ever dowered? What should I deem it, but the highest, proudest, and priceless gift of a generous and loving soul, the self sacrifice of a peerless heart to make painless the happiness of one so little worthy of so rich a prize."

"Allan!"

"In truth it is so, beloved Christabel; mine is all the gain—thou the large-souled donor. In our early communion thou did'st ever make me thy dear debtor for kindness, which was as an unflawed gem; and when we have in later and less happier times held difficult an infrequent correspondence, thine was the peril, thine the pain of unmerited anger and reproach which accidental discovery brought thee, borne by thee patiently, uncomplainingly, and for me; and now in this last moment of sorrow, of threatened immolation, of revilings and harsh treatment, encountered through me, and borne for my sake, thou dost crown the immeasurable value of thy previous treasures showered upon me, by giving thyself in all trustfulness, in all innocence of thy priceless value, to me. Should I not feel, beloved Christabel, thou having done so much for me, that I am all unworthy of the prize thus made mine, but I will study to deserve it, I cannot fail to estimate and appreciate it at its full value, for I hold it measureless; and I were worse than the basest ingrate that ever made earth recoil at his presence I did not feel the obligation, I, trembling with too much joy, so happily bend under."

"I know only that I love thee, Allan, and in the firmest trust in thy truthfulness, I give myself to thee; but thy sister—"

"Dearest Christabel, full well dost thou know her. Tell me, from thy childhood, when as two dear sisters thy wishes and thy acts went hand in hand until thou did'st last see her, hast thou had one cloud pass over the serenity of thy friendship?"

"No, Allan."

"Has she shewn thee any one point in her character which is not as pellucid as an unstained spring?"

"No, Allan."

"Hath she ever turned a cool or indifferent gaze upon thee, pained thee by a restrained speech, or ever given thee cause to think that thou didst not reign paramount in her heart of hearts, even as thou dost in mine?"

"No, dear Allan; but it is her unblemished heart, her own spotless high sense of perfect purity, which I fear will cause her to condemn the path which I have chosen."

"And which completes my happiness—that which is her nearest and dearest object on earth. Dearest Christabel, doubt not Marian; she is, as thou hast kindly said, high soul'd, with a mind on which the shadow of taint never fell, and therefore, she will read so rightly, so truly, the motives which hath impelled thee to seek in my arms the happiness and protection which thy parent, strangely regardless of the treasure he possessed, sought so pertinaciously to cast away and destroy. Marian will receive thee, my beloved, with open arms, a heart more open still, and she will enshrine thee there upon the altar of her earthly reverence for things virtuous, noble, and stainless?"

"Might I think thus, I should be so happy, Allan!"

"Thou may'st, be assured, nor suffer one doubt to intrude upon thy happiest wishes. She hath ever loved thee most tenderly, and when she learns that you have complied with my earnest prayer, made to thee in the chapel of the castle,—a prayer, the purpose of which she was well acquainted with, having accompanied me hither in the journey with this sole object, she will worship thee as do I now, and will ever."

"Dear, dear Allan, I fear the prospective happiness is too great to be realised."

"I will make untiring efforts to stay aught which may appear to darken a felicity I look forward to as an earthly realization of the paradise we are taught to believe will be ours hereafter."

"Should my father discover the spot in which we may hereafter dwell, he may send a body of retainers to drag me from you."

"Christabel, you will then be my wife," ejaculated Allan, in a proud tone. "I too, shall have men-at-arms to restrain him. I have, too, access to the ear of King Henry, and hold possession of a secret which would make thy father, bold, stern, obstinate, and ruthless as he is, cower to the earth in fear and mortification were I to disclose it. This will I not do, unless his own bad deeds compel me to an act as painful to myself as withering in its effects to him. We are, however, dearest Christabel, too young in our happiness to suffer it to be alloyed by gloomy forebodings of the future; let us look to the brightest side, and when the evil cometh, be prepared to withstand its brunt with as bold a front as becometh one who hath heard of fear and never yet felt its influence."

"And yet I would my happiness be without a shadow to lessen its sunshine, could I be assured that he would not step in to mar our peace."

"An' thou hast no dearer ties than kin and home to this land, none have I; we would seek some fairer clime. I have heard of islands in the sunny south stretching far out into eternal sunshine, bounded by a blue sea of spotless hue, where the skies are ever fair, and the flowers and trees and fruits are in richest profusion, and of rare beauty and excellence. I am told that it contains all the sweet varieties of upland and meadow, resplendently green in its fertility, valleys golden with the rich grain, and hills purple with the luscious vine; and there are streams, chrystal and pure in their nature, meandering through the open places, wandering and winding through the green woods, and falling in picturesque natural cascades down the hills, leaping, gurgling, and glittering as they fall from rock to rock, and warbling milder music as they ripple and murmur over the pebbly bed and beneath the bending trees, which watchfully throw a shadow over them, keeping them cool and fragrant for the parched lips of the thirsty wayfarer; and in this land there are no feuds, no strife, no turmoil; the people are quiet and kind, and as serene as the skies which without cloud ever smile upon them."

"Hast thou seen this most beautiful land?"

"I have not, but with its bearings I am acquainted, and can soon obtain such information that we might gain it without much toil or fatiguing travel."

"Oh, Allan! we should be so happy there."

"And you will leave England and live there—Christabel?"

"With thee Allan, anywhere! But—but—you have painted this land in such glowing colours, and—and—I think I am not made for scenes of strife; my coward heart rebels and pants with an agony worse, if possible, than death, when I am placed in any peril. I am all unequal where I should be most firm; it is my nature to shrink from danger, and I fear, dear Allan, no schooling will much improve me, and therefore I believe, that in this bright land you speak of, I should, in being far removed from all danger of attack, be supremely happy."

"And so shalt thou be, while I have the power to effect it; and thus when we are wedded, we will, with my dear sister Marian, bid a long adieu to the land which has given us birth, never more returning to its trials or troubles until we can be satisfied that our peace here will be uninterrupted."

And with her glowing eyes suffused in tears, her voice trembling with emotion, she looked into his eyes, as she reclined her head upon his shoulder and murmured—

"We shall be so—so happy, Allan!"

And he replied,

"So very, very happy—Christabel!"

And her warm breath played upon his features as her very beautiful face was upturned close to his own; and in earnest of what he had said and what he felt, he imprinted a long and passionate kiss of the purest bliss upon her soft sweet lips.

No power could rob them of the intense happiness of that moment—that, at least, was sacred; but, alas! it was not fated long to endure; the joy—calm, soft, quiet, and yet ecstatic—which they experienced in picturing the future, was all towards the realization of the bright imaginings of the future they were yet permitted to receive.

A large bird flew croaking out of a thicket which they passed, darted close to the head of the high-mettled steed which bore them, uttering its hoarse cry, startling him from the swift but easy canter in which he was proceeding; he shied, and then broke into a swift gallop, which roused Allan from the delicious trance into which he had fallen, and compelled him to exercise the skill which he amply possessed to control the rapid and erratic movements of the frightened animal.

His strong hand and perfect knowledge soon obtained the mastery, and the horse, once more under control, proceeded at a rapid pace, but not with that care and self comfort which he had before displayed.

As soon as Christabel had somewhat recovered the state of alarm into which this incident had precipitated her, she, clinging nervously to Allan, enquired—

"What bird was that, Allen, that flew thus strangely and unexpectedly across our path?"

"On owl, dearest."

"An owl," she repeated, with a slight shudder, "it is a bird of ill omen; it is strange that thus, in the broad daylight, it should, with its evil-toned whoop, dart so directly across our path."

"My dearest Christabel, suffer not your fears thus to obtain mastery over your better sense; you have been so accustomed to the solitary apartments of the gloomy castle, without friend or companion, that you have permitted idle superstitions to have an undue influence over a mind, which, in its true healthy tone, would discard these trifles with derision."

"Yet, Allan, it was strange, and its note so mournful: I fear it bodes no good."

"Nor evil either, Christabel. It had roosted in some low tree near the road-side, and was both suddenly and unexpectedly disturbed; its own fears induced it to seek some safer shelter, and thus it crossed our path. Nothing more, love, believe me."

"Hark! Allan!" cried Christabel, with a startling quickness, having barely listened to his explanation in the sudden apprehensions which this little incident had occasioned, and whose sense of danger it had awakened and quickened to a considerable extent.

"Hark!" she repeated, clinging tightly to him.

"What dost thou hear, love?" asked Allan, gazing earnestly upon her with some strange fear crossing him that the events of the morning had been too powerful for her, and touched her brain.

"Listen!" she cried, "there is the tramp of horses' feet, either following or approaching. We are lost!"

On the instant Allan reined in his horse, and brought him to a stand, and immediately detected the truth of Christabel's assertion—there was the tramp of horses, not of few, but of many; they were riding hard.

Upon the impulse of the moment, he clapped spurs to his steed, with the intention of plunging into the depths of the nearest thicket, which would conceal

them until the horsemen passed. Even as the horse obeyed the impatient call, the ominous owl which had before disconcerted them once more flew out with a wild unearthly cry, full in the face of the affrighted steed. Christabel shrieked, and the horse leaped back, shrinking on to his haunches, then with a mad plunge and bound into the air, he turned his head, sprung forward, and at the top of his speed flew down the road-way in the very direction which it had been the intention of Allan to avoid.

In vain he pulled with all his strength at the rein; the beast caught the bit firmly in his teeth, and Allan's efforts were for the moment powerless; he, however, was not thus to be defeated; he tugged right and left with desperate energy, and succeeded in once more obtaining command over the bit, but without being sufficiently fortunate to turn him from the road-way into the deep shadows of the broad trees before they were full in sight of the band of approaching horsemen.

Allan perceived at once his only chance was to keep swiftly on; to turn and flee would be to draw the attention of the armed mounted men, and bring them in pursuit; while there was a chance that if he kept his steed progressing at the mad rate at which he was then galloping, he might fly past them without detection. Whispering a few words of consolation in the ear of his terrified companion, he goaded his steed on to renewed exertions, and gazed anxiously forward to endeavour to ascertain the intentions of the coming horsemen. He knew that if they opened a path for him either right or left, the chances of escapes were in his favour; if not, a desperate effort single-handed against fearful odds was the terrible and almost hopeless alternative.

On he flew, and as he drew nearer, it was with a knitted brow and firmly set teeth, he observed the troop detecting his approach spread themselves across the road with the obvious purpose of intercepting him. He fastened his cap firmly on his brow, drew his sword, and bidding Christabel have hope in him, and fear not the danger at hand, he prepared himself for the encounter, muttering a prayer to the Holy Virgin, that in this hour of dire need she would not abandon him.

The attire of the troops now in immediate proximity disclosed them to be retainers of the Baron Fitz-Alwine, and with it all hope of passing undetected vanished.

Still Allan urged on his steed, and heeded not the loud shouts which were uttered to him to rein in: to dash through the body with irresistible impetuosity, and if his steed withstood the shock of a collision and still kept on, to endeavour to achieve an escape, was the object at which he aimed, and right gallantly did he attempt it.

Cheering the steed forward with his voice, urging him with his armed heels, waving his sword with the determination of cutting down all opposition, he rushed furiously on, and in a few seconds he was in the midst of those whom he too well knew he should find relentless enemies.

The shock was tremendous. A stalwart fellow, mounted upon a strong steed, placed himself in the way, to block up and prevent his further progress. Crash came the steed of Allan, bearing him and his yet more precious burden in terrific contact with him. Horse and rider were rolled in the dust in an instant, and the steed of Allan, controlled by a powerful arm, to which desperation had lent an almost superhuman strength, sustained him on his feet; albeit, he staggered with the recoil, and groaned with the violence of the shock he had received.

An impatient arm was stretched forward to seize the bridle of the checked steed, but, swift as a gleam of lightning the sword of Allan flashed in the bright sunlight, descended, and smote the limb from the trunk as though it had been a blade of grass. Unheeding the yell of agony which followed his blow, he buried his spurs once more into the already gored sides of his steed, and urged him to renew his speed. Rearing with fierce pain, with a wild snort the horse plunged forward madly, and a few leaps placed him clear of the formidable barrier which had just intercepted him.

At sight of the open way Allan uttered a cry of joy, and with words quivering with intensity, incited the noble beast to attain his utmost speed; and bravely did the high-blooded animal respond to his cries, for speedily he placed a wide space between him and his foes—but, alas! not for long. For a moment the troop had been electrified; the sight of an approaching horseman, flying at frantic speed, had surprised them; a nearer approach gave them a shrewd surmise as to who were the fugitives, and they at once resolved to stop and capture them. They knew, as the Lady Christabel was the maiden accompanying the youth, that every care was necessary to prevent injuring her, although they must obtain possession of her; they knew the slightest hurt received by her would be repaid with most unreasonably usurious interest by her father, and they had, therefore, much caution to exercise. Allan, however, by the plan he pursued, completely upset their intention, as well as one of their men, and was almost out of their reach before they could collect their small modicum of senses scattered by the tremendous concussion.

A loud cry was given by the leader to follow in pursuit, and as the mettle of the flying steed seemed superior to any they could boast among them, orders were given to bring him down with the cross-bow; a shower of bolts were despatched, and, unfortunately, with fatal effect. The gallant animal received one in a vital part, and, with a wild cry, leaped into the air, and fell with considerable violence upon the ground, dead.

Allan quickly disengaged himself from the steed, and lifted the fair Christabel from the ground, holding her firmly to his breast, while, with flashing eyes and glittering sword, he awaited the coming attack of the vociferous and excited troopers. Christabel had swooned. Her face, deathly pale, lay upon his shoulder motionless: it seemed as though the remorseless King of Terrors had anticipated Nature, and now had claimed her as his own. Allan gave one hasty glance towards the furious troopers rapidly drawing upon him, reading his doom in their fierce gestures. He turned his eyes upon Christabel, and they suddenly filled with water. He imprinted a passionate kiss upon her forehead, and muttered,—

"The last on earth! We shall meet in heaven, Christabel, never—never more to part!"

Again he kissed her cold lips, and then cried with a firm voice,—

"Now, Fate, do thy worst! I am prepared for all!"

In another instant he was surrounded. He fought fiercely; but a blow struck by a powerful ruffian, with the butt-end of his cross-bow, inflicted a frightful gash in his forehead, and precipitated him senseless to the earth. The Lady Christabel was torn from his arms—placed, as tenderly as they knew how to accomplish such a feat, in the arms of the leader—and with loud shouts of triumph they galloped gleefully towards Nottingham, leaving Allan stretched, as they imagined, dead, upon the earth, his red blood commingling with and staining the pure green grass and flowers.

CHAPTER VII.

Ghost. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Ham. Murder?

Ghost. Murder most foul, as in the best it is;
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

Ham. Haste me to know it, that I with wings as swift
As meditation, or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.

Ghost. I find thee apt;
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That rot's itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this.

HAMLET.

GETTING their weapons ready in case of further interference, and placing Maude in the centre of the party for safety, Robin Hood and his little body of friends set out on their march; and when they arrived at the point where they were to separate, Hal exclaimed—

"If Maude is going over to Gamwell, I shall go too; I am very much obliged to you, Robin Hood, for your good natured offer, but where Maude goes I go."

"As you will, by all means," returned Robin; "I think you are quite right, and I like you all the better for your resolve."

"Your description of Gamwell to me this morning," said Tuck to Little John, "has fired my imagination to such a degree, I shall not be happy till I pay you a visit; I think I shall go on there now with you."

"Aha! do," cried Will Scarlet. "We'll show you sport, Sir Friar, rare fun, and Robin will come over, of course; we'll kick up the dust, won't we, Robin?"

"I must home first; so I'll bid you all farewell here and hurry on, for I am anxious to know whether that villain spoke truth."

"You're not going alone, Robin," cried Will.

"Yes," he replied; "your path lies a different way to mine."

"No, I'll be hanged if it does," answered Will; "I'll go with you and see that all is right at your cottage, then I can soon run up to the Hall after I have left you; you're not going to be left by all, while Will Gamwell has a limb to accompany you."

"You're a good fellow, Will," said Robin, "and I accept your offer with thanks."

"It was kind of thee, Will," said Little John, in a pleased tone, "but Sir Guy will be calling for thee; so I will go with Robin, for in case of need, I may stand in better stead than thou, who hast not the strength to do thy will justice."

But Will persisted in declaring he would go, until Little John said he would be the fittest to lead Maude, and introduce her to the family. It quieted him; he thought so too—he liked the task—and he gave way to Little John's proposition.

They arrived at the spot at which they were to part, and just at the turn saw the body of a man extended lifeless upon the ground; they advanced hastily, and, to their horrified astonishment, discovered it to be *Allan Clare*! he was quite senseless; a deep gash was upon his forehead, from which the blood had flowed copiously; there were marks upon the ground, as if a severe struggle had taken place; the ground was torn by horses' feet, but there was no trace of Christabel. They searched all round; not a vestige which could give a clue to her fate was to be seen.

Hasty efforts were made to restore Allan to life. Tuck, who knew a little of surgery, and Little John, as much as a familiar acquaintance with accidents of this nature had taught remedies of the simplest de-

scription, both exercised their knowledge in endeavouring to re-animate the senseless form of their late companion; they succeeded in bringing him back to life, but he was so faint from loss of blood that he could not articulate a sentence. It was resolved, as his sister was at Gamwell, and as the intention had been previously to proceed there, to carry him thither at once as speedily and as gently as they could; a litter of boughs was therefore immediately constructed, and the ill-fated youth placed upon it. Robin's apprehensions had been increased to a considerable extent by this sad occurrence, and he determined now to hasten to his home with all the speed he could make. Little John, intending still to accompany him, as there were quite sufficient to carry Allan without this aid, and his presence not being by necessity required, there was no need of making a change in the arrangements. The six Gamwells bore the litter; Will, with Maude, Tuck, and Hal, followed; and with hearts, which but a short time previous had been light and joyous, were now sad and cheerless, they proceeded on their way to Gamwell Hall.

Robin kept on towards Hood's cottage at a pace which seemed to defy all appearance of fatigue or bodily labour, although the exertions of the previous day and night were sufficient to have wearied and exhausted even an iron constitution; the fact was, incidents of startling interest had arisen one upon the other's heels, involving them in such a vast amount of excitement, that the continual exercise of his mental faculties had superseded the fatigue which, under quieter circumstances, he must have inevitably felt. Little John, by no means a slow pedestrian, found he had his work to do to keep by Robin's side, and could not help remarking it—not that he complained of it, but that he did not think Robin could have endured, with such an apparent absence of exhaustion, such incessant exertion. Robin smiled when he heard this, and said—

"The time may come when you shall have good reason to wonder how much my body shall minister to my will."

"'Tis very like, too," thoughtfully replied Little John; "a man's limbs will work wonders when his heart's set upon doing a certain thing."

In less than an hour they turned into the alley leading to Hood's cottage, and it was then they experienced a fatal confirmation of Lambie's words; a large body of smoke was rolling over the trees, and the place was filled with the smell of burning wood. Uttering a cry of anguish, Robin rushed along, followed by Little John, and came suddenly upon the dismal sight of Gilbert Hood kneeling by the side of his wife Margaret, who lay dead, with an arrow's icking in her breast: the cottage still burning, but reduced to a shell, completed the miserable picture.

"Father!" burst forth Robin, "Father!" He could articulate no more, but his voice fell upon the ear of Gilbert with intense effect; the old man bounded up, extended his arms, caught Robin in his embrace, and folded him to his breast convulsively. The large tears gushed from his eyes, and in a voice choked with agony, muttered, almost inaudibly, "My boy—my child!—thou, too, art not taken from me—I thank God for this mercy—I thank God!"

He then became silent from excess of emotion, and a considerable time elapsed ere he could utter a word; at length, dashing the tears from his eyes, he said, in a voice firmer than could have been expected—

"Robin Hood, hear me, mark my words, and if thou think'st I have done my duty by thee, since thou hast been in my care, thou wilt aid me when thou hast power to revenge this bitter stroke of for-

tune upon him who has caused it. Thou art rightful heir to the earldom of Huntingdon—nay, start not, 'tis so, anon I will explain how, during thy absence, I became possessed of this knowledge—and while there is life in this old frame, it shall be used to serve thee, to see thee reinstated in thy rights. But, look there, Robin," he continued, pointing to the body of Margaret, "look there, stretched dead, murdered by a ruffian's hand, lies she who loved thee tenderly and truly, even as the child of her bosom—"

"She did! she did!" interrupted Robin, mournfully.

"There was no thought, no act of hers, which could better thee, when she knew not whom thou wert, but she would do cheerfully, delightedly. Hadst thou been ten times her child, she could not have loved thee better. At our hearth thou sat, as the hearth of thine home—once a happy home—look at it now, a desert, a waste. Oh God! oh God! what have I done to deserve this frightful dispensation! Look you, Robin, if ever you loved *her*, that was a mother to thee, in thy infancy, thy sickness, in thy health—if thou feelest aught of affection for me, who have looked on thee, since heaven sent thee to me, as my dearly beloved child, you will aid me in having a full and bitter revenge on those who have destroyed my happiness—put the brand to my roof—murdered the dearest, kindest being God ever created—made my life one desolation. You will, Robin! you will!"

"I will—I will!" cried Robin, with startling energy, and, throwing himself upon his knees by the

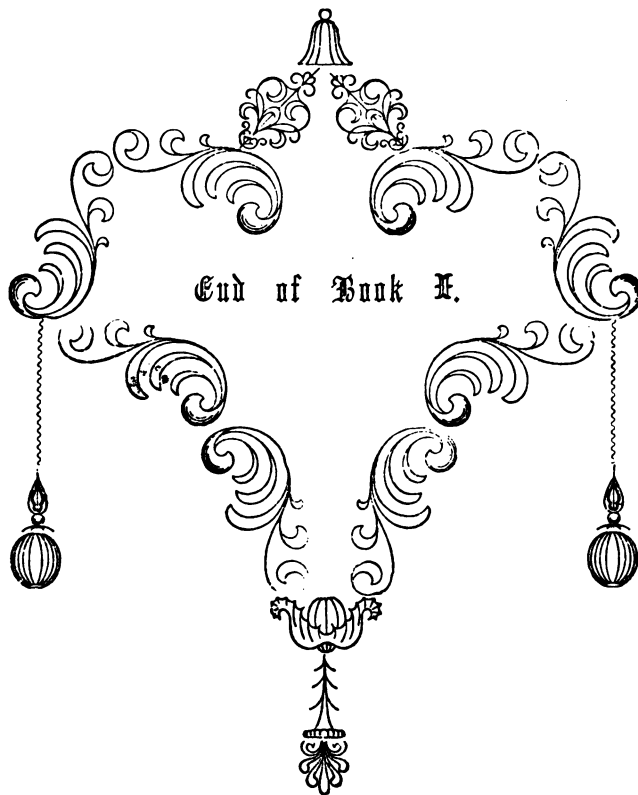
side of Margaret, continued—"And here I swear to inflict a bitter revenge upon him who has caused this desolation! So Heaven help me, as I keep my word!"

"I join in this oath as well!" exclaimed Little John, upraising his right arm, and extending his open palm to the bright blue sky above him. "In danger, in safety, weal or woe, with heart and hand, sword and bow, I swear to aid thee to the fullest extent my body and will will let me. So be the Holy Mother's blessing or curse upon me, as I do truly keep mine oath!"

"I have already sworn this," said Gilbert. "When I laid her dead—for she died as soon as struck—beneath this tree, I raised my hands to Heaven and swore, while life was mine, to repay to the last item the debt I owed to the villain who has thus blighted my worldly happiness. Gratefully do I thank thee for thy acquiescence to my wishes!"

Little John proposed they should carry the body of Margaret to Gamwell to be there interred, and for a time to take up their residence at the Hall until something was devised for the future. This was agreed to; they, however, awaited the return of Lincoln, who had gone to Mansfeld to show Father Eldred the path, and was absent during the devastation. When he arrived they bore the body between them to Gamwell, where they were kindly and hospitably received, and in a few days the remains of Margaret were laid in the ground, and the grass and flowers soon began to wave in the wind over her grave.

End of Book I.





Engraved by J. Wall.

Book XX.

I HAVE HEARD TALK OF ROBYNE HODE,
HEY DOWN AND HEY DOWN A;
AND OF BRAVE LITTLE JOHN,
OF FRIAR TUCK AND WILL SCARLET,
LOCKSLEY AND MAID MARRION,
HEY DOWN, DERRY DOWN.



Drawn by W. H. Thwaites.]

CHAPTER I.

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

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

JOHN KEATS.

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

BARRY CORNWALL.

WE must beg of our readers to show their amiability to us by freely granting a privilege readily and frequently accorded to playwrights, which is that of supposing a lapse of years to transpire between the acts, and we ask it to take place between the books. We are quite satisfied that the 'generous public' will not deny us this boon, and we are free to confess that if they did, we should, such is the perverseness of our nature, suffer it to have no influence upon our intent. Such being expressed and understood, we will believe that a lapse of six years has occurred, which brings us to the year eleven hundred and eighty-two, at which period our story will recommence; at the same time we think it necessary we should refer to a few events, with which were connected most of the characters already introduced, in order that the reader may better understand the position of those whose fortunes he is about to follow; and having done that, we shall proceed with our tale.

Some short time after the burial of Margaret Hood, Allan Clare so far recovered as to relate that while riding with Christabel towards Gamwell Hall, upon the occasion with which the reader is acquainted, he suddenly rode into the midst of a troop of mounted retainers, who, recognising the lady, instantly surrounded him; and, despite his most desperate efforts, tore Christabel from his grasp, inflicted the gash on his forehead with the butt-end of a crossbow, and galloped off with their prize, leaving him senseless upon the ground. It was ascertained, in a visit Hal paid to Nottingham, that Baron Fitz Alwine, having his daughter once more safely in his power, had proceeded to London, and thither did Allan, when sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigues of such a journey, determine to follow, and then make use of a secret which he possessed, to Fitz Alwine's detriment, unless he resigned his daughter to him. Gamwell Hall, presenting so comfortable a home, and such earnest wishes on the part of its owner's family for his sister to remain there, decided him in carrying into effect the step he had resolved on pursuing; accordingly, taking a tender farewell of her, a hearty

and sincere one of his friends, he departed to London, to find, on his arrival, that the baron had quitted with his daughter for Normandy; thither he followed, and there we leave him, and proceed to show what was done in attempting to reinstate Robin in his right as Earl of Huntingdon, and what success was met with.

Gilbert Hood related to Sir Guy, of Gamwell Hall, the history he had received from Roland, relating to Robin Hood, the truth of which Sir Guy at once acknowledged by explaining to Hood that the mother of Robin was his brother Guy of Coventry's child, and therefore Robin was his grand-nephew, and not his grandson, as Hood was led to believe. Sir Guy of Coventry, Robin's grandfather, was no more, and his son was at the crusades; but Sir Guy of Gamwell said he would peril heart and hand, house and land, in Robin's service, while there was a hope of restoring him to his proper station.

These efforts had been made, and were still in progress; recourse had been made to law, but the case was not yet decided, albeit several trials had taken place. Robin Hood's chance of a legal decision in his favour was but slight; he was antagonist to a most wealthy churchman, at a time too when clerical power was working itself to an equal, if not higher position, than regal power; his principal witness, a man of no character, was dead; the sheriff, in whose hands De Beasant had placed the money, was suborned by the Abbot of Ramsay; and there was but the unsupported testimony of Gilbert Hood in his favour. It was true Sir Guy of Gamwell could take oath that his brother's daughter had disappeared from Huntingdon, where she was staying on a visit at the very time Ritson named, but his knowledge went no farther; thus, although there was no moral doubt that Robin Hood was Earl of Huntingdon, there was a great legal one; it was expected how the case would end legally, and the distance between Huntingdon and Gamwell, besides the want of numbers, would prevent him hoping to obtain his right by force of arms; he therefore quietly awaited the issue of an appeal to King Henry II., and resolved to act as circumstances might dictate.

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

Marian,* the sister of Allan Clare, was also there, the beloved of all, both for her beauty and her manners; her conduct to both her equals and inferiors was of one uniform sweetness—a kindness of bearing which created in the males a respect amounting even to veneration, while the females felt not the jealousy which her superior attractions excited, because she never made them feel the inferiority of their charms; each year had more fully developed those beauties which, when she was first introduced to the acquaintance of our reader, were comparatively budding; she had not reached her twenty-first year, nor did she appear as old, for albeit her

* In the ancient ballads concerning Robin Hood, the name of MAID MARIAN very rarely occurs, although Percy says, "In the ancient songs of Robin Hood frequent mention is made of Maid Marian;" but he gives only one song in support of his assertion. The existence of these "ancient songs" seems to have been a secret which Dr. Percy has carefully guarded, for there is no trace of them left to gladden the eyes of the most indefatigable searcher. In the old plays of Robin Hood, Maid Marian took a prominent part. In "The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon," her character is an important one, and in the masques and morris dances on May day, for successive centuries, Maid Marian formed one of the constituent characters. Shakspeare mentions her, but not in very handsome terms; this, however, arises from the fact, that her character in the masques and morris dances, was always supported by a man, whose claims upon decency and morality were probably rather slight. Although the records respecting her are so few, there can be little doubt that Robin Hood had a fair companion bearing this pleasing cognomen, living with him in his greenwood home.

appearance when fifteen anticipated a later age, it had quietly remained, and she seemed but to have grown lovelier, not older; there was a native grace in her manner, a disposition endearingly amiable, and a person of wondrous beauty; it is therefore to be expected that Robin Hood, who felt a kind of love at first sight for this gentle lady, should have had that predisposition strengthened by being much in her society, until it grew into a deep and lasting passion, a love unquenchable, enduring, and unchangeable. It was strange that he could never tell her so; somehow there never seemed an opportunity, and yet they were often alone, but he could not tell why it was the conversation never led towards it; still he thought she must know it, for his language, actions, tone of voice, were all different when directed to her, than when they were to others; but if she was aware of his love, she never let the knowledge escape her—she treated all with the same sweetness of manner, the same kindness of tone in her voice when she spoke, and so, though he was satisfied she did not dislike him, yet he could not tell if she loved him. Her brother's absence seemed to have a quieting influence upon her, and to repress a flow of spirits which were decidedly more natural to her than the gentle still manner she assumed. Much, however, as she was respected, esteemed, admired, nay, loved, there was but one aspirant for her love, and that was Robin; there was a superiority in her carriage, beauty, language—in short, everything, which appeared to lift her above the station of all around her; but it was so natural, and sat so perfectly easy upon her, that it was understood and treated accordingly. Robin was not slow to discover this, and not sorry that such was the fact, or he would not have rested so quietly without popping the question directly or indirectly; as it was, he resolved to trust to future events, and whenever a circumstance transpired either for or against him, then to act with vigour in carrying his wishes into effect.

Maude Lindsay lived still at Gamwell Hall: her father had lost his life one night by accidentally falling in the moat, while in a state of inebriation; she had at his request, purposed returning to Nottingham Castle, previous to this unfortunate accident, but it transpired ere she could accomplish her intention. She had been offered an asylum at Gamwell, which she accepted. Her foster-brother Hal, had returned to Nottingham Castle, through the influence of Herbert Lindsay, and now fulfilled an onerous situation, which he longed to get rid of; but the bright eyes of bonny Grace May, which had been peeping out of their lids for eighteen years, about the same period as his own, still shed forth their daily splendour in Nottingham, and as they were more attractive than his situation was oppressive, they had the power to keep him where he was, particularly as they would shine on him more kindly than any one else; and there was a pair of lips a short distance below them, oh, so sweet! there was no going away from Nottingham while they dwelt there. Maude occasionally received a visit from him, and he came with "a kiss from Grace May" on his lips, and the last words when he quitted were, I shall carry "a kiss for you to Grace May?"

Our friend Giles Sherborne, famed FRIAR TUCK, when he discovered that his love for Maude was not returned, nor likely to be, like a wise man, quaffed an extra flagon of ale, took "his suld cloak about him," and

"Wandered away so man knew whither."

That Maude loved Robin, and that devotedly, even in

their first short acquaintance, her actions denoted, but when she came to see Marian, she wondered not at Robin's love for her, and with the shrewd perception, not exactly of a jealous woman, but of one similarly influenced, she saw that if the love was not returned, there was a decided tendency that way, with a great probability that it would ultimately occur; she therefore buried her love in her own bosom, and tried to appear cheerful, with a painful heavy load in her breast—it was the deepest and bitterest disappointment she had ever experienced, when she saw that she must love without hope; but she tried to meet it the best way she could, to hide the grief in her young heart, and dress her face in smiles for the sake of those who were kind to her. However, her efforts could not carry her far, nor could make her the merry light-hearted thing she had once been; but whatever change took place in her manner and appearance, it was attributed to her father's loss, rather than to the right cause.

Among those around her who were kind to her, there was one who was the kindest of the kind, who sought by every act and deed to make her as happy and comfortable as lay in his power; and that was Will Scarlet. Once a week regularly, he made a declaration of love to her, invariably to meet with a kind denial; but he, nothing daunted, still went on loving with all his might, and his transports before the week was out would reach such a height that a proposal was sure to be the consequence. He had none of that delicacy which kept Robin from making scarcely an indication of attachment—he could not see the 'fun' of it; and so he proceeded in his affair, leaving nothing undone which might advocate his cause, and giving Maude no opportunity of forgetting she had a lover.

Maude was a girl after his own heart; she had just the face and figure to attract his fancy, and the voice and manner to keep it when attracted. Maude to him was the loadstone of life, the only thing which he concluded a man ought to live for. Maude was everything; nothing could be done unless he consulted Maude. He wore the colours she preferred, he called his dogs after her, and his favourite weapons were distinguished by her name. There was his "Maude yew bow," his "Maude spear," and "Maude arrows;" and he tried all his persuasive powers to coax from Hal of the Keep his sweet little nag Flying Maude, but that was a fruitless task—he met with a flat denial; but nothing damped, he procured one as thorough bred as he could get, and named it "the incomparable Maude." Every one in, about, or near Gamwell knew the name of Maude—it was for ever on his lips; if he had a favourite of any description, animate or inanimate, Maude became its name immediately. She was his household goddess, whom, if he worshipped in the roughest fashion, yet it was with the most earnest and sincere devotion, and as such it had its influence on her.

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

Every day brought forth some little act of Will's to Maude, which could not fail to excite in her a kindness towards him, and if they were not done with that delicacy which sensitive minds deem essential, it was only the honest roughness of his nature

which understood it not, but they were not the less to be appreciated. Maude knew this—and what female does not instantly understand a kindness which springs from love?—and in her turn tried to please him, by performing a thousand little things which she knew would gratify him; but the effects of her good nature was to throw him into ecstasies, vow eternal love for her, and wind up by asking her if she loved him *yet*, and if she did not, if she thought she ever could? This question she had tact enough always to evade without giving him a decided refusal, and yet at the same time not leading him to believe she even indirectly loved him. She did not do this with the idea of keeping him as a lover, for on that ground she would have given him a decided refusal for now and for ever, but she saw he was enthusiastically attached to her, and she feared an utter denial might have an influence on his impetuous nature, productive of effects hurtful to himself and others. He was sanguine to the very “echo which applauds again,” and so fancied if denied to-day she would consent to-morrow. An eventual refusal never crossed his imagination; he had asked her about three hundred times if she loved him *yet*, and told her about twice as many more that he doated on her; and although he had been gently put off three hundred times, he was quite ready to put the question three hundred times more, without thinking there had been any lost time.

Maude's heart did not, however, require such a prolonged siege: she was of a warm, affectionate nature, and this was all in Will's favour; the chances were, therefore, that some fine morning, when Will popped the question for the fourth or fifth hundred time, she would hold out her little hand and give herself away with it. There was nothing to prevent it; and when Maude came to look at his personal qualifications, there was but little unfavourable to be seen. He was tall and well formed, his features were regular, but his complexion was so florid, accompanied by a profusion of hair—really very red—as to obtain for him the nickname of Will Scarlet; but it nevertheless was luxuriant in curls, and hung down on his shoulders with a grace to be admired—if it had been any other colour—and as he grew older it was expected to grow darker, but it belied expectation, and, if possible, grew redder. Will's hair would not change; and as mustachoes, beard, and whiskers began to appear, he seemed almost to be a second edition of William Rufus, the *RED* king, so named from his visage and hair. But to counteract in some degree the effects of this personal disqualification, Will had large blue eyes, bearing a most pleasing expression, added to which was a smile continually illumining the features, and giving them a good-humoured appearance, which, when under the influence of any excitement, and that was frequently the case with him, considerably diminished the ruddiness of his aspect. Maude, albeit she had given her heart, saw plainly there was little prospect that her hand would be given to her heart's choice, and being in the constant receipt of kindness from the Gamwells, most particularly from Will, she, in her desire to do all in her power to merit it and return it, began to consider Will with a feeling very like affection. She had a kind heart, and could not bear to give him pain; but she had really declined his offer so many times, that though now somewhat disposed to accept it, she did not like; she did not know, in truth, how to manage it, and it now became a matter of more difficulty—from a feeling of delicacy, which may be understood and not expressed—to consent, than it had been hitherto to refuse. This was the state of affairs in the year eleven hundred and eighty-two, precisely six

years subsequent to the events related in the first book of this work. The reader being now, we hope, perfectly satisfied as to the disposition of the characters, we proceed to open the campaign.

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

“And light and sound ebbed from the earth,”

it was upon this night that an expedition had been planned by Gilbert Hood, who had never let his hopes of revenge slumber, to intercept a body of Baron Fitz Alwine's men returning from abroad with their lord, attack them, and as he entertained no doubt of overpowering them, change garments, ride on to Nottingham Castle, gain access, and then burn it to the ground. Their intelligence of the movements of the baron and his party had been obtained through Hal of the Keep, who had mentioned the baron's return, quite unconscious of the use which would be made of his information. Robin Hood and Little John had both sworn to aid him in his revenge, and now they were called upon to fulfil their promise, they were ready to redeem it to the fullest extent. Robin deeming it almost as incumbent on himself to pursue this design, conceiving that he was almost as much injured—as much a sufferer as Gilbert Hood—and when a chance offered itself of repaying in the same coin the injury he had endured, he grasped at it with a readiness which showed how deeply he felt the loss of the only mother he had known. Little John, who never went from his word in anything, who had become strongly attached to Robin for the kindness, the utter absence of selfishness, his nature exhibited, as well as for the extraordinary superiority of his acquirements in a forester's arts, was as ready, nay, as eager, as either Gilbert or Robin to retaliate upon the baron the mischief he had occasioned; he therefore gathered among the vassals a goodly number of followers, well armed, aided by the seven sons of Sir Guy—Will Scarlet decidedly objecting to be left behind—and thus a band was formed of men resolutely bent upon carrying their point. Gilbert Hood had determined to slay Baron Fitz Alwine if he came across his path; while Robin, knowing this intention, had resolved it should be otherwise; he hoped to get “old Boreas” in his power, and make him render some account of Allan Clare, of whom nought had been heard for four years preceding, a circumstance which was having a wasting influence upon Marian; and Robin, feeling satisfied that Fitz Alwine must have some knowledge of Allan, who had avowedly followed him, expected to be able to gain such intelligence of him, as to set the mind of Marian at rest, and thus do her one of the best services her situation required. It was with feelings of this nature, that when the men were marshalled and nearly ready for departure, he sought an ante-room adjoining her chamber, with the hope of meeting her, and telling her he had some chance of gaining tidings of her brother; with this intent he sprang lightly up the stairs, and entered the chamber. He saw Marian standing by an open window, gazing upon the moon, and speaking unconsciously aloud. She had not heard him enter, and he felt awkwardly situated. He did not like to break upon her soliloquy abruptly nor to retreat, nor to listen to what she was saying. While agitated by these emotions, she continued, and so the

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

"And what to me," she uttered in a low sad tone, "is all this beauty, if only from its presence I can draw addition to my grief? It is wrong to question the dispositions of Him who made us, and dispenses the circumstances which made for us good or ill, yet it seemeth strange, beyond my understanding of justice, why I should be made thus the sport of fortune—I, who have ever bowed meekly to His will, who have worshipped and fulfilled the duties His law imposed on me, cheerfully, devotedly; who never wronged a fellow being in aught; who have ever sought to make in all things those around me happy. Why should this be? Holy Mother! do thou lend me thy blessed aid, and strengthen me to bear, unrepiningly, a lot which seemeth harsh to me, which I feel is wasting me away daily, hourly; from a child my portion has been sad to the dregs of sadness. Bereaved of parents, the dearest, kindest on earth—ever honoured and revered be their memory—I have had none to look up to, to cling unto but Allan, my dear brother, who in all things sought to supply their place to me. Oh! Allan, why have you left me? While you were by my side I could draw some consolation, some hope of future joy, if it had been only in the contemplation of thy anticipated happiness; but that hope is denied me. Thou, too, art gone from me, perhaps never to return, and I am, indeed, now alone, even unto bitterest loneliness; all around me are kind to a degree which is acutely painful, for I have no means of returning it, or doing aught which can make my situation less dependant on their bounty—and, added to this, comes the painful certainty that my heart is another's. Heaven help me! to whom shall I turn for consolation, for guidance!" and she sobbed aloud as she concluded the sentence.

Robin's heart leaped within him, as he heard her say her heart was another's, and then he awoke to the situation in which he stood, as an eaves-dropper; the blood rushed to his brow, and he made her aware of his presence on the instant, by saying to her in a low tone, "Marian, may I crave a few words with you?"

She started, and slightly screamed; on finding it was Robin, she somewhat recovered, bowed her head, but spoke not; she could not—her heart was too full.

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

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

"'Twas even so, Marian—but be not angry with me, I had no thought to do anything to pain or displease you, the Virgin be my judge!" said Robin earnestly. "I came but to speak a word with you ere I depart on an affair of some importance, and if I spoke not upon my entrance, it was because the sound of your voice chained me to the spot; you will not be

angry with me, or think me base and pitiful, for having thus robbed you of a few sad thoughts?"

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

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

"You are very kind," murmured Marian.

"Nay," he replied, "I would be so—I seek to be so—I would have you think I strive to be so, for indeed there exists not one I would so earnestly endeavour to make happy as yourself; your grief becomes mine, your joy equally so, and no path which would lead to thy bliss should be left untrodden by me. You never had one to sympathise with you; confide in me—I pray, I intreat you. Think not I offer unreflectingly, or without a sincere desire that you will do so, and find in me a friend as a friend should be, in the unpolluted sense of the word. Look you, Marian, I will confess the truth—I will honestly acknowledge I am moved to this by the love I bear you. I do, dear Marian, passionately, devotedly, adore you—have loved you with an increasing affection from the first hour we met. I do not ask you to return it, nor would I have given utterance to this, for the disclosure might pain you, but that I would shew you how earnest, how devoted a friend I would be. Believe me, I would not presume upon that privilege, for loving you as I do, thy happiness, thy free and unconstrained wish would be my constant object to effect. I will not deny I heard thee say thy heart was another's. I ask not whose, and shall ever respect thy choice, nor seek by any act, covertly or directly, to transfer thy affection from him on whom it is bestowed, to another, even though that other be myself—thou dost hear me, Marian? and dost believe me, I trust. Do not deny me. I will be thy friend and brother, if thou wilt it so—a dear and most affectionate brother in all things. Thou hast known me six long years; thou mayst judge of me by my acts. I will not deceive thee; should I, may the Holy Virgin inflict her bitterest punishment on me here and hereafter! You will I shall be thy friend, Marian, wilt thou not? I await thy reply."

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

"You are angry with me—are displeased—I have done wrong!" uttered Robin, hastily.

Marian extended her hand to him, and turned her face and eyes upon him; they were suffused with tears. He took her hand, and fancied he felt a gentle pressure upon his as he received it. She remained silent for a moment, and then said—

"Robin, I do hear you, and with feelings I have no words to describe. I have known you for some years, nor have known during that time one act of thine which should prevent my gladly acknowledging thee as a dearly-prized friend. In the absence of my brother, you have been a brother to me; and it is with a

pride and gratification, for which I am most thankful, that I have witnessed thy performance of everything, important or trivial, which might render my residence here a pleasure to myself and less burthensome to the kind-hearted beings in this family. For this I am most grateful, and should regret most deeply if you thought otherwise. If I said I felt *alone*, it was that I have none near me who should be my guide, to whom I could look up for counsel and for direction. Every one around me have their relatives—even you have your foster-father; I have *none*, and it was that painful knowledge which made me utter those words. And now, Robin, I do require the aid of thy kind consideration. You heard me say my heart was another's, and accompanied it by a generous—most generous sacrifice of feeling. I cannot suffer myself to be outdone in generosity even by you, Robin. Do not think lightly of me, if, in return for all your kindness, I should feel compelled—feel it a duty, to set aside a maiden's bashfulness, and own that thy kind thoughts of me are equalled by mine for thee—that—that my heart is—is thine, Robin. Why should I blush to acknowledge it? I love you even as you love me; and though perhaps I should not confess it so boldly, yet I esteem the truth that should be, even as dear friends, between us, so well, that my heart will not suffer me to be silent."

There are times when we have all felt that the commonest language has borne a powerful influence over us; and perhaps were we to trace it on paper, would read marvellously dull and spiritless; but it is not the words which make the interest, it is the tone, the accompaniments of eyes and hands, and the *time*, which make words, comparatively simple, have a passionate effect. Thus was it, in the foregoing colloquy; it was not what was said but what was conveyed, that produced upon their young hearts an effect like pouring oil upon fire. They were warmly, devotedly attached to each other; had been, for some years, but until now each kept the secret in their own breast. Robin's admiration, and eventually love, had been created by the beauty of her form and strengthened by the sweetness of her demeanour and general disposition; while the constant kindness of Robin to Marian, aided by no mean personal qualifications, had produced a like result in her. This feeling on both sides had gradually increased, until an opportunity occurring, a mutual avowal was the consequence. We will not repeat what words on this subject followed those already detailed, for they cannot be invested with the interest, the earnestness, and devotion with which they were given; but it was a sweet sight to see the two fond hearts kneeling down in the bright moonlight—their faces upturned to the clear blue heaven, which glittered with pale stars, like a diamonded robe—vowing to love each other truly and devotedly, and never change in bright or adverse circumstances, while a pulse continued to beat in their glowing hearts.

CHAPTER II.

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

SHAKESPEARE.

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

BYRON.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, Lord, no!" he cried laughingly; "but this is the night for a stroll—just the night to undertake any thing in the woods, eh, Maude?"

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

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

"It is nothing dangerous you are about attempting, I hope—is it?"

"Oh, Lord, no! not while I have a good bow, a stout staff, a strong—oh, I forgot, I mustn't say that—it's nothing, Maude!"

"Then why must you not speak of it?"

"Oh! of course not; because if it was known, or to get to the ears of any one of the soldiers, you know, it might—oh, I forgot—no, no, it's only a frolic, and I am going out with Robin Hood and Little John, that's all; so before I went I came to say farewell, dear Maude, in case we should never meet—oh, I forgot! no, I mean in case—no, that is, I never like to go any where without bidding you good bye, do I?"

"I cannot say you do."

"And why do I do it?"

"It is not for me to say. I don't know that I can say it."

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

"And you really love me, Will?"

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

"I believe you love me."

"I believe you, I do."

"But supposing I love another!"

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

"But you don't?"

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

"Nonsense!" interrupted Will.

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

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

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

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

"Nay, Will, 'tis not required—I will not have compulsory love; besides, he I speak of deserves not such proceedings. Before we met he loved another—he did not keep it secret. He behaved in the kindest, most affectionate, most honourable manner to me; but he loves another, and will continue to do so while life dwells in him; I therefore look not for his love, hope not for it—expect it not. At the same time,

Will, I must be a stook—a heartless creature, if I could be insensible to your continued kindnesses; they have wrought strongly upon me; and if you will accept a heart divided, such as it is, it shall be thine."

"Look you, Maude," returned Will, in a low, thick voice, "I was foolish enough to fancy that if you didn't love me you didn't love any one else; that I am grieved to find it otherwise, you may believe, and should be more so if I thought I had hurt your feelings in producing an acknowledgment of it. I also know what the kindness of your disposition would lead you both to say and do; but shame on me were I to take advantage of it. No, Maude, I scorn it. If I had known this, I would not have troubled you as I have done; but you will forgive me, for I knew it not. I don't say I am not cut to the heart by what I have heard; but I will say, if you can bear that feeling as you have done—so patiently, so gently, so uncomplainingly, it would be worse than villainous of me to make an outcry. Although you offer me your heart, yet I can well see the motive which impels you to do so, and a pestilence on me! if I wrong you by accepting it, when I can see you would do it with pain and a self sacrifice, rather than you should think I suffered on your account."

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

"Will Scarlet! Will Scarlet! hilloh—ho!"

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

To-morrow—ah!

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

"Where can Robin be loitering?" exclaimed Gilbert, impatiently; "it is unlike him to be a laggard where his presence is needed."

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

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

"He will, in its execution," said Little John.

"I believe so," replied Hood.

"I know so," replied Little John. "Hark, a foot-step! 'tis Robin's—two—Will and he are together." Robin and Will evidenced the truth of his words by appearing at that moment.

"How now, Robin; you lag, boy. We have waited for you some time," cried Gilbert.

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

"I said so but now," said Little John.

"Ha," replied Robin, "Little John, you are always my friend, back and edge, foot to branch, neck to

nock. I thank you for it, worthy John, and when the opportunity occurs, will repay it to the best of my ability."

Little John laughed. "You make a mountain of a mole-hill," he said; "you overrate my liking for you."

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

"Aye, and will do your bidding manfully."

"We may depend upon them?"

"As upon myself."

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

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

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

"How is it, Will," said Robin, "you look dull—there's a shade upon thee! bonnie Will Scarlet! What's come to thee, lad—do you not like your trip?"

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

"Oh! merely because you, who always throw life and spirit into the party which you join—the most light-hearted, boisterous, and merry being among them—should now draw your bonnet over your eyes, drop your hands to your legs, and lag a-foot without a word; 'tis so unnatural to thee, Will, I can't but ask, what ails thee? Something, I am sure, hath damped thee mightily."

"Nay; 'tis nought; you shall find me first in the fray and last to leave it, this night, Robin."

"So you ever were, Will, where danger existed; but it was not with such a face and air as you wear now. I am satisfied something has occurred to deaden your spirits. Let me but know if I can serve you in aught which may restore you to yourself; espouse your quarrel, if quarrel it be, or do anything which may again make you bonnie, frolicsome Will Scarlet. I'll do it, spite of the Evil one! Yet, Will, think not I would pry into your secrets; if you would not wish to speak the cause of your dullness, do not let thy friendliness for me, or my seeming importunities, draw it from thee. I shall not think it unlike a friend of thee, for do I not know, Will, that where a friend's aid was warmly needed, thou would'st come to me; and now I but seek to know the cause of thy sadness, in hopes that I might advise or suggest something to restore to thee thy peace of mind."

"'Tis not so much a secret, Robin, that I should deny thee the knowledge of it, nor is't so much that I should hang my head thus; for if I had troubled my head to think about the matter, I might have expected the upshot; still I have a strange feeling upon me, which makes me dislike mentioning the matter even to you."

"Then do not," interrupted Robin, warmly but kindly.

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

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

"No, Robin, I had determined to tell thee, and therefore there is no likelihood of my repenting, at any future time, that I had made thee acquainted with it. Besides, can I forget, Robin, we were little children together? and long ere we knew we were relatives, we were fast friends. When did we ever quarrel Rob? Never. If one bigger than myself struck me, did you not always beat him for me? Did we not always fight side by side and back to back? Did we not together o'ertop every lad in the village in all sports? Who was there among them could swim, hunt, fish, play at staff, or draw a shaft with truer aim than thou? And was I not next to thee? And did we not go together, hand in hand, heart to heart, like dear brothers? Hang it! I never loved my brothers, any of 'em, half like to thee. And when we made love to the little village girls, would they not come to thou and I, one and all, when we wooed them to a dance round the May-pole—or on Sundays in the dale—or to walk in the quiet green lanes—or in the moaning old wood by moonlight—and in all these times, in all these things, when were the thoughts of each hidden from the other? And why should I now keep from thee, my old friend, that which in other times I should have told to thee, and felt a duty performed when I had done so?"

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

"You may, Robin, most like will; but I never shall," continued Will, mournfully. "You know I have loved Maude Lindsay, how I—I haven't a word strong enough to express how much I loved her, and she—I find—"

"Well?" cried Robin, impatiently, a strange mis-giving crossing his mind, as Will hesitated.

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

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

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

her, I have had such a lump in my throat, such a weight in my chest, that I have felt as—I can't describe it—but I have never felt so before, until to-night, and I am sure I never shall feel again as I have done."

you do, because I can judge it better, not loving her—"

"Not loving *her*, but somebody else," interrupted Will, with something approaching a smile.

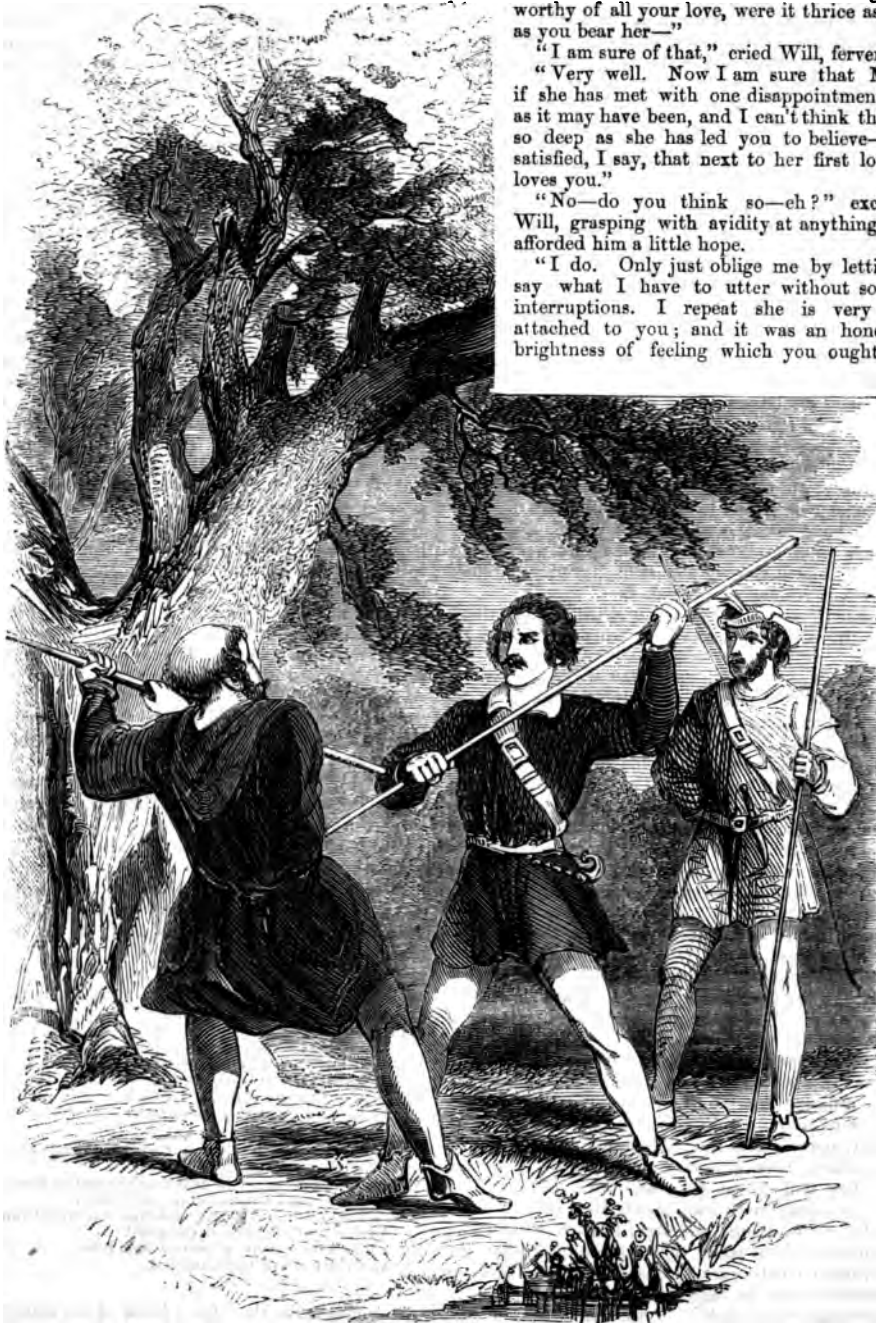
"Be it so," replied Robin, returning the smile. "Take my word that Maude is a kind, warm-hearted, affectionate little thing, and worthy of all your love, were it thrice as much as you bear her—"

"I am sure of that," cried Will, fervently.

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

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

"I do. Only just oblige me by letting me say what I have to utter without so many interruptions. I repeat she is very much attached to you; and it was an honesty, a brightness of feeling which you ought most



Drawn by W. H. Thwaites.]

Engraved by J. Wall.

"Come, come, cheer up, Will; it is not so bad as you think, for I know Maude's disposition better than highly, most proudly, to appreciate, that induced her, when she offered her hand to you, not to hide from you

that she had loved another before you. You misunderstood her, and thought she was going to sacrifice her happiness by wedding you, at a time when she was pining after another in secret wretchedness as a return for your kindness. Now I know Maude better. When she weds you, and I hope that will be soon, she will do all in her power to forget her first love, and cling to you in a manner in which you will perceive no more difference than if she loved you from the first, and nobody else before you; so make your mind easy, and the first thing to-morrow morning, take the earliest opportunity of talking the matter over with her, and you will find it is as I have said."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How now, lads!" exclaimed Gilbert, "what means this flying; are the hawks abroad? Speak."

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

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

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

"You are right, John," returned Gilbert Hood, with much sadness in his tone; "you are right, and it was but a few years since I loved to see the boys merry, mirthful, and happy; but since my poor Maggie has been taken from me, I have felt as if all

lightness of manner, all mirth, was a disrespect to her memory. I know it is wrong to feel thus, but I cannot help it. I have tried hard to shake it off, but in vain; often when in Gamwell Hall, good Sir Guy would make the old Hall shake with his festivity and rich humour, have I quitted it and wandered alone in the long wintry nights through the old leafless forest; it was more congenial to my thoughts. I have sought the spot where she was murdered, and I made miserable. I have knelt me down and repeated my oath to have revenge while I have life to accomplish it, and I will. I hope this night to pay off a moiety of the debt."

"I hope so too," returned Little John; "it sha'n't be for want of stout aid if you do not."

After this short colloquy, they proceeded in silence until they reached a favourable point of the thicket, in which they uncoined themselves, each taking a part favourable to their intended plan of attack; ample directions were given to their companions both by Little John and Gilbert, and now they quietly awaited the coming of their expected foes. The bustle of their hiding had subsided a short time, and their whispers had ceased, leaving no sound in the air but that produced by the wind among the leaves, as if they were chanting a low and mournful song to the moon, who was spreading her sweet beams over them like unto a silver veil. There was occasionally the running cadence from the throat of a bird, who, waking up, mistook for day the broad moonlight penetrating every unsheltered nook. By-and-bye the stillness was broken by footsteps, but they were very faint, indeed, scarcely perceptible: Robin was the first to announce them, and every man looked to his weapons; then a slight breeze rustling the leaves, it was declared an illusion, but Robin said he heard them plain enough, and if they but waited patiently they would find him correct. They did so, and in a short time the dullest ear knew that some person was approaching.

"Whoever it is," said Robin, "he is alone, and on a nag's back—I should say one of the forest breed, by the short quick step."

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

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

Who am I? what am I? can't tell me that, God wot?

A yeoman bold and right merry;

A stout limb! a bright eye! and good lungs have I not?

And skin as brown as a berry?

When an hungered I eat; when athirst then I drink,

If old wine, till ready to burst;

If I'm tired I sleep; if not, not a wink;

And I'm clerk of Copmanhurst.

Skies are blue, water's white, but what is the hue of wine?

Why that of the glittering ruby:

A young girl's blush, or the crimson flush on this nose of mine!

Which bespeaks me no temperate booby.

Here's a staff and long shafts, and what else would you know?

A voice which is none of the worst;

I'm a friar with missal; a yeoman with bow;

And I'm clerk of Copmanhurst.

"A plague on thee for a beast of no taste," cried the singer to his nag, when his ditty had ended; "couldst thou not, when I warbled a strain, which I will go so far as to say was done with most exquisite skill—couldst thou not, I say, have pricked up thine

ears and listened with a becoming gravity, without taking all sides of the path at once, never keeping to one, but waddling here and there, and lifting up thy voice with mine, to the utter destruction of all harmony; for dost thou not know, and if thou hadst been bred to the church thou wouldst, that a base voice will not agree with a very shrill scream, which truth leads me to tell thee is the quality of thy voice; and though so high, it is exceedingly base, and base in thee to thrust it in one's ears, when it is most harsh and disagreeable; but thou art a female, and like unto thy sex exceedingly; thou art wayward and wilful, always desiring change. When I wish one side, thou wilt take the other, thou wilt do what thou shouldst not do, and not do what thou shouldst do; thou knowest I love thee, hussy, and thou wouldst, I have no doubt, be glad to change me for a new lover—I am sure thou wouldst. Like the sex, fickle, inconstant, and—

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

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

"Understand me, Sir Clerk of Copmanhurst, if that be thy title, which your boisterous bawling taught me to be it, that you are stopped by him who would stop any one from whom he wanted an answer, and one who is only beneath thee so much as thy nag gives thee in height," returned Little John, coolly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why, as I live, it is Tuck, Friar Tuck—Giles Sherbourne! not a word, John; I have often longed for a bout of quarter-staff with him, and if I can keep

my face from his inspection I shall be able to accomplish it."

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

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

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

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

"Play!" returned Robin.

"Do what you can as quick as you can," whispered Little John.

Robin nodded, and to it they went. Tuck commenced by a flourish of his staff, with the purpose of throwing Robin off his guard—it did not succeed—and he made a feint at the shin, but aimed at the head—it was stopped—and before he could understand how it was accomplished, he received a blow on the shin, and then a thwack on the side of the ear, which produced such a tremendous ringing in his ears, that he could not hear the loud laugh Little John gave, although he saw the extended jaws; he received half a dozen blows immediately after, in all parts, and in such rapid succession, that he grew quite confused; he guarded and hit at random, but blows rained so fast upon him, and his opponent exhibited such extraordinary agility, that he felt, for the first time, all abroad. He lost confidence, and that once destroyed, it was all over with him in a game where coolness and confidence are so requisite. He would not cry quarter, but played desperately, frantically, hoping yet to carry the battle by a *coup de main*, in which strength was to be his sole dependence. In this, too, he was disappointed, for in throwing all his force into his blows, he could not recover his guard with sufficient speed to prevent his opponent hitting him severely. He raged like a tiger, and threw away all chance he might have had, for he was a good player, by suffering his passion to get the better of his judgment. At last, exhausted, in a tremendous perspiration, and his breath quite spent, he called a parley!—not for quarter, he scorned it—but just breathing time. Robin readily granted this, for he was himself in a great heat, and fancied the joke had been carried on quite long enough.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why, it is Robin Hood!"

"The same," returned our hero.

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

"Ere Robin could make a reply, he felt his arm grasped with sudden vigour, and a voice exclaim with startling energy,—

"Robin, is this true?"

He turned to see Will Scarlet gazing on him with a look scarcely to be described.

"Hush, Will," he returned quickly, in a low voice, "not now; a moment hence I'll answer that question;" then turning to Tuck, said to him, "there was no running off in the case; she accompanied her lady in her flight, and she left you because she did not like you well enough to return your love."

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

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

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

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

"In what way?" demanded Tuck.

"Briefly thus. You remember that Baron Fitz Alwine caused my foster-father's cottage to be burned to the ground, and my mother to be slain; we swore to revenge ourselves upon the first opportunity: one now offers in the return of Fitz Alwine and a party of his men, who have been in foreign lands these six years. They pass this way to-night, and if you have a mind for a bout, now's the time."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thanks, good friend; 'tis not impossible that we

shall have these worthies here speedily; and so we will, if it please thee, retire to covert, and await their coming."

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

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

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

As it was deemed requisite there should be no vestige of anything betokening human presence, Little John cogitated upon the best place to secrete the nag, and accordingly, after a little reflection, he led it up the roadway a short distance, and finding a nook, which satisfied him that it would perfectly conceal the little damsel, he proceeded to enter far into its recesses; but, as Tuck had observed, it was not her inclination to go into the covert, and so she exhibited at once such disinclination, by planting her fore feet firmly on the ground, and doing her best to resist all efforts to make her; perhaps the young lady might not have thought it looked decorous or prudent to trust herself alone in a thicket with one of the male sex, and so her notions of propriety being severely shocked, she came to the determination not to go. Now Little John was as equally determined that she should go, and as he was of a size which rendered it possible, if extremities were proceeded to, that he would carry her in, in all human probability he would gain his point, so he commenced by dragging her by the bridle, which he held firmly near her mouth; the young lady, however, showed a most vixenish spirit, quite unbecoming one of the softer sex; she tried very hard to bite, and very hard would she have bitten had she succeeded, but failing in this, she threw her head about in all directions, reared up, kicked up her hind legs, squatted on her haunches, and exhibited a thousand vicious tricks, altogether unfeminine. As she had forgotten all softness and modesty of demeanour, the attributes of her sex, Little John forgot his gallantry, and lent her several very hearty whacks with the butt end of a spear, which he carried with him; they were laid on with no very light hand and with true heartiness of purpose, but they had, we are sorry to say, very little effect in quieting the damsel; she spun round him like a top, until his patience grew exhausted, and in a fit of passion he threw down his spear, grasped the bridle still firmer, passed the arm and hand at liberty round her waist, and actually, by main force, pushed her into the

covert, and then fastened her securely by the reins to a tree. The lady, like many ladies, was restive to the last, but at length, finding resistance useless, having no alternative, submitted with tolerable resignation to the fate allotted her. Little John having thus accomplished a victory over a determined female—no joke, by-the-bye—quitted her, recovered his spear, and joined his friends.

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

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

"Oh! safe enough; beshrew me, if ever I came across such an obstinate little brute."

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

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

Every ear was bent to the ground, and it was easily discovered Robin was right. On came a troop, and they made no secret of their approach, for they were laughing and shouting as if excited by liquor. Occasionally, as they drew nearer, snatches of song fell upon the ears of the hidden foresters, who each grasped his weapon and made ready for attack. As they approached there was a great clamour among them, which suddenly ceased, and a voice of "stentorian might," more loud than musical, roared forth the following:—

War Song.

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

With hopes our hearts are bounding
On the issue of the fight;
We hear the trumpet sounding,
To the charge! with mad delight;
Oh! its pealing note we answer with shouts that sound afar—
For our dear-loved homes and victory—forward, hearts, Hurrah!

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

"Hurrah!" chorused the band, with tremendous power of lungs, at the end of every stanza, and when it had ceased there was a noisy burst of voices, as if they were especially delighted with the song and its performance; and in the midst of the clamour the neigh of the nag again rose clearly and distinctly in the air, with a very elaborate shake at the termination. It was immediately echoed by two or three of the horses in the troop, and a shout of laughter was

the result; but there was also an exhibition of prudence with it, for the greater proportion reined in their steeds by command of their leader, and he was about to despatch two men to search for the beast, and, as he supposed him to have one, his rider, and ascertain his cause for concealment, when out dashed the nag from the thicket, flew past the spot where Gilbert Hood and his party lay concealed, and galloped up to the troop, to their surprise, riderless.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"As Robin Hood did, a short ten minutes ago."

But Tuck had not waited a reply. He broke out into the open way and raced along in the direction the nag had taken. He had but a small distance to run ere he came up with a body of mounted men and in the midst of them, prancing, kicking her heels in all directions, throwing up clouds of dust, and resisting all efforts to capture her, he beheld his little mare. He came up just in time to save the frolicsome lass from receiving a sound belabouring; one of the troopers had dismounted, and had already, with pretty tolerable strength, inflicted a thwack over her head with the butt end of a spear, and was about to discharge a second, which was already whistling in the air, when he received such a tremendous blow upon his head from a staff, that, like a shot, he measured his length upon the ground, insensible.

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

"How now, knave! who art thou who 'someth knocking down our men?" cried the leader, riding up to Tuck as if he intended to ride him down.

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

"No," shouted the leader, enraged at being nearly thrown. "No, I see nothing," he roared, "but an insolent knave;" and at the same time he delivered upon Tuck's pate—he was bareheaded in both senses of the word, for he had neither hat nor hair—a blow with the end of his spear, which bid fair to crack it—at least, it sounded as if such a point had been accomplished; but nature had obliged our friend Giles with a skull of peculiar thickness, and although it was a sore knock—and he felt it so—it did not break; it had the effect, however, of raising his passion to blood-heat, and shouting with all his might,

"Hoods to the rescue!"

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

"Hoods to the rescue!" he roared like a Stentor.

"Hoods to the rescue!" was responded by the little band, and they came rushing from the thicket which had concealed them. As they broke into the moonlight, and came dashing towards the troop, which consisted of between fifty and sixty men, Tuck broke through his foes and joined them. The troop, immediately they beheld this band of armed foresters issuing from the covert, raised a shout, and immediately formed into a line as wide as the road, and prepared to ride them down, but they were met by a shower of arrows, which took effect on four or five of them; and the foresters, perceiving the numbers of their antagonists to be double their own, sought cover of the trees as the horsemen charged. From their sheltered position they sent their arrows with deadly precision. The troop quickly discovered the disadvantage under which they laboured, being shot at without an opportunity of returning it, for they were only armed with spears, battle-axes, swords, and bucklers, and they dismounted for the purpose of dislodging their assailants. No sooner was this done than the foresters bravely advanced from their cover and fought hand to hand, shouting,—

"A Hood! a Hood! revenge to the death!" which the troop returned by crying lustily,—

"No quarter! Down with the Saxon churls—down with the dogs!"

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

Our friend, Friar Tuck, did credit to his quarter-staff, for he plied it in right earnest, and with amazing dexterity. He had received a lesson in coolness that very night from Robin Hood, with whom, if he could

not exactly cope in the pure science of the game, yet could have matched him far better if he had not have given way to passion, and thus offered openings which, when cooler, he was good player enough to avoid; now, however, when it came to a matter of life and death, and he was opposed to a fellow with a lance, he exerted all his knowledge, and stopped every thrust, occasionally repaying it with a blow of tremendous force; and when, as it so happened with two or three, he hit the temple, he killed them instantly, such was the extraordinary vigour of his blows.

Will Scarlet kept by Robin, and fought also with a spear, and in that mêlée there was no braver heart than his, or one more reckless of danger; twice he saved Robin's life, and Robin returned the compliment by warding off blows aimed at him, which otherwise would have told with fatal effect. Desperate as the little band fought, it was soon perceived, even by the most sanguine of the party, that they must be defeated; it was utterly useless to attempt to conquer a body of disciplined men double their number; and Little John, who walked about with a battle-axe he had wrested from one of his foes, cutting down all who opposed him, and, in turn, saw several of his friends cut down, tried to find out Gilbert Hood, tell him what must be done, and make the best retreat they could, as he thought where there was no chance of victory, it was little use to stand to be cut to pieces, even if they did sell their lives dearly. He kept his friends together as the only chance of securing a tolerable safe departure, and fell back upon his former position; here he found the Gamwells fighting away with increased ardour, and around them the bodies of several slain. Will Scarlet had got surrounded by four fellows, and they were trying hard to capture him; the greater his emergency, the cooler he grew, he glanced from one to the other, keeping them at bay with his spear. Robin, seeing his danger, ran to his aid, and the two youths stood up manfully against the four, with a courage and skill which even their foes admired, but, however much their admiration might have been excited, their forbearance was not, and they only increased their exertions to take them both; one of them made a desperate dash at Robin's spear, with the intention of whirling it out of his hands, but Robin, swiftly withdrawing it, the trooper missed it, lost his guard, and received Robin's spear through his body; at the same moment Robin exclaimed with intense agony—

"Holy Mother of God! my father! Will Scarlet, Little John, to the rescue!" Turning, he fled to his father's aid. Will Scarlet also turned and saw Gilbert Hood brained by a battle-axe ere Robin could get to his side; he prepared to follow, but, having lost his guard, one of his opponents threw himself upon him, another followed, he was bound and carried away to the rear, prisoner; Robin saw not this, he arrived only to catch his father, who was attacked by a party of men, and cut down by one while keeping others at bay. It was then that Robin Hood drew his bow from his shoulder, his arrows from his quiver, and with the first shaft shot the fellow dead who had just killed his foster-father; he stood like a tiger at bay, his cap off, and his eyes gleaming like live coals; in less than as many minutes, four men lay stretched around him; the troop was closing around them, making numbers defeat bravery; the foresters fought with desperation; by degrees Little John had lost his weapons, and he was opposed to one of the biggest of the troop—they were all tall men—with nothing but the butt end of a quarter-staff, which had been cut through by a battle-axe while he was opposing it to one; but with this he contrived to ward off the

fellow, at times rap his knuckles, and ultimately so to confuse him, that when the other delivered a blow at him with his axe, he avoided it, sprang upon him, twisted it from him, hurled it away, and seizing the man by his throat and belt, hurled him over his head, as if he had been a mere bundle; the unfortunate trooper pitched heavily on his skull, fractured it, dislocated his neck, and lay extended a corse. Little John now got to Robin, and getting four of the foresters together, bade them raise Gilbert Hood, retreat with him, and they would cover them; and so, raising his voice, he cried—"To the woods, lads—to cover—quick!"

The men obeyed, and the troopers shouted, "Victory! pursue the Saxon churls—hunt 'em down."

But that "hunting 'em down" was easier counselled than executed, for most of the men had bows and arrows, which they had not yet used, and now brought them into play with frightful execution; they were all good bowmen, and the short distance from, and the size of their foes, rendered their aim a matter of certainty. In the eagerness of pursuit, a dozen men flew after them, to meet a sudden and certain death. Robin discharged no shaft from his bow which did not bury itself in the breast of an advancing pursuer; the extraordinary accuracy of his aim, even under such terrible excitement, drew shouts of approbation from the foresters, and yells of rage from the baffled pursuers, who were met with such a steady and deadly discharge of arrows, each bearing death or desperate wounds, that after two or three miles, the chance was given up, and the survivors returned to their companions to relate their ill success.

Upon gathering their party together, Little John discovered that six of the party were missing, three severely wounded, and Gilbert Hood slain. Among those missing was Will Scarlet, and directly Robin became acquainted with that, he determined to go back in search of him. He left him, he said, fighting against odds, and he was fearful he was slain or wounded; in either case it was a duty to recover the body of one who had several times that night exposed his life for him, and back he would go. They offered all sorts of opposition to him, but in vain; and begging of them to take all care of his poor father's body, he departed on his friendly errand. He had hardly turned his back, when Little John gave directions to the Gamwells to make a litter and proceed with the body to Gamwell Hall; he would soon be with them, he said, and followed Robin on the same task. He felt it to be quite as much his duty as it could possibly be Robin's, for Will was always with him everywhere, was always entrusted to his care, was his pupil, and therefore he felt that if it was any one's duty it was his; so determining, he followed Robin's footsteps, but not to overtake him until he had reached the late scene of strife, and then he saw him alone; not a vestige of the fight was to be seen; all was cleared away. The bodies were removed, and even the broken and scattered weapons had been collected together and borne off; thus there was no clue to the fate either of Will Scarlet or the five foresters. The prospect of success in following and endeavouring to effect the escape of their unfortunate friends was utterly hopeless, and, therefore, such project, although advanced by Robin, was instantly abandoned; they agreed to return to their friends, and see what was to be done on the morrow. Ere those bearing Gilbert's body had reached Gamwell, they were overtaken by Little John and Robin, and all arrived at the Hall just at daybreak, to relate the melancholy issue of their adventure.

Poor Gilbert Hood had been killed on the instant,

the axe having penetrated his brain; and as recovery therefore was out of the question, preparations were made at once to lay him by the side of his wife Margaret. Two days subsequent to his death, Tuck, having performed the rites the church demanded, the body was ready for interment; ere it was borne to its last home, Robin requested to be left with it alone for a short time. His request was complied with; and when he found that none were there to look upon him, he flung himself upon the body, and burst into a passion of tears, the first he had shed since the death of his foster-father. For some time he wept in silence, and then he knelt, offered up a prayer, most ardently, for the future welfare of him who lay before him, in the sleep of death; then he kissed the cold hand and marble forehead rigid with death, and, in a voice low and broken, with emotion he said—

"Farewell for ever, my dearly loved parent! parent, not in blood but in act. Farewell to thee, my more than father! for thou—not having the need to do much for me, not being thy child—did more for me than if I had been thrice so. From my earliest infancy thou didst bestow upon me thy tenderest care—thy fondest attention. No little act, thought, frolic, or whim of mine, but thou didst greet kindly, and give way to affectionately, making me love thee beyond all things else in this world, and ere I can repay thee for all thy tenderness, thy goodness, thou art snatched from me. Oh, God! never to look upon thee again! never! never!—but here in the inmost recesses of my heart shalt thou live bright and unsullied, while the breath of life animates me; thy memory loved, honoured, and revered; and no circumstance, nor time, nor change, shall dim the brightness with which it now shines, and shall continue to burn there. Farewell! never again to meet on earth! But as we are taught to believe that the spirit of the good and virtuous, after the earthly life hath ceased, may watch over the actions of those it loved in life—if it is permitted to thy shade to hover round me, do thou, oh my dear father, spread the influence of thy kindness over me, leading me and guiding my actions to the path thou wouldst have most approved, hadst thou been living to direct me, tempering my will to my judgment, and in the wandering life which it will be my fate to lead—for now thou art gone, all prospect of wealth or hopes of independence are wrecked, and I must trust to my right arm to cut me out a scanty pittance—thou wilt keep me in the path of honour, not shaming the name which I will bear and keep, I hope, unsullied and untarnished by thought or deed, mean or disgraceful. Hear me swear this, dear shade of my father, humbled in spirit, in anguish, agony most bitter at thy loss, in utter wretchedness, abject and broken-spirited, hear me swear that while I bear the name of ROBIN HOOD, whatever acts necessity may compel me to perform, they shall be tempered with thy honour, thy kindness, and thy justice; with my right hand on thy breast, and my left to my God, I swear this, so come weal or woe as I keep this oath; and as I have sworn this in the direst misery grief can inflict, so will I in my brightest, happiest, and proudest moments hereafter observe it!"

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

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

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

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

The weapons were laid upon the bodies, and then the mould was heaped over them, and so the void was filled up, and the mass of sad friends prepared to leave, except Robin, who stood with his hands clasped before him in the most intense abstraction, apparently as if watching the process of filling the grave, but really unconscious of aught around him; he was roused from this state by a light hand laid upon his shoulder. He turned mechanically, and beheld the sweet face of Maude bathed in tears, looking earnestly up in his face. She pointed to the grave, and in a low voice said—

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

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

It was affecting to see how kindly he was treated by every one there, as each and all endeavoured, to the extent of their power, to make him feel his loss less; everything which could tend to soothe and relieve his mind from its sadness was done. In sadness the heart naturally turns to those we love for a portion of their sympathy—it is not perhaps that we wish them to experience the same grief that we ourselves feel, yet we do not like to see them cheerful; when we are sad we expect them to be serious, because we are so; we want their sympathy, and the best consolation we can receive is to witness the actions and thoughts of those we love tinged with the sadness which oppresses us; the desire to restore them to cheerfulness, makes us exert ourselves to shake off our grief, and it is rare that in such efforts we find ourselves prove unsuccessful. It may be readily imagined that Robin turned to Marian more than to any for sympathy, nor had he any reason to lament a want of it; it was exhibited in so sweet and delicate a manner, as to make it come with tenfold charm to him, and deeply did he appreciate it. But Robin Hood was not of a nature to remain inert, however oppressed by a calamity, when there was a

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

CHAPTER III.

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

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

WITHIN four hours of their departure from Gamwell-hall, Robin Hood and Little John entered a small hostelry in Nottingham. They seated themselves close to a party of men who were drinking, and were rather noisy in their demeanour; they were soldiers, and their garb bespoke them to be retainers belonging to Nottingham Castle; they were talking loudly, and were clamorous in their actions; their conversation was of a desultory nature, principally relating to feats of arms. As the subject was roughly handled, there being more talkers than listeners, neither Robin nor Little John paid any attention to it; they drank their ale, and conversed apart in a low tone; they were nearly ready to depart, when one of the drinking party made an observation which attracted their attention, and induced their stay, with the hope of gathering some intelligence that might have a favourable influence upon the purpose for which they came.

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

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

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

"No. I arrived here yesterday with the baron; I

went with the party to meet him as he came from London, and was therefore away when they came here."

"Well, they are off to London to-morrow, and I believe they take the prisoners with them."

"Was it a sharp tussle?"

"Rather. The troop brought about twenty of their comrades, desperately wound-

to Nottingham. However, they abandoned their intention, and buried them in the forest, a few miles from here; but they brought all the weapons they could gather, as evidence of the fray, and to afford some clue to their owners."

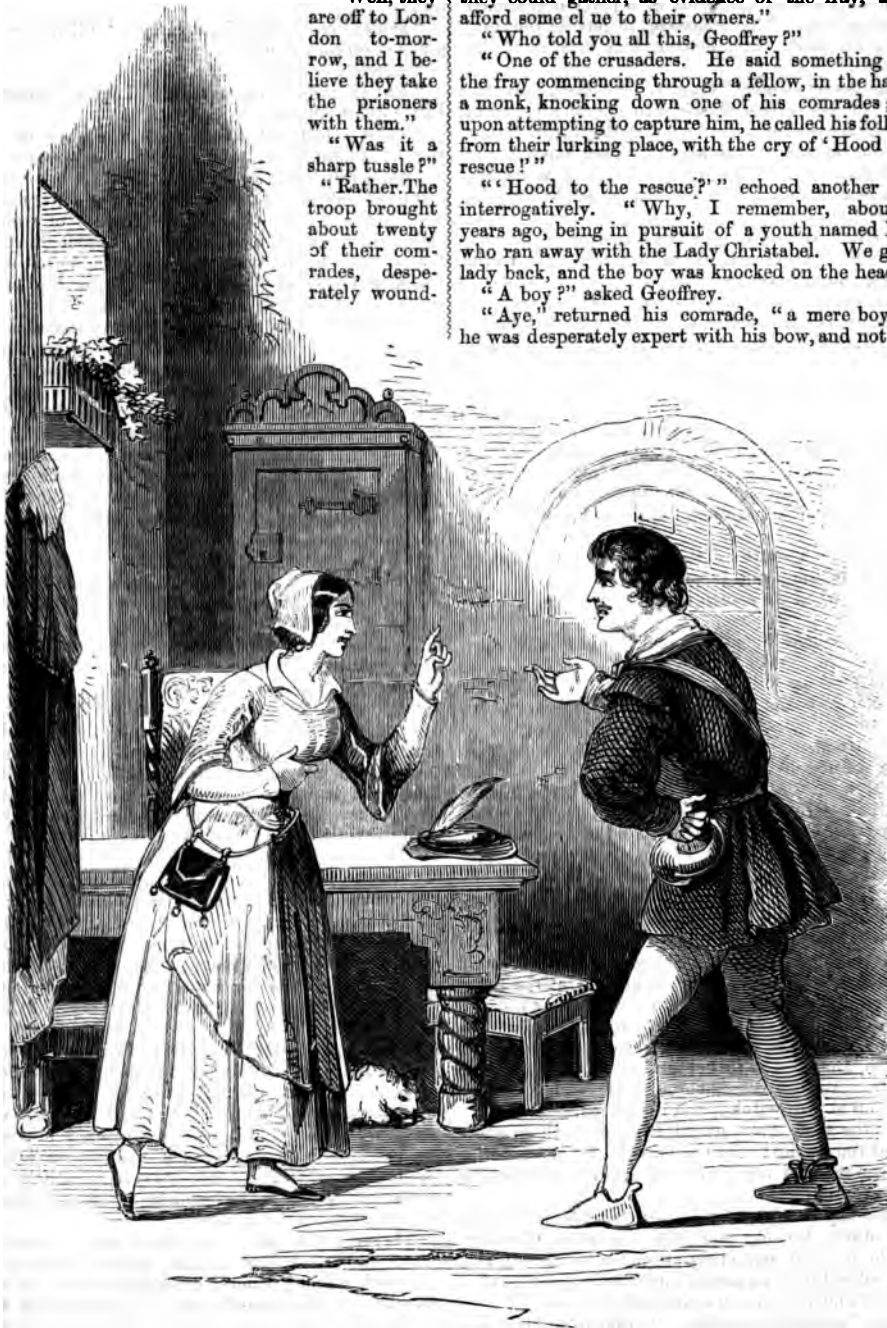
"Who told you all this, Geoffrey?"

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

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

"A boy?" asked Geoffrey.

"Aye," returned his comrade, "a mere boy; but he was desperately expert with his bow, and not afraid



Drawn by W. H. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.

ed, with them, and they carried for some distance to use it, when opportunity offered. He knew every the bodies of those slain, intending to bring them inch of the forest, and you would not believe how he

kept us at bay, and eluded us, until at last, having stolen a horse from the troop, he was riding away with the lady as comfortable as may be, when he suddenly plumped into the arms of a party despatched to intercept him. They succeeded in getting the lady, cracking his crown, and leaving him dead upon the road way."

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

"Twelve?" echoed two or three voices.

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

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

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

"They have a youth in the castle now, a prisoner; perhaps it is him," said Geoffrey.

"I'll see when we return to the castle," replied the man.

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

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

The men, in the course of their drinking and roistering, had extended their circle, and got so spread as to make it impossible to approach the door without passing through the midst of them. Under the circumstances, this was an unpleasant fact which Robin gladly would have dispensed with; for, in the event of his being recognised, it would go a very long way to prevent his being able to assist Will Scarlet. When he rose, therefore, he proceeded towards the door with as indifferent an air as he could assume, at the same time as quickly, without exciting suspicious notice; Little John kept by his side, partly to shield him from the gaze of the man who professed to be able to recognise him, and partly to get out as close together as possible. As they passed through the circle, Geoffrey looked up at Little John, and exclaimed,—

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

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

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

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

"Not by the sixteenth part of the eighth of an inch!" returned Geoffrey, somewhat nettled. "I'll

hold any man a flagon of ale that he is not taller than I, nor so strong in trying a fall, nor breaks my crown with a quarter-staff ere I have soundly cudgelled him!"

"Done!" cried one of the party. "I'll wager thee a flagon on each item."

"Agreed!" cried Geoffrey.

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

"Thou canst not refuse such a chance of rare sport," exclaimed his patron; "such an opposer may not cross thee again! Besides, thine honour will be compromised; for have I not wagered on thy head, and thou wilt not lose me the prospect of winning three flagons of ale, man, of which, if thou gain them for me—and beshrew me thy lusty sinews tell something in favour of it—thou shalt drink the largest portion? Thou wilt agree, I see, friend!"

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

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

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

"If thou canst!" roared Geoffrey, who, primed with ale, was quite elated at the idea of showing off before his companions. He was of a stalwart frame and exceedingly tall; expert at the use of his weapons, but his size prevented him from putting his powers into play in a friendly manner, because he seldom met with one who was big enough, or dared to oppose him; the present opportunity was therefore hailed with vast delight by him, and it would have been something particularly important in its nature which would have prevented him foregoing the expected pleasure. "Thou wilt not leave us in the lurch if thou goest away, man, eh?" he cried, as Little John was leaving the room. This was uttered in a sneering tone, and a laugh from his companions followed the remark. Stung by the observation, Little John turned sharply back, and walking up to Geoffrey he said in a tone of excitement—

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

him who has not questioned it, and wagered upon me, I leave my weapons as a pledge of my speedy return."

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

"And I," said Geoffrey, chafing considerably.

"And I!" echoed several voices.

Little John disappeared with a quick step, and a short distance from the spot found Robin waiting for him. He related what had just transpired, explaining that there was no possibility of escaping from it, and said they must appoint somewhere to meet, for as there was every prospect of being recognised, he must not get near the place where the retainers were likely to look upon him with too scrutinising an eye. Much as our hero wished to be at the quarter-staff play, and would have run all hazard to accomplish it, yet as Will Scarlet's chance of escape would be compromised by his risk of being discovered, he reluctantly consented to keep away, and meet by the castle at three o'clock in the afternoon. He knew the residence of Grace May's parents, and hoping to meet with Halbert Clare, the foster-son of Herbert, familiarly called Hal of the Keep, he took his way thither, while Little John returned to play the match.

There was a general movement among the guests when Little John again entered the hostelry; the number had been considerably augmented, and the news of Geoffrey Gurthfeld the Stalwart, being about to play a match with the quarter-staff with a stranger, was noised about from one to another, and several who had been sitting when the match was made, had run and fetched two or three friends to see it. Little John was surprised, undoubtedly not agreeably, at seeing such a quantity of visitors added to those he had left there, and he began to have slight misgivings himself, that out of the motley crew around him, there might be some officious knave who could recognise in him one that had been one of the sturdiest foes in the late fray. It was but for a moment that this passed through his mind, and he resolved to let it have no influence upon him, further than inducing him to make use of every circumstance which might further the object with which he had come.

He was placed, however, in no enviable situation, and many a man, boasting and possessing a good stock of courage, would have gladly excused himself from such a situation. Little John was not, however, one of this description—to say that he did not know what danger meant, would be false; but the sense of it affected him differently to what it would have done others. It was but a difficult strait in his idea, was viewed and treated as such, and almost inevitable death staring him in the face, would not have moved him from coolly weighing and examining circumstances which would be likely to afford a loophole for escape. There was no hurry or indecision in his conduct, excepting upon those points upon which he was perfectly unacquainted, and then he would readily give himself up to the guidance of those who did know them and could apply them, at the same time always reserving for himself a clause to act for himself when they branched into paths with which he was acquainted.

He glanced around the assembled people with a penetrating scrutiny, but with the air of apathy and indifference which the Indians are so famed for assuming. He was greeted by the assembly with something like respect, a favour for which he had to thank his person; he returned the salute by a slight inclina-

tion of the head, and seeking out his antagonist he advanced towards him. When he stood in front of him, he said quietly—

"Art thou prepared, sir Norman?"

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

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

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

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

This point having been decided, they commenced fulfilling the conditions of the wager. They both divested their feet from all covering, and then Geoffrey stood with his back to the wall, while a fellow mounted on a stool, placed a flat piece of wood upon his head, and from thence in a direct line to the wall, where it was held by one of the guests. Little John came and placed himself beneath it, and when he raised himself to his proper height, and stood quite upright, he raised the measure a good three inches; it seemed to astonish everyone, Geoffrey not being the least—so much so did it, that he was asked again to stand to the wall; he complied, the measure was applied, and it was found to be true.

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

"I call myself six feet six inches," said Little John.

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

"Taken!" cried two or three voices.

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

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

"My good friends," he began, "almost all here are known to each other, and the honest yeoman who has just won the first part of my wager is a stranger among us. Now, I know you all to be lovers of fair play, and therefore I am sure you will treat him with that courtesy a stranger has a right to expect from us, seeing that no advantage is taken because we know him not, and giving him the benefit of any little favour his situation may demand, courtesy require, and our own honour dictate."

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

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

"I thank you, good folks, for your-kind intentions and your courtesy, and I will not abuse it, and will

show my sense of your feeling towards me by endeavouring, to the best of my power, to win," said Little John, when the clamour made by the guests' applause had somewhat subsided. There was a shout for him raised, and then it was proposed to adjourn to an open space at the back of the hostel, to carry out the other portion of the wager: it was no sooner agreed to than it was put into execution.

The place chosen for the wrestling was an area of a considerable extent, and was used for dances and fêtes and the celebration of festivals. Here the May-pole was erected—one of the earliest and prettiest customs we could boast of, but now almost obsolete. It was covered with a carpet of green turf, even and beautifully green, and was admirably calculated for the purpose to which it was now applied. He who had backed Little John now busied himself in making the spectators form a ring—he was assisted by two or three of Geoffrey's comrades; and when everything was arranged with satisfaction to all parties, Little John and Geoffrey Gurthfeld advanced to the centre of the ring. The former had divested himself of his weapons and his gauntlets, otherwise he had made no change; but Geoffrey had doffed his military habit, and appeared in a small doublet, tightly belted round the waist—his figure was thus displayed to more advantage than that of Little John, who wore a tunic of dark green, reaching to his knees, hiding half the fine limbs which supported his body. When they met in the ring, each looked earnestly at the other. On Little John's face was settled a pleasing yet indifferent expression, as though he was going about any commonplace action; while the features of Geoffrey, on scanning the make, the limbs, the sinews, and muscles of Little John, betrayed rather a nervous anxiety, as if he knew he had no chance to throw away if he wished to win.

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

"And I," said Geoffrey, holding out his hand, which Little John took, and shook in a friendly manner; and having done this, each made their grip, by laying hold of their antagonist's shoulder and elbow. Each tried the other in various ways, to find that to throw the other was not easily to be effected; they turned round and round. At length, after several feints, Geoffrey gave Little John's leg a desperate jerk with his foot, and threw all his force into the lunge he made, in the hope of giving him a clear back fall. He might as well have tried to have moved a house. Those around having witnessed that movement, expected to have seen Little John thrown; they raised a shout of anticipated triumph, but they were deceived; and while neighbour was telling to neighbour that he thought the yeoman would have been thrown, Little John, in his turn, began to exert his powers to give Geoffrey the fall. It was then his extraordinary strength was shown and noticed, for he had stood immovable when Geoffrey had used his greatest force, and now every one could see that the retainer was straining every muscle to prevent Little John moving him to the right or left, yet he could not keep his ground, although his efforts to do it were tremendous. Suddenly shifting his hand from his antagonist's elbow to his hip, Little John dropped on one knee; at the same moment he hurled his competitor over his head, and he fell on his back with a terrific crash. Ere Geoffrey's back had touched the ground, Little John was erect, and stood quietly awaiting the arising of his defeated opponent. Although the breath was nearly shaken out of his body, and for a moment he was stunned, Geoffrey arose, and forcing a smile, said,

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

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

"Faint!" echoed Geoffrey, scornfully; "be it as you please, we begin again—this fall must decide it."

There was a great cavil and dispute when it was seen that they were about to again try their strength for a fall; those who had wagered upon Little John considering they had fairly won, while those who had lost, glad of any chance of recovering the money, contended that although Geoffrey fell flat on his back, still it was not what was called a fair back fall; but all agreed that Little John behaved very handsomely in giving Geoffrey another trial. The combatants again took firm hold of each other, and this time the struggle was of short duration, for in a few minutes Geoffrey's legs came flying in the air, and his shoulders came to the ground with great force.

"A back fall—a clear back fall—hurrah for the yeoman!" shouted he who had won by Little John's success. The losers said nothing; and Geoffrey, with a face betraying considerable chagrin, rose to try his skill with the quarter-staff. If Little John had had a doubt about winning at the wrestling, he had none whatever at the staff. It was his favourite weapon—indeed it was that of most foresters—but he had actually, as a boy, been enthusiastically a follower of it, pursued it with ardour, and acquired a proficiency in it almost incredible. He excelled in its use to the same degree of perfection Robin had already attained with his bow and arrow. He had studied it and schooled himself to its attainment with untiring perseverance. No one within ten or fifteen miles of Gamwell had attained any celebrity in the handling of the quarter-staff but he sought him out, and, while yet a youth, never rested till he had defeated all. Thus, when he found himself about to be opposed by one who had only a commonplace skill in the use of the weapon, he laughed inwardly as he heard Geoffrey's friends offering to wager freely upon their comrade. He was satisfied as to the result; and, as the wagers were as readily accepted as offered, he determined that they should have a little play for their money. Accordingly, the quarter-staffs having been measured and found to be of equal length, and both Geoffrey and Little John refreshed with some strong ale, they stood forth to commence the play. Each held the staff at the quarters, and raised it diagonally. Full ten minutes elapsed ere either made a fair blow, and the expectations of the spectators having been wound up to the highest pitch, they began to manifest some impatience; but Geoffrey had already experienced enough of his antagonist's capabilities to throw a chance away, and Little John had resolved to act upon the defensive, therefore little as yet was done. At length Geoffrey broke ground, and a quantity of blows were given and stopped with great rapidity. Little John discovered that he had no mean player opposed to him; and, at the same time, Geoffrey having made some of his most skilful efforts, his most favourite *ruse*, and, indeed, put into requisition all his knowledge of the game, and found himself stopped at all points with the greatest ease, discovered that he had a thorough master for an antagonist, and it behoved him to exercise all the skill and caution he was master of to win the bout. To accomplish this

he thought his best plan would be to act on the defensive, draw his opponent out, and watch with the closest attention that opportunity to deliver the blow which was to make him the winner. After a little while Little John discovered this; and, as he saw no prospect of getting Geoffrey off his guard so as to make him be well beaten before the decisive blow was given, without he did it by degrees, he altered his resolution, and commenced on the offensive; and perhaps it was more to his advantage, so far as the opinion of the bystanders was concerned, to do this, for by it he evinced himself to be a complete proficient in the art. He commenced by making a series of rapid feints, and then delivered a severe blow over Geoffrey's legs before he knew whether a blow was really on his way to him. This he took care should be distinctly given, that all the spectators should see it, and at the same time see that it was done by skill and not accident. Thrice in succession did he give a blow in the same place without receiving one in return from Geoffrey. His feints were so rapid and so natural that they almost bewildered his antagonist, for they were new to him; but when he got more accustomed to them, and prepared accordingly to stop the real blow, or deliver one while a feint was being made, Little John changed his mode, and commenced a completely different style of play, which proved as successful as its predecessor. Geoffrey had received about fifty blows without having returned one, or suffering his temper to get the better of him; at last, he resolved to attack, and try and wear his opponent out. He twirled his staff, dealt blows right and left, whirled it about, dashed it here and there, his blows raining with such speed and force that his partisans were elbowing each other, following with eager eyes every blow, and expecting each instant to be enabled to cry out with stentorian lungs — "Hurrah! a Geoffrey—he's won! he's won!"

Still they could not see that one blow had taken effect. They observed wherever Geoffrey's staff fell Little John's was invariably there to oppose it. It was true there was a great noise from the staffs as they rattled against each other, but it was "great cry and little wool." Little John backed here and there as Geoffrey dealt his blows, and the latter followed him up step for step until he grew pretty well exhausted, without having succeeded in hitting his opponent. Immediately Little John felt the blows to be less powerful and less frequent, he turned the tables and attacked Geoffrey, but with more effect; for although the latter played and stopped exceedingly well, still he received a vast many blows, until his legs and sides grew terribly sore. Little John would have continued it much longer, for he had warmed up into the spirit of it, but he remembered Robin Hood and the difficulty he should have in getting quit of his present companions, and so he resolved to finish him off, but to do it in style; he therefore ceased his violent play, and again they stood opposed to each other as they had before a blow was struck. He then began to work his feints; to appear to be striking at different parts with extraordinary quickness. When he believed he had thoroughly confused Geoffrey, he made a feint at his legs with such an appearance of reality that Geoffrey shifted his guard with rapidity to receive it; he left his head unguarded, and the next instant he lay sprawling upon the ground with a broken pate, the blood flowing freely from his forehead. The blow had been so clearly given, and under such peculiar circumstances, that it created the highest admiration in all the beholders.

"Hurrah for the forester—the bold yeoman!" and twenty caps were flung in the air. The winners were

uproarious, and the losers not by any means so noisy; still most of them had the honesty to acknowledge that Little John had won well and nobly, leaving himself beyond all dispute Geoffrey's superior.

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

"Aye, aye; fair—all fair. Hurrah for the forester!" they cried.

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

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

"Nay, never chafe, man," returned Little John; "thou hast been defeated in a fair and lawful manner; it would have been more strange if thou hadst won, seeing that I am expert at the use of the staff from great practice, and for the love I bear it; besides, nature has fitted me to it, and we are all more or less gifted on some points—the quarter-staff's mine; you have yours I don't doubt, and art one of the best at wrestling or quarter-staff I ever stood up to: you will meet with many that can't beat you, and yet believe themselves very good players; so, Norman, here's my hand, I offer it with all sincerity as a friend, or, if you like it better, as a foe; but I hold you no ill-will, and I forewarned you I was well practised in the art of quarter-staff playing."

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

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

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

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

"Agreed," returned Geoffrey, and he gave the necessary orders to the host; there was much rejoicing among the partakers, especially those who had won their wagers; the merits and demerits of

each were canvased, and their healths drank uproariously. Little John began at length to grow anxious to get away, for he had so many admirers among the company, whose skins were full of ale, that he feared, if they observed him depart, they would follow in a train. Now this would be in the highest degree disagreeable; for he had made himself sufficiently notorious already to hazard his prospect of success in the undertaking for which he had expressly visited Nottingham, and, therefore, his principal object was to steal away quietly and unnoticed; but Geoffrey, who had washed his head and had it dressed, kept close to him; not a movement could he make but Geoffrey took notice of it; and ultimately he saw that he must enlist the aid of his late antagonist, if he wished to escape from these new found friends. He tried several times, but ineffectually, to withdraw; there was always some would-be-officious friend to exclaim,—

"How now, whither away, noble forester?—I am with thee, good yeoman, thou'rt journeying my road I know; when thou goest I will keep thee company, bold heart."

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

"Thou hast proffered friendship to me—thou canst serve me now."

"In what way? tell me that, and believe it done," replied he.

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

"Aye! most willingly will I, but there is but one way."

"Name it."

"You must with me to Nottingham Castle—they dare not follow us farther than the draw-bridge; and then you can with me to my sleeping-room, and I'll guarantee that thou quittest the castle unobserved by any prying knave."

"That is the only way?"

"It is; because thou hast signalized thyself, these fools will stick to thee, walk with thee, in order that they may be seen in thy company, and cry 'look you, neighbour, you met me yesternoon, I was with—who, marry? why, who but he who conquered Geoffrey Gurthfeld, he is my friend;' so, honest forester, thou must 'een submit in thy turn, and if thou would'st escape the prattling and prying of these dogs, you must do as I say."

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

"It is turned of two," was the reply.

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

"By three we can be there easily."

Little John mused for a short time, and as he perceived it was the only way to accomplish his object, he reluctantly said to Geoffrey—

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

"With all my heart; I am ready now."

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

"Friends, I must leave you; this worthy forester

accompanies me, but no one else—understand me, no one else. I have been surrounded by quite enough friends to-day to desire their presence on my way to the castle; therefore, I shall consider any one who follows me now, does it to dog and insult me, and if I catch them, by the Holy Saints but they shall smart for it."

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

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

Farewells were exchanged, and when Little John bade them adieu they gave him a tremendous hurrah to help him on his path; but bearing in mind the warning delivered by Geoffrey with such earnestness, there was no one left the hostelry to attend them; and thus did these two huge men, late opponents, but now friends, stroll up the town together, in the direction of Nottingham Castle.

CHAPTER IV.

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

WHEN Robin Hood quitted Little John, he sought, as he intended, the residence of the parents of Grace May. With the locality he was acquainted, but not with any of the ways, save by report; but, if description would make acquaintance, he might be said to be intimately acquainted with them. He had not seen the "bonnie Grace May," of whom he had so frequently heard; and his curiosity had been so excited by the warm and vivid descriptions of Hal of the Keep, that many times he had resolved to pay a visit to Nottingham, if it was but to satisfy the curiosity. He was now in a way to gratify it, but not in a mood. The recent loss of his father weighed heavily upon his spirits, and when he arrived at the house, he craved admittance with a feeling of indifference as to whether Grace May or her grandmother opened the door to him. As he stood waiting an for answer to his summons, he hummed an air, quite unconscious of doing it, being at the time deeply lost in thought. Such is the power of habit. Robin Hood was naturally of a gay and lively disposition, and whenever alone, was in the habit of singing ballads or humming airs, learned from his foster-father, and many composed by himself. Although his mind was crowded with sad thoughts, yet he unknowingly gave way to the habit, until his quick ear detected an approaching footstep bounding along. The door hastily opened, and a voice, exceedingly musical, and enriched by the sweet laugh that accompanied it, exclaimed:—

"I knew, Hal, you'd come this morning; I said—Oh! I beg your pardon. I thought—I didn't know," said Grace May, for it was the little damsel, and blushed prodigiously, as well she might, for she threw herself into Robin's arms, and he received a

kiss ere the discovery was made. He was rather astonished at his reception, and the young lady disengaged herself ere he could understand who it was embracing him, or perceive half her beauties. There is no doubt she need not have hurried herself on his account, had he observed the remarkably laughing blue eyes, the pretty lips—small, and such a pink! the fair hair, hanging down in long ringlets, far more graceful than any tendrils the vine ever put forth, or the form that combined all these treasures in one being. She appeared embarrassed almost to a painful degree; besides, she was disappointed, and there appeared an expression over her features as if she was ready to burst into a flood of tears.

"I beg your pardon," she repeated.

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

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

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

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

"It shall be readily granted. All Hal's friends will find a welcome here. Pray come in."

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

"Have you walked far?" she inquired.

"From a little village to the left of Mansfeld."

"Gamwell?"

"Yes. Do you know it?"

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

"You do?"

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

Here the young lady remembered what she was saying, and to whom she spoke; she therefore performed a blush of the very choicest rosy tint. Robin laughed and said—

"Hal's kind feelings have made him over-colour his description of me, but he has not succeeded in doing as much when he described you to me."

"He said nothing spiteful of me, I am sure."

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

"And you did not believe him?"

"Yes, I did. But I find my mistake."

"I am glad you tell the truth."

"Yes, for I find I ought not to have believed him, as instead of being *one* of the prettiest, you are *the* prettiest."

"Only not foolish enough to believe one word of it, nor you either. Besides, there's Maude Lindsey, who was called the beauty of the castle—and there's another at Gamwell Hall, too. Aha! Hal has told me all. I know, I know. And pray don't you think *her* far handsomer than I? To be sure you do, only you are afraid to say so."

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

"Pray do, and utter a little truth."

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

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

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

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

"Why, that is—" Robin was rather embarrassed, he could not say he would, he felt so satisfied that Marian's equivalent did not exist, and yet to tell a young damsel he'd rather have another than her, was awkward; his embarrassment lasted but a moment, and he answered quietly:—

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

Grace nodded, and laughed.

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

"Oh! no," uttered Grace, quickly. "But I would not tell him so, it might make him vain."

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

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

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

"Certainly. I wonder Hal does not come; he is always here before this."

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

"And very natural too, is it not?" asked Grace, with her laughing eyes sparkling like sapphires.

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

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

"Not very well, but not ill."

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

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

"Yes," returned Hal, "but I did not expect to stay a minute, so I ran up to the Flagon, where it was to be played, and sure enough there was a crowd assembled on the green, at the back of the hostel. I edged my way in, and just arrived in time to see the forester throw Geoffrey over his head. Geoffrey, Grace, think of that—threw him clean over his head; they were wrestling then, but there was some dispute, and to it they went again. Who should the forester be, but Little John, actually Little John; so I knew you were somewhere in the town; I looked for you all over, but could not see you, and I would not speak to Little John, because he was so much engaged; besides, I could not get near him. Well, I saw him throw Geoffrey on his back, and then they went to quarter-staff. Now, I know what Little John can do with that, so I came away. I ran up to the castle to see if you had been there, but they said no."

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

"No," replied Hal, when the confusion subsided, "trust me for that; your name is still kept in strong remembrance there; besides, the baron returned yesterday, and were he to know you were within reach, he would provide for you for life, as he is about to do for some persons who were brought in prisoners, the other night, by some crusaders who have just arrived from the Holy Land; they were vassals of the baron's, and, on their arrival in England, came direct here; they were attacked by outlaws as they came through Sherwood, but they defeated them, and made half a dozen prisoners. No, I merely asked if any one had inquired for me, for I know you are bold enough to go up there, without the slightest fear of being captured and thrown into a dungeon. When

I found you had not been, I guessed you would come here; here I came, and here I found you."

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

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

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

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

"Even so," returned Robin.

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

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

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

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

"All that I can do for his rescue you may be sure I will, for his kindness to Maude. Many's the time she has told me of it, and I have only wished for the chance of returning it. Now I have it, I will do all that can be done for him. We will to the castle; I can easily take you in without question, but must still be cautious, for the baron has returned, and he has began his old roaring, impatient tricks again—here, there, and everywhere, swearing and shouting, making the whole castle too hot to hold us and himself too."

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

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

"You can learn nothing of Allan Clare?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not on such an errand, dear Hal," returned she. "I was thinking that to the many good qualities you

have taught me Robin Hood possesses, that of fast friend may be added; and shall I not be glad to see you also earn the title? Go, Hal. Think not of me ever breathed!" cried Hal, in a paroxysm of rapture.

"And I have more reason than ever to believe you



Drawn by H. W. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.

while this affair is on foot, and Heaven grant you success!"

"You are the dearest, best little angel that

to be the luckiest and happiest dog in the world!" exclaimed Robin.

"There! go away with you," said Grace, laughing.

while a rosy blush mantled her fair cheeks and forehead. "You pay females generally a bad compliment by praising so highly a proper feeling in one of them."

After a little more of this badinage, Hal gave Grace a quantity of kisses, Robin bade her farewell, and they departed on their way to the castle. As they drew near towards it, Hal suddenly exclaimed,—

"Look there, Robin! There is Little John and Geoffrey Gurthfeld going lovingly up to the castle together."

"Ha!" cried Robin, "that is Little John! How's this? What can be the meaning of it?"

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

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

"Look, Robin, he's making signals to you—he sees you then?"

"Ah! I am to wait back—he's going into the castle." Robin exchanged signals with him, and then Little John and Geoffrey having rather increased their pace, arrived at the drawbridge and passed over it.

"I have told him that I am going into the castle and will meet him in there," said Robin.

"At what time?" inquired Hal.

"That we must leave to chance."

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

"I'll give them leave to catch us if they can," said Robin.

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

Little John had done his best to improve the opportunity Geoffrey's company afforded him, and had not been in the castle half an hour ere he found out where some of the prisoners were placed, and he fondly hoped that Will's dungeon might be one of them. Geoffrey was more communicative to him when he was in the castle than he was to his friends in the hostelry, and acknowledged that he had been guarding three that morning.

"One of them is quite a youth, rather a remarkable looking one," said he.

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

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

"That's poor Will safe enough," muttered Little

John. "Do you know if he's wounded? perhaps that may make him sullen."

"Not a bit—he's as sound as you are; no, it's the temper of the young colt."

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

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

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

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

"Is it possible—on the western wing?"

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

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

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

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

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

"But why the eastern wing?"

"Oh! because that is rarely frequented—it is not inhabited; it is haunted, and so nobody goes near it; therefore it might be well managed that way."

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

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

"It seems easy," said Little John, musingly.

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

"I am much obliged to you," said Little John, as Geoffrey left him.

"And you shall have something to be much obliged for, thou Saxon hound!" muttered Geoffrey, grinding his teeth, as he quitted the room. "The churl thinks me one of his Saxon serfs, I suppose, but he shall find me a true Norman; he shall not walk away and boast that Geoffrey Gurth—Pshaw! I spit at their Saxon name—that Geoffrey Vanterie was foiled and

beaten by a Saxon dog! The fiend's curse upon my failing limbs—to serve me such a trick!—I, that never bent to man before! But I have meshed him as completely as ever fish was. What, my stout forester has come to release his friends, eh? This is one of the knaves, I have no doubt, that attacked the crusaders in the forest. Well, he shall have a voyage in his Majesty's service, if my knife fails to reach him. How eagerly he swallowed the bait! My life on't! we shall find him at the western wing. I am glad, too, I directed him to the eastern wing, for it is quiet there, and he can have my blade in his ribs without much ado. I will let him get a bit of a start, and then I will set the castle dogs on his track; when they have opened and are in full chase, I will stop the game short, and then, Saxon hind, pay you what I owe you. S'death! how sore my limbs are—Satan never spare me if I spare him!"

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

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

"I wish," he uttered slowly, "among the other things I have practised, I had studied to read men's thoughts in their faces, I should never have exerted it more than just now. This Geoffrey may be a honest, well-meaning fellow, but I don't think so; people are not so ready to be bosom friends with those who have foiled them in some favourite quality; for my part, if I didn't quarrel with the man who could beat me at quarter-staff, I shouldn't be over friendly with him, though I wouldn't seek his harm. I don't think this Geoffrey's professions to me are all real; however, I shall see, and if they a'nt, why let him keep free of my arm and staff, for so sure as I am a Saxon, and that is very certain, I'll trounce him in such a way he shall never forget Little John while he lives. I got the situation of Will's prison clearly out of him, and yet I doubt him; he was too eager to describe it to be sincere; still I believe poor Will to be up there, and I may as well let him know I am near him; I am in the cage, and I must do the best to get out of it. Let me see—he did not tell me how I was to reach that western wing, but I dare say some of the corridors over head will take me to it—at least, I'll try."

So soliloquising, off he started to endeavour to thread his way through the galleries and corridors above. After he had traversed several, he began to grow bewildered, and to fear that he had lost his way.

"It is strange," he muttered as he proceeded, endeavouring to imagine the plan of the building, "how nature fits us for some things, others for things quite different; now, place me in a forest, even a strange one, and I'll work a path to the point I want, as true as if one was out for me, for there are signs and marks by which to guide your steps, and those who have passed their days in the green wood know how to use them; but in a place like this, who's to tell which is the path, or what is to direct you; passages here, rooms there, galleries and stairs in all parts, and yet I dare say there are many now who could go to any part as easy as I could go through Sherwood; well, well, I suppose it's ordered so, or else it would not be."

He had rambled about for some time, now along

a passage, then through a chamber, sometimes upstairs, sometimes down, and as all the rooms were connected with each other by corridors and stairs, in following one passage and its windings he arrived on one flight, then ascended to descend. Shortly after this he began to be weary of this perambulation, when he passed along a corridor which was terminated by a door. Up he walked to the door, it was just ajar; he opened it, walked in, and beheld himself in the sitting apartment of an elderly man, who was seated in a large chair, busily engaged in arranging some bags in a large box; as he made some noise in his occupation and Little John walked very lightly, his presence remained unnoticed for a short time.

Little John perceived that the little old man was not aware that he had a visitor, and he employed the time until the discovery was made, in speculating who this could be, and whether he should address him. He had the pass word; he could say he was a visitor going to take a stroll upon the ramparts and had lost his way; he had little doubt that he should be directed correctly, and then it rested with him to make such use of the time as to render futile any treachery Geoffrey might be guilty of. He had scarcely arrived at this conclusion, when the old gentleman raised his head to take one of a pile of money bags resting on the table, in order to deposit it in the chest; the form of Little John as he did this just caught his eye, and then he turned his full gaze upon him; the scrutiny was anything but satisfactory.

It would have been unpleasant to any one. He was putting away his money, flattering himself no one was near; had given the strictest orders he should not be disturbed the whole afternoon, when suddenly he observes a tall stout forester—outlaws were a species of forester—armed to the teeth, standing close to him. He started, as might naturally be expected, and opened his eyes as widely as they would go; and then in a voice not very forte, being rather tamed by surprise, he demanded—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This is a thong of deer-hide; I am never without it, it always comes in useful. Now I have a favour to ask of you, and if you refuse it me, I'll hang you up by the neck to that piece of furniture, without a moment's hesitation, until you are dead—nothing can save you—I can keep that door against twenty men with these weapons; I don't mind losing my own life, but you shall perish before me."

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

"What is it?"

"The release—"

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

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

"Who is there?" said the baron.

"Geoffrey Gurthfeld," was the reply.

"What do you want?" inquired the baron, by Little John's dictation.

"I have something important to tell your lordship."

"Come again in half an hour."

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

"Have you?" said Little John.

"Have you?" repeated the baron, in a very doubtful tone.

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

"Do you?" said Little John.

"Do you?" repeated the baron, with a suspicious glance at the skean, and a very devout wish that the plan could be speedily accomplished.

"Tell him to come in half an hour," said Little John.

The baron did so.

"It will be too late."

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

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

"Why, I would consent, but—"

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

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

"That sounds plausible and well, my lord baron: to my simple thinking, it is a marvellous round-about way of managing the affair. I am a plain man, used to forest ways; one rule of ours is never to go round about to gain an object, when it is to be had by going direct at it; so, if you please—or if you don't it is all the same—you will accompany me to the fellow who has the charge of my friends, order them to be released, and suffer them to depart free and unmolested."

"You doubt me?"

"Inasmuch as you are a Norman mongrel, I will not trust you. But, to set aside any doubts of the faith of your word I might hold—and, believe me, they are neither slight nor unfounded—I will keep close to your side; the first symptom of treachery I perceive on your part, I will bury my skean in your heart; for, look you, sir baron, in order that you may have no doubts of my word, we Saxons hold you Normans of no more account than wolves, or any wild beasts which we may think it a duty and a pleasure to destroy; therefore, rest assured, should a necessity arise, I shall not have the slightest hesitation in keeping my promise."

The baron was in an awkward predicament.

He was perfectly aware of the full amount of danger of the position in which he was placed; he was a rank coward, who had blustered and swaggered through life, so as to give himself the appearance of a redoubtable knight; he had been in many battles, but generally as a commander. In the *melee*, his voice might be heard shouting and encouraging the men, at the same time he took every precaution for personal safety of which his situation would admit; and, in battles, the nature of which involved so much hand-to-hand fighting, every one was too much engaged to notice what he was about; they heard his voice, and that was sufficient; he had policy and the fear of contumely strong enough to prevent him refusing to take any post in time of war, and he trusted to a sharp sight, a good suit of mail, and a stalwart war-horse, to keep him from danger.

Thus he had obtained the reputation of a brave and puissant soldier abroad, and at home his swearing, blustering, tyrannous conduct to his retainers and vassals, had kept up the delusion; all matters of personal conflict he begged leave to eschew, and took every care not to be drawn into them, if they could in any way be avoided, in consequence of this there was always a party of his men who served him as a body-guard, and were usually within call, but on this particular afternoon, when he was looking over his coffers, for in those days bankers did not exist, to see that during his absence no one had made free with a private store, to prevent any greedy eye being fastened upon his gold, so as to create unlawful intentions, he gave orders of the strictest nature that he should not be disturbed or interrupted. To provide, as well as he could, for the observance of this command, he had sent his body-guard away, so that he was quite aware that if he were to summon assistance, Little John would be well able to prevent its being of the slightest service when it did arrive, by sending him on a visit to his ancestors, a journey he soon had a right to expect, but one which he had no desire of performing. Being choleric himself, knowing that when he imagined he had achieved an object, if he found something had occurred completely to defeat it, there arose within him such a storm of fury and blind passion, that, whatever the impulse, he acted upon it; regardless of all consequences, he judged others in the same light, and in consideration of this did not think it politic to tell Little John that the six prisoners, including Will Scarlet, were already out of his keeping, on their way to London, whither they were to be sent to be first

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

"Take your hand from my throat and sheathe your weapon; I will consider of your request!"

"There requires no consideration," uttered Little John, removing his hand as requested: "I am satisfied you have no wish to pay Satan the visit you owe him, for he has been at your elbow long enough; but if you refuse me, you certainly will, as you will go unshrived. Now, baron, we will on at once; and, remember, one effort to deceive me or play me false, shall be met with instant destruction; I strike home and sure when I do strike. I bid you recollect this for your own sake, because if you do any little thing which I may even deem suspicious, I will act as though I was certain of your treachery—therefore beware! Ere we go, however, I have another request to make which I expect you will answer truly; I shall ascertain if you do not, and provided you mislead me in that also, I will pay you another visit on the discovery, which shall not take so long a time as the present, inasmuch as there will be no words and one deed. So answer truly, as God hears you!"

"Give me your question."

"Where is your daughter?"

The baron started, and opened his eyes with a marvellous expression of wonder.

"My daughter!" he faintly echoed.

"Aye, your daughter, the Lady Christabel?"

"Why do you ask it?"

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

"It is a very strange question."

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

"In Normandy."

"What part?"

"Why are you so particular in your inquiries?"

"In what part?"—"sdeath, answer!"

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

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

he gulped and gulped until he recovered his breath.

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

"In a convent at Rouen."

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

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

"I do not know."

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

"Yes," muttered the baron, reluctantly.

"Under what circumstances?"

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

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

"Thou art a rude forester—that is, art unacquainted with gentle society; thou shouldst understand that barons—"

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

"I have seen the stubborn, evil-minded—"

"No names but his own—you have seen Allan Clare?"

"Twice!" and the baron stopped as if he had finished the subject, but if he fancied he had, his questioner did not, and after awaiting a few seconds, exclaimed—

"Go on! When, and what were the results of your meeting?"

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

"How came he to enter Louis' service?"

"By an agreement between us."

"What were the terms of it?"

"That if at the expiration of seven years he brought a certain wealth, reinstated himself in his family property, which was confiscated by his father's adherence to the cause of St. Thomas à Becket, I would consent to his union with my daughter; during the

interval he was not to see her, and if he kept not his word, I was to dispose of her as I thought proper."

"And how long is it since this occurred?"

"About three years."

"Then there were no underhand means to make him enter the King's service?"

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

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

The baron's breast was like a pent-up volcano, fire raged within, but there was little appearance of it without; he would have given a chest of treasure to have been behind Little John with a battle-axe, and he gloated over the idea as it crossed his mind, but as it would have been bad policy to exhibit any such feeling, he led the way merely as if he was the victim of necessity. Before he quitted the room, he had the precaution to return to his money-chest, the bags he had taken out, and fasten it; then he prepared to lead to a part of the castle which he knew to be thickly studded with men-at-arms, and so turn the tables upon Little John; but the latter was not going to walk so blindly into the trap which the baron's cunning had suggested. He knew he had every thing to gain and not a chance to spare; he kept therefore his wits about him, and passing a window, he suddenly stopped, seized the baron by the shoulder, and exclaimed—

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

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

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

"Ha! who told you that?"

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

"Geoffrey Vanterie?"

"No, Geoffrey Gurthfeld."

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

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

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

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

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

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

His heart beat violently as he conceived the project, and just as the forester turned his head, off he started at full speed.

He had a small portion of corridor to get over, then came a short flight of stairs; along he went as

swiftly as his old bones would permit him, and, to do him justice, the agility he displayed at his age, was somewhat surprising, if it had not been that extreme fear accelerated his speed beyond his natural capabilities.

He just reached the edge of the first stair as he felt Little John's hand upon his shoulder; he was preparing to descend the stairs two at a time, but the hand upon his shoulder, though it was but a touch, proved such an impetus, that vigorously ejaculating the word "ha!" he leaped the flight and would have done so, had the stairs numbered sixty instead of six; it was not much, however, and it gave him the start of his pursuer without impeding his flight. When he reached the bottom he started on, expecting, of course, to meet his preservers, but, alas, he could not see them; he roared for help, and held on at his pace with increased vigor. Much to his amazement, and more to his horror, he could hear the footsteps receding as he advanced, and with no little speed, too. He roared again for assistance. Little John had leaped the stairs as well as himself; he could fancy that his toes trod upon his heels.

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

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

Dash went the baron through a chamber, the chase at his heels; he flung the door back but it was stopped, and the two went through the doorway nearly together; every nerve and muscle did Fitz Alwine strain to keep a-head; visions of sudden death filled his imagination; he beheld in fancy the skean glittering in the air, and anticipated the agony of its entrance into his heart. He shrieked for help; he tore along. A door, partly open, was before him; he jumped at it, struck it, it flew open; he saw two persons standing there. He leaped into the arms of one of them, roaring—

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

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

"How, now, Little John! has rage so blinded you that you know not your friends? Hold your hand!" cried Robin Hood, for it was he whom the forester had so rudely seized. The sound of the voice in-

stantly restored him to comparative coolness, and after a minute's survey, to see that his ears had not deceived him, he replied—

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

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

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

"Ha! the baron! I am glad I have saved him; he will answer me a few questions respecting something I have a great desire to know," observed Robin.

"You may spare yourself the trouble of asking; I believe I have gathered all the information from him you can have occasion to seek; I know all about Allan Clare, and where the prisoners are; I was about to compel him to order their release; we were on our way to do it, and I had threatened him with instant death, if he attempted to play me false; he passed his word that he would release them, but, Norman-like, took the first opportunity to break it; on our way to the western turret, where they were confined, he suddenly darted from me, shouting for help, intending, I suppose, if he was lucky enough to get it, to make short work of me; he just got to your side in time, for in another minute he would have been in the next world."

The baron uttered a faint groan.

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

"How?" roared Little John, with rage and wonder.

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

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

"The baron only feigns insensibility; he has recognised me, and will not forget me for being your friend."

"Not if I can in any way avoid it," muttered the baron to himself.

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

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

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

"Good forester—honest yeoman! be not so blood-thirsty—so *very* bloody minded towards me! I have done you no harm, that you should take my life; your friends attacked my men, and slew many of them without provocation; the prisoners whom they took, instead of being hung as they *ou*—that is, as they *des*—I mean, as they might have expected, were spared, and sent to London to-day. I did not know you were coming to—to obtain their release; how should I? you did not let me know you were coming; I have but done as you yourself would have done, had you been situated as I was. Then be just—do not carry your evil intention into effect; shew me courtesy, and I swear that you and your friends shall depart free and unmolested; even Hal of the Keep, who has turned traitor to me, and, as an unfaithful servitor, should meet the severest punishment, I will pardon, and still retain in his present post. Therefore, good forester, as thou hast boasted of the simplicity of thy forest ways, and of the justice which guides all thy actions, forget not its stern rules in my case, and become all at once unjust where thou hast the greatest cause to exercise thy justice!"

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

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

"No, no, no!" ejaculated his lordship, quickly.

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

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

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

"I cannot—I am not prepared—do not kill me, do not!"

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

"Anything! everything!" ejaculated the baron, with intense eagerness.

"But will you keep it?"

"As I hope to be saved!"

"Let him live, Little John, his oath is registered in heaven; if he breaks it, he consigns his soul to everlasting damnation."

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

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

"Yes, indeed, you have almost frightened me to death," ejaculated the baron.

"Well, Robin, on your account I will not kill him—"

"Kind forester, many thanks," interrupted the baron, with a groan of relief.

"No; I'll not *kill* thee, but thou shalt remember my visit to Nottingham Castle."

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

"You are not going to slay; you said you would not—you will not break your word?"

"No; I do not mean to slay thee, unless thou'rt very noisy; be still, and thou wilt not be hurt."

At the baron's side hung a poniard: Little John drew it from its sheath, and its owner's countenance, at the same moment, performed a hideous grimace. Robin interposed.

"You will not break your word?" he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, very few; there is a more connected entrance from the northern wing, and it is more frequented."

"That will do—follow me—I shall need the assistance of both."

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

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

"I think we had better quit the castle," said Hal,

"ere it is too late; we hazard our safety by remaining, and at the same time, no object is to be gained."

"I am ready," said Robin.

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

"I thought you were friends," said Hal; "I saw you come together—he introduced you into the castle."

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

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

"He would not be quick enough to avoid my crab-tree staff."

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

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

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

Bidding the baron, who was dangling to and fro in the most wretched plight—adieu, they followed Hal through various apartments, until they reached the court-yard in safety and unnoticed; to pass the postern, and by the drawbridge to the town, was the next thing, and the most hazardous to be done, in case Geoffrey should have left word with the warder not to suffer Little John to pass, but it seems that, desirous of exhibiting his superior astuteness, and manage the whole affair with no more aid than absolutely necessary, he had not even thought of the precaution of ordering that no one should quit the castle but those connected with it. He had posted men at different stations, expecting to make his capture in fine style; but he reckoned without his host; for at the very time he was on his way again to the baron's apartments to consult him about Little John, that personage, accompanied by Robin Hood and Hal, were out of the castle, making towards the Mays' residence at a brisk pace.

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

"My Lord Baron! my Lord Baron! where is your lordship?"

But his lordship did not reply. Being assured

that he had not quitted his room by the route he had approached, he branched off in the direction his lord had really taken, and following the track, soon had

as Little John had raised him. Once only an accident nearly occurred: while unfastening the buckle, the weight of the baron caused it to slip through



Drawn by H. W. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.

the pleasure of seeing the baron swinging away, half dead with terror and exhaustion. Being a very strong man, Geoffrey released him with almost as much ease

with great rapidity, and if Geoffrey had not suddenly seized him by the hair, he would have fallen, and a broken limb, if not a neck, must have been the con-

sequence. Although it added to the torture, yet the act saved him; and instead of resenting it when Geoffrey had removed the gag from his mouth, he was glad to seek the support of his arm, and be led gently to his room.

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

CHAPTER V.

"Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
And desolation saddens all thy green."

Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin, all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mould'ring wall;
And, trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away thy children leave the land."

GOLDSMITH.

"Now comes the brunt, the crisis of the day!
They clash—they strive—the Caliph a troops give way—

And now they turn—they rally—at their head
A warrior—"

Bold, as if gifted with ten thousand lives,
Turns on the fierce pursuers' blades, and drives
At once the multitudinous to rent back,
While hope and courage kindle in his track;
And at each step his bloody falchion makes
Terrible vistas, through which victory breaks!

Right towards Mokanna now he cleaves his path,
In patient cleaves." T. MOORE.

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

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

The stalwart retainer, anxious to be restored to favour, used every exertion in the shape of rigid inquiry in the town, especially among those who had witnessed the conflict between himself and Little John. After many rambling stories, conjectures, and suppositions, he made out that Sir Guy of Gamwell, one of the keepers of Sherwood Forest, had a deputy answering the forester's description to a turn,—that

"He was called Little, though his limbs were large!"

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

With this intelligence, Geoffrey hastened to Fitz Alwine, laid it before him; and the account agreeing

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

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

The baron sought the King's presence, related the whole affair with highly magnified additions, and produced his prisoners, broken weapons, and two or three of his vassals as evidence. The name of Robin Hood struck the King as familiar to his ear, and, upon inquiry, found it was the same youth who had set up a claim to the earldom of Huntingdon, claiming to be a lineal descendant of Waltheof, to whom the earldom was granted by William the First; but his claim had been characterised as impudent and insolent, while the Abbot of Ramsay and Baron of Broughton was secured the title and possessions.

When Henry ascertained that the claimant and aggressor was one and the same person, he awarded, on behalf of the baron, that Robin Hood should be outlawed, and that Sir Guy of Gamwell's estates should be confiscated; himself and family driven forth; Little John, and as many of the inhabitants of Gamwell as might be suspected of having been partakers of the fray, to be hung without benefit of clergy, and their goods and estates to become the property of the King.

It so occurred that an old friend of Sir Guy's happened to learn this, and sent a messenger, post haste, to Gamwell, with the intelligence. It created as much alarm as indignation. The news spread through the village, and the villagers thronged to Sir Guy to make certain that the common rumour was not, as usual, a common liar. The distressing tidings were confirmed, and it only remained for a speedy decision in what way to meet the impending blow. Old Sir Guy, with true heartiness of spirit, determined to defend his little castle to the last, and die rather than surrender; while the villagers, with one voice, declared they would stand by him to the death. But Sir Guy had also a good estate in Yorkshire, which he held by another title, and it was the advice of Little John and Robin Hood combined, that he should, with his family, quit Gamwell Hall at once and proceed to his place in Yorkshire; because, in the event of his holding out Gamwell Hall against the King's troops, not only his own life, but the lives of the female members of the family might be involved in the conflict.

"I care not for the few years, it may be months or days, which may be taken from this withered frame," said the old Saxon, dashing an intruding tear from his cheek. "I am but like the old forest oak, which bears a few leaves liable to be scattered away by the first storm of wind that blows; and what matters it

if it so happens? it has had the glory of the sunshine of spring and summer, and the last leaf as it falls trembling to the ground amid the howling tempest, is the type of what must soon have come if the storm had not arisen. Let my children go, I would not have them stay; but on this spot I was born, and on this spot I will die! Nothing can shake my determination; the hearth of my ancestors shall be my resting-place in my death, as it was at my birth. They, staunch and true Saxons, would have died defending it, why should their descendant degenerate from the old spirit? No! let my girls away; my boys will not give up the old roof that has sheltered them for many years without a struggle; and should the worst come to the worst here, they can protect their sisters in their future home. Say no more to me; I am resolved upon it."

All arguments were vain, and when it was found to be useless to attempt to alter his determination, the efforts were given up; and as no time was to be lost, attention the most undivided was turned to the departure of the Lady of Sir Guy, her daughters, Marian, and Maud, and the female servants of the establishment. A body of the most resolute and hardiest of the villagers, devoted to the old knight's service, prepared to escort them with all the moveables of value, which it was thought necessary to remove. When everything was completed, farewells were exchanged of the most affecting nature; just ere they departed, Robin Hood hoped to say a few words to Marian alone; she had not yet appeared, and he shrewdly guessed that it was caused by a desire to give him the opportunity he so much coveted. He, therefore, hastened towards the spot where he hoped to meet her, but before he had reached it he was arrested by the hand of Maude Clare, who came from a room equipped for her journey, and with eyes swollen with recent weeping.

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

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

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

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

"Love me?"

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

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

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

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

"You are speaking now of Will Scarlet?" interrupted Robin, eagerly.

"I am."

"And you find that you love him dearer and better than you did any one before, or ever will any one again?"

"Nay, I do not say that."

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

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

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

"Dear Marian," he said, hastily approaching, and taking her hands, "I have sought you, ere you depart, that I may speak upon some things of much import to me, and of some little to you; it is not likely that we shall meet again for a time—that in itself may be short—but which, to me, must appear of painful length. I cannot bear that the words I have to say should remain unspoken for such a length of time; and, under the circumstances, I know of no time more fitting than the present to speak them, providing you will listen to them."

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

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

"Your actions lead me to believe you do."

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh! no, no, no—"

"I do not say so to increase the sadness which, dear Marian, you must feel, in common with those who have so long inhabited this sweet place, at parting from it, but I know that, while one stone clings to another, it will be defended, and while I have life, I quit not those who stand in its defence; the same Providence which has carried me unscathed through so many dangers, will not desert me in the impending one; but, setting that question aside, I cannot forget the situation in which I am placed. I have been the means, unintentionally, it is true, of bringing grief upon my uncle's house; I am, by the King's decree, outlawed; every man's hand is ordered to be turned against me; I am liable to be hanged on a branch of the first tree, or upon the gallows of any town by the common hangman; I am out of the pale of the law; I am, henceforth, homeless, an outcast, and a wanderer. Marian, you have plighted your troth to me, have sworn to be mine in good or evil, in weal or woe; but deeply as I prize the value of that oath—and no one but myself can fathom half the depth of that feeling—bitterly as I feel my degradation, its anguish becoming a thousand times more keen in thy loss—from that oath I absolve—I release you—fully and entirely. I would not have thee bound to one who is reduced below the condition of a serf, and placed upon a level with the vilest wretch in existence. I have, therefore, sought thee, Marian, to take a last farewell of thee; to renounce all hope of thy becoming mine; to leave thee as free in choice and hand as though we had never met; and to ask only that thou wilt think sometimes kindly of Robin Hood, even though he be an outlaw."

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

"I never doubted thy willingness, thy ready acquiescence to share any burden my miserable fate might cast upon me," said Robin, again taking the hand which in her momentary anger she had hastily withdrawn. "I know well thy nature would prompt thee to carry out thine oath to the letter, not so much

because it is thy oath, as loving me, you would cheerfully bear whatever good or evil were mine; and I feel myself justified in saying this, for well I know, didst thou not love me even as I do thee, thou wouldst have scorned to have given utterance to that oath, or to words which might have inferred an affection which thou didst not feel. It was with a full knowledge of this that I would take a farewell for ever of thee, or at least until such times as my fortunes may so improve, that I may again seek thy hand without endangering thy happiness. You had already determined that you would not wed until the return of your brother Allan to you, unless you had certain intelligence of his death abroad; you will keep this resolve, and 'tis easy to imagine him away, even if he returns, until I may be in a condition to claim you; it will rob our separation of much of its anguish, and will be a fond anticipation I at least will cherish of the future."

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

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

"Robin, if I loved thee not before, I should do so now, after what thou hast said. Yet I ought not to feel surprised, for at all times thou hast shown me one uniform kindness, utterly regardless how much it might at any time, compromise thine own personal happiness, and in return I can only offer a heart sincerely and truly thine; devoted to thee now more than ever, because the time has come when thou canst appreciate one heart fervently attached to thee. Thou hast done me the justice to believe my affection is not that which flourishes only in genial circumstances, but one which, like the clinging ivy, will bloom as green and freshly in the gloomiest shade as it may in the brightest sunshine. Believe, Robin, that it will remain so while I live, without change, unless a change in thee, in thy worth, should create it; but this I fear not. I am thine now and for ever while on this earth, and would be with thee in thy grief and in thy mirth, as in thy sadness and gaiety, nor cast one sigh at any strait, however painful, so thou wert by my side; but I can see the expediency of our separation, and consent to it with a painfulness which you can measure by your own feelings; yet our parting must only be for short intervals; whenever you are enabled, without danger to yourself, to see me, do not, I pray thee, let the opportunity pass. My brother may soon return; he may be enabled to get this cruel decree reversed, and we may yet be happy."

Robin smiled mournfully, and shook his head.

"We will hope for the best," he said. "My

resolve is taken. I have determined upon the line of conduct I shall pursue; circumstances may tend to give me a name foul in the mouths of talking fools and curish Normans, but, Marian, believe them not; as you love me, think not ill of me, whate'er you hear, unless you *know* me to commit a vile act, or I should acknowledge to you that I had done one; for, by our Holy Mother! I swear that, whatever deed you may challenge me with committing, I will acknowledge to you the truth, if I have done it, truly, without addition or softening."

"What is the course you intend pursuing?"

"Do not question me, dearest Marian. I believe it to be honest in its purpose, howe'er it may appear, or I would not follow it. Will that suffice thee?"

"It will; but bear in mind, Robin, that the best and most honest resolves are sometimes, by adventitious circumstances, changed in their effect, becoming actually criminal, where it was originally intended to be no more than strictly just."

"I believe so; but I must be guided by, as I am the victim of, circumstances; still, I will use every effort to prevent the effect being opposed to the motive which created it. I know that all my acts will bear the odium of outlaw stamped upon them, and will be viewed through that medium. I do not fear, however, that you will look on my deeds with the prejudiced eye of one who knows me only by that vile epithet, and will live on in the hope that the day will come when I shall have the reward of my privations and trials in the possession of thee, and of days which will pass in calm and quiet."

"I will pray that it may be so, Robin, and will hope that it may come to pass; matins nor vespers shall come, or go without the most earnest prayers for it."

"Heaven bless thee, Marian! I will no longer detain thee; they await thee at the porch. Farewell! mayst thou be as happy as I can wish thee."

Marian had thought to part bravely, and he had equally determined to do so, in the hope that, by displaying no weakness, she might bear more cheerfully a separation which he expected would be for ever; but when he twined his arms round her, and his voice trembled as he repeated the word "Farewell!" it was then her spirits gave way, and she burst into a torrent of tears, burying her face on his shoulder, sobbing as though her heart would break. He felt the hot tears throng into his eyes, although he strove hard to keep them down; he would have spoken words to soothe her, but there was an ache in his throat—a convulsive pain—as though he must choke, and he could not force a word out; he bit his quivering lip—he pressed her passionately to his breast—and bowed his head in the bitterest grief, suffering the scalding tears to rain down his cheeks, from sheer inability to check them.

The hour of parting was one of agony to both; the mental anguish they had the whole of their preceding years endured, condensed into one hour, would not have equalled the present in suffering. To each it was the separation from the last tie which bound them to the world. Marian, an orphan, her brother away, left among, comparatively, strangers, having bestowed her first love—a love to which might be added the affection for parents and brother, concentrated into one feeling, upon one who was personally and morally worthy of it, was now to be parted from him, to be among those who, though kind to her, could not feel that sympathy and interest which one who loved her would. This alone was enough to make her sad, independent of the grief of parting with the dearest object of her affections—perhaps for ever—for she

was aware of the danger of Robin's situation, although she would not acknowledge it to herself.

The mere parting from those we love, if it is only for a short time, is in itself grievous; and under all the foregoing circumstances combined, it is not to be wondered at that these two young beings should have felt heart-broken at their separation. When Robin had so far recovered as to command his voice, he said all the kind words to soothe and console her which he could utter; and, after many a passionate embrace, he imprinted one long, burning kiss upon her lips, and then led her to the porch, where the little cavalcade had assembled, and waited but for her arrival to depart. She took her place with Sir Guy's wife, daughters, and Maude, who could scarce keep her saddle for grief; the maid-servants, most of the villagers' wives, daughters, and children, forming the rear; and amidst tears and sorrowful farewells, they departed on their way to Sir Guy's estate in Yorkshire, under the escort of a small troop of men, who had resolved to protect them, or die to the last man.

A week passed away; any and every means were employed to fortify and strengthen Gamwell Hall, and such parts of the village as were likely to be subjected to the attack of Henry's soldiers. Such portions of furniture and moveables which were of value were sent with the little troop to Yorkshire, and all the rest, excepting those that were actually necessary for what domestic use they required, were enlisted in the service of defence, in blockading and strengthening the weaker parts of the Hall. The staircase, which was moveable for occasions like the present, and was usually outside the house, was removed, and rendered available to be thrust from the topmost window, if flight was actually necessary, and present a means of escape that way. They had determined to fight from chamber to chamber, and had so contrived their defences as to hold each chamber for a length of time against vastly unequal numbers; and ultimately, if compelled, to retreat to the forest, and in its intricacies defy all efforts to be routed.

As day succeeded day they became more on the alert, spies were placed on the look out, little posts—a description of barrier—were created in the village, from which to annoy the advancing enemy, and so covered by their position and connection with each other that a retreat could easily be effected from each to each, as they might be carried in turn; in fact, nothing was left undone which could make the victory by Henry's troops dearly bought; they did not attempt to conceal from themselves that they must eventually be ousted, but they determined that it should not be done without a serious cost.

They had not to learn the tender mercies of the Norman soldiery, particularly when sent on an expedition like the present; and as thorough-bred Saxons, they hated the race upon principle, and there was as much national feeling in their intention of resisting to the death the coming enemy, as there could be at the anticipated slayings, burnings, and other injuries which usually tracked their steps.

A week passed away, and their arrangements—for they had worked hard—were pretty well completed; Robin had spent greater part of his time in making arrow-heads, while he had the opportunity; he made them after the manner of his foster-father, and they required a peculiar fashioning—he laid up a good store of them; spears, swords, and weapons of offence and defence were created; and the little village of Gamwell, hitherto so quiet, became now a scene of life and bustle. All the villagers had rallied round Sir Guy Gamwell to a man, and determined, come what would, to fight his battle out manfully against

the Norman wolves; the old folks were sent away with the little household stock of any value, to those relatives who lived at no very great distance, and who were not likely to be molested; while the younger men, glad of any opportunity of having a brush with Normans, stood up in defence of their own fire-sides.

The bustle of the week's preparation had subsided, and the village had resumed its quietness, as regarded sound, but not of aspect. It seemed like the calm preceding a storm. The villagers were certain that the foe would come, and they neglected no precaution to meet them as became Saxons, who loathed even the name of Norman. Every hour they still had was occupied in constructing things of use, and converting articles made for a very different purpose into warlike instruments. Ten days had now elapsed, and no enemy had appeared. They had completed all their arrangements; not a portion of their vigilance had relaxed; and now that they were unoccupied in producing anything but arrows, they grew impatient for the arrival of the foe. At length their impatience was set at rest by the arrival of one of the scouts placed in the forest, who reported the approach of a troop of horse soldiers. The tocsin was sounded; the villagers flew to their arms and to the different posts assigned them with a readiness which displayed the discipline they had undergone; they ensconced themselves behind their barriers; and by the time the troops arrived at the village, there was not a man to be seen.

The leader of the soldiers, who noticed that no one was in sight, chuckled to himself that he should be able to carry his orders into effect ere the villagers had a chance of resistance. He knew the Saxons well; knew that they fought fiercely, and made reprisals upon the Normans whenever they could; that they never submitted patiently to any decree of the king's, if they could avoid or evade it; and therefore he made up his mind, from the nature of his commission, that there would be a little hard fighting ere he could carry it into effect; consequently, he was glad to observe that there was no one in sight to give an alarm. He had fifty men under his command; and the villagers, with the help of a few friends from a short distance round, numbered above a hundred: thus they doubled the number of their foe, were individually equal to them in courage and determination, and held without comparison the best position. The Norman leader, however, little dreamed that such was the case; and acting upon his first supposition, gave the word to the men to quicken their speed, and they began winding up the hill towards the first barrier at an accelerated pace, breaking their order in the desire to advance as quickly as they could. They had nearly gained the summit of the hill, and were beginning to speculate upon the amount of spoil they were likely to obtain, when they were thrown into check by a sudden and unexpected shower of arrows, bolts, and stones from slings: it was so unlooked for by the soldiers, and such was their astonishment, that it was repeated ere they returned a shaft.

The loss of several of their men, however, awakened them to a sense of their position, and with a tremendous shout they charged furiously the first barrier; they were met manfully, and stoutly resisted; the Saxons from their covers doing great execution without the loss of one man. The Normans soon perceived, from this well arranged plan of attack, that they had been expected, foresaw there was nothing left for them to do but to fight desperately or retreat, and the thoughts of retiring before Saxon villagers was not to be entertained for a moment, while a chance remained of conquering them; they

therefore continued their attack on the first barrier with ardour, and their numbers soon enabled them to carry it; but they soon found there was another, which they also carried, to be stopped by a third. Their numbers had been considerably reduced, and they could not discover that any of their bolts had taken effect; while the Saxons, most of them expert archers, brought down three or four at every discharge. The men were rather discouraged at this, for their comrades were dropping round them, and they had no chance of getting fairly at the enemy; the leader also perceived this, and ordered a false retreat, with the hope of drawing the villagers from their covers, and then, suddenly rallying, return to the charge and rout them. He put this *ruse de guerre* into action; the men commenced an orderly retreat, and they retreated some distance without gaining their object; but as they were beginning to believe this also to be a failure, a great shout announced the approach of the villagers, who appeared running towards them, seemingly in great disorder, with their bows bent ready for use.

"Keep on the retreat a little while longer!" roared the leader to his men. "We shall catch them in the trap as beautifully as we can wish. Keep on—keep on!"

They did keep on, and the villagers came on with the same apparently headlong speed as before; but, to the rage and mortification of the leader, they succeeded in obtaining the barrier from which they had previously been dislodged, and, stopping there, discharged a flight of missives, which told fearfully upon his men. Cursing every saint he had ever heard of, he dashed back in a paroxysm of fury to charge the barrier again, followed by his men, who began rather to dislike this sort of warfare; but he was suddenly stopped in his career by a shower of bolts, one of which pierced his brain, and another killed his steed—horse and rider fell simultaneously dead upon the ground. The men, dispirited by their previous ill success, were entirely discouraged by the loss of their leader. Two of them dismounted, and disengaged him from the horse, and throwing him across the saddle of a riderless steed, mounted, and with the remainder of the troop retreated in good earnest.

The villagers sent a shower of arrows and a shout of success after their discomfited foes, and then, advancing from their cover, proceeded to bury those whom they had slain, and make prisoners of those who were wounded. Two only of their party were wounded; while on the opposite side, although the fight had not, from the first attack to the last retreat, averaged more than twenty minutes, the killed and wounded were eighteen. The villagers were in high glee at their success, and in the height of their exhilaration would have sent for their families back again; but Little John, who had arranged everything, had obtained and exercised a command over them, restrained them, and explained clearly to them that this was only a prelude of what was to come; that ere another week, perhaps a couple of days, were over their head, they might expect the return of the troopers, with the addition of probably a hundred or a hundred and fifty to their number; and that so far from relaxing their vigilance, they ought to redouble it, and prepare to meet the attack of treble the number of those they had recently defeated.

His arguments carried conviction with them, and the villagers resolved to follow his advice. The wounds of those who had suffered in the conflict were attended to, and a few of those villagers, who had friends and relatives, staunch Saxons, dwelling within a few miles of the place, who would be glad to join in the fray, were despatched to fetch them. The

barriers were added to and strengthened in those parts where they had proved deficient in the recent attack. More weapons were made, a store of provisions laid in; in short, nothing was left undone either to enable them to hold out some time, gain another victory, or insure a well regulated retreat. The arrival of thirty volunteers from neighbouring parts added to the sanguine hopes of success which the villagers entertained. Meetings were held every evening in the Hall, in which every possible mode of attack which the Normans could make, and the means of preventing its success, were discussed; every casualty, accident, or ruse, they might, could, or would make, was thought of, and plans proposed to counteract them in all their forms; and, in case of eventual ill success, the means of retreat and general rendezvous.

The mornings were employed in practising, disciplining, weapon making, and in exercising retreats and sallies; sentries were posted and scouts were placed as before in the forest, to note the approach of the enemy, and so arranged that although the troop might, when first discovered, be six miles from Gamwell, yet in less than a quarter of an hour the besiegers would be aware of their approach by a series of primitive telegraphing. A new and more extensive barrier was built, and placed nearer the brow of the hill, as after the last affray all disguise was useless. They exercised at the target, and it was at these exercises that Robin Hood astonished them by the extraordinary ability he displayed; to pierce the centre of the bull's eye without swerving the breadth of a hair, was a matter of the greatest ease to him. Little John, an accurate as well as a powerful archer, several times hit the centre of the bull's eye; Robin following each time, asserted he would split Little John's arrow as it stood there, and each time he kept his word; however, Little John several times did the same thing, and then ensued a trial of skill between them, Robin Hood choosing the object to be fired at. He obtained a willow wand, and stripping off every leaf but one, which grew at the end, he stuck it in the ground upright, so as to let the leaf wave in the wind; he then bade Little John stand at one hundred and fifty yards and hit the leaf; Little John said it could not be done.

"Will you try and do it?" asked Robin.

"I will try it, but shall not succeed, nor you, nor any one else, either," returned Little John.

"We shall see," said Robin, laughing.

"It can't be done," said Little John; "I know what can be done with a bow, and what can't; and that can't."

"With a quarter-staff you may know what can be done," replied Robin, "that I don't dispute; but with a bow you do not know, as I will show you, if you miss that leaf."

"You are a better archer if you hit that leaf, Robin, than I take you for, aye, or the world owns," remarked Little John, preparing to take aim at it.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Robin contemptuously, "'tis nothing."

Little John took a steady aim—a long cautious aim—he let his arrow fly, and it went far beyond the wand, but so near, that many cried he had hit it.

"Not quite," said Robin, laughing, pointing to the leaf, which was still fluttering in the wind; "now, Little John, I'll show what can be done with a bow—one, two, three." Away went the arrow as he uttered the word three, and tore the leaf from the wand. A shout announced his success.

"Bravely done," said Little John, "'tis the finest aim I ever saw."

"I can do better, Little John; any archer may do that; but I will show you something which not any nor every archer can do."

"I should be glad to see anything surpass that."

"You shall, then."

A similar wand to the last was firmly placed in the earth, by Robin's direction, a leaf pendant about a foot from the top; a thin slip of fine cloth was affixed to the top of the wand and to that a small pigeon; two hundred yards he stood from these objects, and while Little John could count ten, he cut the leaf, then the strip of cloth, liberating the bird, and shot the latter ere it had flown five yards. Little John, accustomed as he was to good archery, was surprised at Robin's skill, and the surrounding villagers were perfectly astonished; but their admiration was raised to an extraordinary height when they saw him, from the same spot, split the wand, and do with similar ease several feats of archery apparently incredible. The villagers congratulated themselves upon having such an ally, for the importance of a sure aim, at particular moments, was evident to all; and when Little John explained to them, as many had a previous opportunity of judging, that he was almost as expert at all other manly feats, their respect for him was raised in a proportionable degree.

Time wore on, and as yet they were unmolested, nearly a fortnight elapsing. The hot month of July was near its close, and again they were ready, in every point of view, for their enemy. Mounds of earth were thrown up, stratagems and plans conceived, and every precaution employed to ensure their success. They expected their foe to arrive in the morning, concluding they would stay a night to refresh in Nottingham; and each morning, as it came, beheld them in readiness for attack.

One night, two of the villagers returning from Mansfeld, whither they had been to purchase articles for their friends, brought intelligence of the arrival of a body of about two hundred men from Nottingham; and it was immediately seen that they had come the fourteen miles that afternoon, with the intention of resting the night at Mansfeld, and proceeding the short five miles to Gamwell the ensuing morning, in order to commence the attack fresh and unfatigued by the journey. The villagers had staid long enough to ascertain that the troop would remain all night, and then hastened to their friends to communicate their news. It caused some little stir; but the feeling soon subsided. The most vigilant betook themselves to watch during the night, being relieved occasionally, and every one took as much rest as they could obtain, in order that their energies might be devoted to the morning's work unfettered by fatigue.

The sun had scarce shown his face in the east before every man had assembled to hear a mass said by Friar Tuck, who was still among them, and who looked forward to the attack with all the eagerness of a boy expecting some favourite pleasure. Then a hasty meal was taken; which, when despatched, Little John called the villagers into a circle, and addressed them.

"Friends," he commenced, "I have a few words to say before we seek our different posts. I am one of few words—talking comes not in my way; different men have different powers; mine consists in the use of the quarter-staff, and perhaps hitting a mark with an arrow; and perhaps others who can't do that, may have the gift of speech; I confess I am not expert at it; however, perhaps, what I have to say may do as well as though it was fashioned with better words."

"The enemy are coming; now don't, on any occasion, suffer yourselves to be drawn out of your covers,

and don't give up one, until you can't hold it any longer; when that is the case, remember what you intended to do in the event of its occurring, and do it quietly, without hurry or skurry; if you do, you will forget something of importance, which will render your plans useless; nothing can be well done which is attempted in a hurry. Contest every inch of ground—remember you are fighting against NORMANS—the dogs! Give them bolts, shafts, stones, and staffs for every inch of ground they take; be cool, strike home; when you strike, make no miss, or your own life will pay the forfeit of your error. Show them that every foot of our land is worth a Norman life. Keep cool and firm, and they will pay dearly for any advantage they may obtain. Hurrah for Gamwell and Saxon hearts!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the villagers with one burst, each grasping his weapon more firmly; their gleaming eyes and determined countenances expressing their stern resolution of fighting to the last. The shout had scarcely subsided, when Robin Hood, with a burst of enthusiasm which he could not control, bounded into the place Little John had a moment previous occupied, and, in a voice teeming with excitement, exclaimed—

"Friends, if ye need more than what Little John has said, to keep you in front of the foe while a hope of success remains, remember that ye are fighting for your hearths—for the roof which was built to shelter your wives, children, and all most dear to you; remember that ye are opposed to the Normans, who have bowed ye to the earth and trod upon your necks—who have tyrannised over the weak and defenceless—who never extend their hand but to burn, slay, and destroy! You cannot forget that ye are Saxons; you cannot forget what Hereward le Wake did for his Saxon brethren—how he hunted, defeated, and foiled the vile Normans, though opposed by thrice his numbers; you will remember that this is the home of your childhood—the dwelling-place of those who preceded you—of those whom you love, honour, and respect; and if you lose it through weakness or irresolution, you make yourselves, your relatives, homeless. And who will be the cause? Normans! You will fight to the last?"

"We will!" burst from the surrounding throng, with one accord.

"Now then, let them come and do their worst. We are brothers, who will fight for home, for each other, side by side and back to back, nor murmur that, in opposing a Norman foe, our back may find a resting-place on the green turf, and our death glance may light on the broad blue sky above! Be Saxons, in the remembrance of the wrongs done by these tyrants to our once smiling land; be fathers, when you think of your homes, your beloved wives and children and sons—when you remember those whom age has made sacred, and look to you for the support and love which they gave you in your childhood, and which their age denies them obtaining for themselves. Think of these things. You are fighting for your birth-place; and, as Little John has said, make these Norman curs learn that every foot of our native soil is worth a Norman life. Now, brother Saxons, a prayer for our success, a cheer for our birthplace and for Saxon hearts!"

A tremendous cheer followed the conclusion of Robin's speech, and in an instant the men knelt down and repeated a prayer, after 'luck, for their success; then, with one accord, sprung to their feet, and made the air resound with the cheer which they gave for their homes and their nation. Then they separated, and each party took the portion allotted to them,

while they rehearsed their plans and means of counteracting those of the Normans. The spies had been withdrawn from the forest, and placed in the direction of Mansfield. About three hours after sunrise, the blast of a horn announced the approach of the enemy. The scouts retired and entered the barriers, and soon, as when attacked before, no living soul was to be seen.

The enemy approached. It was easily seen from the continued line, as they poured round the wind of the road, that the villagers had not exaggerated their number. They continued arriving until about three hundred horsemen were assembled at the foot of the hill which was, from the direction facing Mansfield, necessary to be surmounted ere Gamwell, which lay in a vale, could be entered. After a short consultation, a party of troops commenced galloping up the hill; a second party dismounted, and followed under cover of the horsemen; a third party made a detour to the right, and a fourth to the left.

This manœuvre had been anticipated, and was counteracted accordingly; at the right and left wings, defences had been constructed behind the quantity of trees which grew straggling on the brow of the hill. The interstices had been filled with shrubs and brushwood, with such a natural effect, that the men who were advancing on the left of these points—not expecting they would be anticipated—congratulated themselves upon having so good a cover to form behind as they reached the top, and from which to advance to the attack in regular order. They were rather staggered at receiving, when they approached near enough, a well-directed discharge of bolts, which did not come whistling about their ears for nothing. Several men, as well as horses, fell. The bolts were immediately followed by a flight of arrows, also so well directed as to take considerable effect upon them. Many of the horses, with arrows sticking in them, grew unmanageable, and, in spite of all their riders' efforts, plunged, reared, kicked, and ultimately dashed back from whence they came, tending to throw the party into confusion, which was added to by a third discharge of missives, before they were able to return it. The disorder from the restiveness of the horses became so great, that they retreated down the hill amid a flight of arrows and a shout of derision.

When they arrived from whence they had been dispatched, they found the men who had advanced on the right had met with similar ill success. It was then determined that these points must be carried on foot, as indeed every part, for the centre was so ably defended, that the double party attacking it could not gain an inch of ground, while the same means were resorted to of wounding the horses and rendering them unmanageable; in their riders' efforts to prevent their turning and riding down those who were following, they were utterly unable to return the heavy fire to which they were exposed; they grew confused, and shafts were still pouring on the horses; the creatures, smarting with pain and fright, resisting all efforts to control them, turned, plunged among those who were unwounded, producing disorder, and goaded by the arrows, plunged madly among those on foot, carrying confusion among them, and eventually compelling a retreat of the whole party to the foot of the hill.

It was now seen the horses were at present useless, and the men, dismounted, were divided into three parties, and, shielded by their bucklers, advanced steadily again on the three points, while a party remained at the foot, ready to advance when the barrier was carried. Although exposed to a tremendous shower of missiles, the Normans kept on, undaunted, their bucklers protecting them considerably from the

shafts and bolts directed at them. They bore their bills in their hand, ready for instant charge as soon as they gained the barrier, the party taking the centre soon gained the barrier, which was about seven feet

commenced scaling, so close to each other, that all efforts to prevent them were useless—and indeed it was not their intention—for so soon as they scaled the barrier, the Saxons retired in a body, in as



Drawn by H. W. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.

high, and pierced in all parts with loopholes, from which to send their missiles. When the Normans had reached it, they gave a shout, spread themselves, and

regular order as can be conceived, keeping up a shower of arrows and bolts on the Normans, and not allowing them to come near enough to use their bills.

They fell back on their second barrier, those on the right and left wings doing the same by a preconcerted signal. The Normans pushed on, but many of them fell into deep pits, dug for their reception by the villagers, who, when they had gained their second barrier, observed the remainder of the Normans scaling their first barrier, and pushing on vigorously for the second. Here the Saxons made a more determined stand; but the Normans, accustomed to hard fighting, dashed on, regardless of the weapons of death flying round them, and, attacking the barrier with desperate fury, scaled it, and were soon hand-to-hand with the Saxons. The conflict was fierce and deadly while it lasted; but soon the signal was again heard, and again the Saxons retreated in regular order, keeping their foes at bay by the terrible execution their arrows and bolts committed. The point on which they were falling was the last barrier—it was the most extensive—it was almost a natural one—it was formed by a sinking, or deep slope in the hill before it. Where this slope rose again, there was a long ridge, or natural mound, behind which the hill descended suddenly and precipitously; this point had been assisted by all the artificial auxiliaries which invention could furnish, and it was resolved to make here a determined stand, ere they fell back on Gamwell Hall, which was the "*dernier resort*."

The Saxons came in full retreat to this barrier—they gained it without losing a man—and the Normans followed at the top of their speed, shouting their war-cry. Occasionally, as a shower of bolts came to intercept them, they threw themselves on their faces, were up again, continuing the next instant with the same speed. But they had now a greater difficulty to encounter than they had hitherto experienced. The barrier was only practicable from the two ends, as a deep trench had been cut beneath it, completely preventing them, without ladders, scaling it; at each of the ends a slight barrier of wood-work had been run up, and behind these were stationed a strong body of the best archers. To have run rashly and attacked this would have been the height of madness, as it must have involved a great many lives, without any positive good being gained. They stopped, therefore, and the whole party of the Normans assembled to learn what plan of attack would be the most feasible. The captain of the troops took a survey. There lay Gamwell beneath him—for he stood high on the hill, and each side of this hill was thickly studded with trees, presenting an impassable barrier for horses, and by no means a safe pathway for the men. Calling one of the men, he enquired if any of them knew the locality, and was answered by the presence of one, who said he had a relative in Gamwell, whom he constantly visited, and therefore he was well acquainted with every part of it.

"Art thou a Saxon, knave?" demanded the leader with knitted brows.

"No," returned the man, "I am a Norman."

"Is thy relative with these rebellious churls?"

"Yes, he is a Saxon, who married a half-sister of mine."

"And you know this place well?"

"I do, every part."

"Can you guide my men to yon village by any other path than this?"

"Yes, there is one at the foot of the hill; it winds into part of the forest, and branches out suddenly near Gamwell Hall."

"Which is Gamwell Hall?"

"That building to the left, on the rising ground, nearly surrounded by trees; that is where old Sir Guy Gamwell lives."

"The old rebellious Saxon churl! Pfaith, Henry

might have given me an easier task than dislodging these dogs from their kennel. Now, knave, thou'rt sure thou speakest truth?"

"You will find it so."

"Probably, but I have no great inclination to fall into an ambush, I can tell thee; and if I thought thou didst intend falsely, thou shouldst have worse than a dog's death."

"I guided you here truly."

"Truly thou didst; but why not show us this same path you speak of at first?"

"Because the Saxons would have seen the movement and prevented it accordingly. A handful of men can command that pass against a thousand."

"Is it at the foot of the hill?"

"Yes, to the left." The man described its situation and bearing accurately. The captain of the troop appeared satisfied, and gave orders to a party of men to hold themselves in readiness to take the path, under the guidance of this man, while he held the Saxons in play in the position they still held, in order that they might not fathom the manœuvre he intended to make. But in this hope he was mistaken, for the guide's relative happened to perceive his brother-in-law among the Normans, and afterwards in close converse with the Norman chief. He communicated to Little John his suspicions of foul play, and the path was immediately thought of. It had been left unguarded, and thirty of the men, under the command of two of the Gamwells, departed at once to hold it in possession; while Little John, calling Robin to his side, for they were both in this cover, said to him—

"Could you hit any object with certainty on the summit of this hill?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Well, then, you see that Norman just to the left of him with the tall plume—he is a traitorous rascal, who, I fully believe, is about to lead some of those fellows who are going over the brow of the hill by the forest path to Gamwell—bring him down for me."

An arrow was in an instant fitted to his bow, discharged, and they saw the man leap high into the air, fall, and heard his death-shriek. A shout was raised by the Saxons, which so enraged the leader, that, dividing his men into two parties—first recalling those who had been despatched to follow the forest path—he placed one of them under the command of a trooper, and taking the other, determined to carry each end of the barrier by assault. When his directions and arrangements were complete, he gave the word, and they dashed off from the summit of the hill to each end; they battered at it with their bills; some clambered up only to be thrust back dead; but the earth being fresh, the stakes, although driven firmly in, gave way beneath the united attack of the men, and fell with a tremendous crash, burying several of the Saxons beneath it. The Normans came leaping over it shouting, but were met by a forest of spears and a tremendous discharge of bolts from the cross-bows; twice they were repulsed with a serious loss, but they renewed the charge, each time with redoubled vigour; and the Saxons, whose numbers were vastly inferior, were compelled to give way. But they did so gradually and in good order; they fought with stern desperation; they knew it was life or death with them, and fully they carried out Little John's command, that they should make a Norman life pay for every foot they gave. Both ends of the barrier were now carried, and the Normans poured into the breach, shouting and fighting madly; while the Saxons uttered no sound, but contracting their line gradually, soon presented a front which the Normans

could not, after repeated efforts, break. The Saxons still kept falling back upon the village and in the direction of the Hall, whose doors, under the guardianship of four men, stood ready to receive them, and close as the last Saxon entered. They were now nearly up to the cottages, and they were compelled either to make a last effort there, or near Gamwell Hall. There was little time for decision; the Normans were pressing on, and the trooper, who had the command of half the troop, had, by personal strength, forced his way through a part of the Saxon's front, the gap he had made being closely filled by his men, fighting with desperation in order to secure the advantage they had obtained. The Saxons gave ground, grew disordered—a panic appeared to seize those opposed to this trooper. They retreated rapidly, oppressing the others. The Normans saw their opportunity, followed it, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing many of them in open flight; they gave a shout of triumph, when suddenly a voice exclaimed, in a tone which was clearly heard above the din of war—

"Hold, Saxons! will you shrink like beaten hounds before these base Norman reptiles? He who is a true Saxon, and a man, follow me!"

The voice was Little John's. He strode among his enemies, hewing down all who opposed him, followed by a body of his friends, whom death could not daunt. So resistless was their attack upon the Normans, and so unexpected, that in their turn they gave way. When those who were flying saw this, they returned with shame on their visages, and determined to retrieve their cowardice by advancing or falling where they stood. Little John had only eyes for one man—the trooper who had nearly caused the rout of the Saxons. Little John knew him at a glance; it was the same trooper who had played him the trick at Nottingham—Geoffrey Gurthfeld, or Vanterie, which was his proper name. Towards him did he strive to get. Short was the conflict with each Norman who stood in his path; he cut them down like reeds. At length they met. Geoffrey's eyes glistened with savage pleasure as they lighted on his former conqueror, and with a huge battle-axe in his hand, he advanced quickly towards him, shouting—

"Base Saxon churl! I have met thee again, even as I could have wished, as deadly foes; this to thy brain, hind!"

But Little John had no intention to stand to be slaughtered by the battle-axe of Geoffrey, and when the latter had flourished it round, and it was in the act of descending, he sprang within its circle, seized it as it fell, and placing his foot with a sudden dash against his opponent's breast, wrenched the weapon from his grasp, and twirling it round, flung it far from him.

"Thou'rt a Norman," he cried, "and would be guilty of any base act, but I will not follow your example; to thy blade as I to mine. Now we are evenly matched," he concluded, as Geoffrey drew his sword—a long two-handed weapon, which he carried at his back. Little John was similarly armed, and to their combat they went in terrible earnest; they both played the quarter-staff well, and were consequently the more expert in wielding these huge swords; but the extraordinary superiority which Little John possessed in the use of one weapon befriended him in the use of the other. Both knew the other's life hung on their success, and they fought accordingly; the clashing and din they made caused many to suspend their fighting and look on these two. Dire was the strife. For some time they fought without either appearing to have the advantage, although they

had hacked and hewed at each other with the greatest perseverance. Little John had no intention of playing with his foe—no thoughts of lookers-on affected him, he knew his presence was needed elsewhere as well as here, and the sooner he got rid of his opponent the better. Every advantage that could offer he took as soon as it exhibited itself, and had succeeded in giving Geoffrey two tremendous gashes in the arm, which bled profusely; Geoffrey knew they would render him weak and powerless, therefore he fought harder than ever, grew desperate, then struck wildly. Little John made a feint of giving an opportunity for a slash, and when Geoffrey caught eagerly at it, only to miss it, he whirled his sword round his head, and struck with all his force; the sword descended like lightning upon Geoffrey's shoulder, entered, and clove him to the chine.

He fell dead without a groan, while both Norman and Saxon, who were looking on, stood aghast, lost in wonder at the tremendous blow and its terrible effect. Little John stayed not to look on the evidence of his success, but, waving his bloody sword over his head, he strode through the ranks like the God of War, devastation and death marking his path. He gained a small eminence, and, looking round, perceived that his friends were being encompassed by the Normans, and that a continued opposition would be a fruitless waste of life. There was little time to be lost, but he could not help delaying a minute to look with pride on the gallant manner his little band of Saxons stood in opposition to twice their number. He looked to see if he could distinguish Robin Hood, and soon observed him fighting at the head of the little party which had just returned from the forest path, whither they had been sent by Little John to prevent the Normans entering Gamwell by that route, and he saw him attempt and accomplish a feat necessary to be done—which was, to turn the wing of the Normans, and prevent its getting between them and their path to Gamwell Hall. He had seen enough to tell him how the fight was going, and what must be the result, unless they effected a retreat to the Hall speedily.

The Saxons had fought nobly, but it was a hopeless task to resist hand to hand double their number; so Little John blew the blast of his horn, which was to tell them to gather together and retreat to the Hall. He then plunged again into the fight, making terrible havoc in the enemy with his two-handed weapon. His call was obeyed. The Saxons fell back, united; and, before the Normans were prepared for any such act, the whole body of them were retreating on the Hall. The manœuvre was beautifully executed, and the surprise of their foes gained them the advantage of a short distance; however, they were followed very quickly, but not quick enough. The foremost Norman, as the Saxons gained the Hall, was shot down by an arrow, the second stumbled over him, and then the gates were closed and barricaded, enclosing the Saxons safely in the walls of Gamwell Hall.

Here the Normans found themselves baffled; but they cut at the doors, which were of stout oak, with their axes and bills, making the place echo with their blows; but this had been expected, and was met accordingly by the rolling of several huge stones from a window above, which crushed several of the Normans beneath them. They then thought fit to depart from the door, and wander round the grounds to endeavour to ascertain a practicable point, but, in doing this, they were exposed to the fire of the Saxons from the loopholes; and, as they already numbered near a hundred killed and wounded, it was thought proper not to expose any more life than was absolutely needful; the men were recalled, and a band of a

hundred men were established all round the Hall, and so placed as to be beyond the reach of the Saxons' aim. The captain then, with the remainder, entered the village, but found every place empty. All was silent and deserted; cottage after cottage they entered and ransacked in search of spoil, but there was nothing left for them to take. Their rage and mortification on discovering this may be better conceived than described. They had relied upon finding provisions, but not a morsel could they obtain, and a few were sent into the forest to find a buck or two, while the others made arrangements to cook them when they did come. They spent that day in the village, and towards night the band who had surrounded Gamwell Hall were relieved, and took their share of what provision there was for them; the commander, on finding that all the villagers were in Gamwell Hall, determined upon attacking it in the night; some rude engines were constructed to force the doors, and they now only waited for night to set in to commence the attack.

The scanty meal which the Normans were compelled to take, was vastly different to the refreshments of which the Saxons partook; they fed heartily, and washed down their food with draughts of good old ale; they threw themselves on the floor to rest after the fatigues of the day, and prepare for the next attack, which Little John had prognosticated would take place in the night, as being the most feasible time for it. After they had taken several hours' rest, and it drew near the time for the exercise of their vigilance, they went over their numbers to ascertain their loss, and found it less than they expected; all their wounded they had brought with them, for as fast as any of their friends fell they were passed to the rear, and carried up to the Hall; it had been arranged that such should be done, and it was put into execution when the time arrived for its application. There were twelve killed, and twenty-three wounded. The wounded were placed where they might be carried off safely in the event of the necessity of a retreat; arrangements were then made, and every precaution taken to enable them to hold out this place to the last. As night drew on, they each took themselves to the posts assigned them, and waited in silence and patience the attack.

"They have begun their savage work," said Robin Hood to Little John, pointing through a loophole to a red glare illuminating the surrounding objects; "they have kindled the torch, and the cottages blaze readily."

"Aye, it is so; they have found a way to level to the earth in a few minutes that which has employed many weary hours to erect. The only fear I have of not keeping this hall against treble the number of yon reptiles is, they will put the torch to it; and there's too much wood about the old house to let them do it quietly, without our having roasted joints."

"But you have provided against such an attempt?"

"As well as our means will allow; but I fear, if the fiends persist, they will succeed in their attempt. Our only chance is to keep them well employed in warding off our shafts."

"Look there! there is another cottage in flames. Ha! another. Dogs! fiends! what devilish spirit incites them to this hellish work?"

"It is their nature. When they have burnt and destroyed all they can there, they will be here to slay and slaughter. What a glare! The whole village must be in a blaze!"

It was in truth a glare; everything in its vicinity was rendered plainly distinguishable by its light; and the dark shadows of the Normans, as they passed to

and fro doing their evil work, were noted by the Saxons, who gazed on the destruction of their homes, beneath whose roof they were born, with feelings of intense excitement. Had they not been restrained by Little John, they would have sallied forth and attacked them.

"Wait until daylight," he said. "If we can only hold this shelter till the morning, I will wager my life we will yet defeat, drive them off, make them return to him who sent them, dishonoured and beaten."

"Why not attempt it now?" asked one still writhing under the sight of his cottage in flames.

"Because at present their number is too great to cope with; they would triumph in carrying the point we must prevent them obtaining. By the morning I fully hope their number will be considerably lessened; they will be worn out with fatigue, and will offer an easy conquest to us, who will be comparatively fresh, and who have the aid of the excitement which the desire of revenging so many wrongs must create. Reserve your best energies for that effort, and I have little doubt we shall meet with the success we so much covet. Were we to attempt it now, certain failure must be the result; for ere we could be amongst them, we should meet them coming here for the purpose they have just completed there."

"You are right," said Robin Hood; "here they come."

Shouts were now heard advancing in the direction of the Hall, while a hasty glance from the loopholes showed them the Normans running along bearing lighted brands.

"To your posts! to your posts!" cried Little John; "let every man single a Norman with his bolt and take a sure aim ere he shoots; throw not a shaft or bolt away. Robin, I know your aim; keep by my side, and fetch me down those I point out."

Robin did as he was requested, and in silence they awaited the near approach of the Normans. They were not so headlong in their speed that they came up close to the gates of the Hall to meet with the same reception they had received in the morning, but they came sufficiently near to throw their lighted torches against the door; they would have soon kindled it into a flame, but this had been foreseen, and water was poured from buckets through a loophole just over the doorway, and extinguished the torches. Fresh ones were thrown to meet the same reception; still they persisted. One fellow was particularly active and expert at throwing them; Little John raised a cross-bow to his shoulder, and taking a deliberate aim, killed him on the spot. A general discharge followed this from all the available portions of the Hall, and a few of the Normans who had too heedlessly exposed their persons met their death. Strips of pine-wood were then lighted and discharged at every inlet, but a very few of them took effect. Another discharge was made by the Saxons with good effect, and proved a lesson to their foe to keep as much as possible their bodies from being seen. A silence for a short time reigned, then a shout announced the arrival of the Norman chief with the greatest body of men bringing the engine to force the door;—the men who had already attempted to effect an entrance having acted without orders, only under the influence of a feeling created by the pleasure they experienced in having fired the little cottages.

The first engine they brought consisted of a long beam of wood, the top end of which was rudely capped with some iron agricultural machine, and made a tolerable substitute for a battering-ram, and they now advanced to put its powers into execution. Little John saw that it was necessary if possible to prevent

this, and a thought suddenly striking him of a means, he said to Robin—

"Can you depend on your aim in such a light as this?"

"If I can see my object."

"That's enough. Do you see that Norman to the left of those four who are hauling that beam along?"

"I do; it is their leader."

"Send an arrow through his Norman trunk."

"He is encased in mail; I tried him several times to-day; he is armed to the chin. If I can see his face long enough to take an aim, I'll bring him down."

"See—there is a chance now—the torch is flashing in his face."

"Let me stand where you are, I am afraid the edge of the loophole will catch the end of my arrow and alter my aim. Ha! he has turned his head away."

"Sdeath! do not let him escape—our safety mainly depends on his death. He is too shrewd for our welfare."

"Stay, he is walking to a point more opposite me—so, 'tis well; now, Norman, whisper your prayers."

Robin raised his bow, extended it—Little John watched him with nervous excitement; he saw the hand holding the bow move backwards and forwards slowly, as if following some object, presently it became stationary, he held his breath; twang went the bow-string, the arrow was gone; he gazed on Robin's face as he followed the course of the arrow with his eager eyes, a smile broke over his features, and Little John knew he had hit his mark.

"The Norman is down," said Robin.

"Then you have saved us," said Little John.

He sprang to the loophole, and saw that it was as Robin had said. The Norman was down—a body of troopers were surrounding him—the engine was abandoned—and all seemed confusion among them.

"Now, my Saxon hearts!" roared Little John, in a voice which was heard in every chamber in the house; "now, give them a shower of bolts and shafts. Down with the Norman dogs!"

The Saxons, who had looked with eyes of anxious, eager interest, upon the proceedings of the Normans, and were prepared for the word of command to counteract their effects, raised a shout as the deep tones of Little John's voice fell upon their ears, and each singling out a Norman for an aim, they discharged together the missives with which their separate weapons were provided. The effect was terrible—curses and shrieks mingled in the air, and in another minute the unscathed and slightly wounded Normans retreated behind the trees and various coverts which the locality afforded, leaving the dying and the dead upon the spot where they had fallen. Disastrous as had been the late discharge upon them, they still determined to leave no means untried of ousting the Saxons from their stronghold. A council was held among the trees, and various methods proposed to obtain their objects; many of them adopted were put into execution, only to prove entire failures, accompanied by a sacrifice of life. At length a plan was proposed, and the Normans set about in good earnest to put it into execution.

The Hall had been surrounded by bands of troops, stationed in every spot likely to afford them a safe shelter from the arrows of their foes, and in the choice of these coverts they had been compelled to be scrupulously cautious; for did a Norman show a portion of his garment, a feather even, to the besieged, his life was sure to pay the forfeit of his temerity; they therefore paid sufficient deference to the powers of the Saxons as archers, to keep closely hidden, only watching every inlet and outlet with the strictest

scrutiny, in order, if possible, to repay the favours they were continually receiving.

One of these bands was stationed in a thicket of trees behind the Hall; they were principally pine trees. It was proposed to fire them, and—as they grew sufficiently near—to sever the trunks, so that the burning mass might fall upon the building: the idea was eagerly caught at as soon as communicated, and the men being prepared with means to kindle the trees, bills and axes to sever them, proceeded amidst acclamations of delight and anticipations of revenge to carry out the proposal.

This was a manoeuvre entirely unexpected by Little John and the Saxons. Their foes had been seen to guide to the back of the Hall, and their movements were followed with celerity, in order to counteract whatever stratagems might be exercised by them; Little John and his friends were not long left in the dark respecting their intention, for several torches were kindled, and the bearers of them proceeded to climb the trees, with the purpose of lighting the branches, while those below commenced hacking and hewing the stems, even while their companions were upon them, in order that not an instant's time should be wasted in putting their manoeuvre into execution. No sooner was their intention detected, when Little John cried—

"By the Mass, we shall be unkenelled! The hell-hounds have found a way to draw us out; the trees will fall upon the roof, and in a few minutes the whole building will be in flames. Robin Hood, bring down some of those fellows with their torches! At'em, friends! Cross-bowmen, clear those dogs from the root of the trees! Spare nor bolt nor shaft! Our safety depends on clearing them away! Down with Norman wolves!"

Little John set the example by keeping up an incessant discharge of bolts from a cross-bow, not always with the effect intended; while Robin Hood's shafts never left the bow without carrying death with them. Every loophole, window, or opening, available for the discharge of their weapons, was manned by the Saxons, and the slaughter of their foes was comparatively terrific. But the Normans, urged on by rage and the hope of revenge, unheeded the deadly discharges, the loss of their companions, or the almost certain destruction which exposure entailed upon them, persevered in their efforts; the place of the killed and wounded were supplied as fast as they fell, and as all the unfortunate wretches who had clambered with the torches amid the branches of the trees were killed, they abandoned that method of accomplishing their object, and threw lighted brands up in the branches; from much dry weather they quickly kindled, and vast volumes of smoke rolled over the ill-fated building.

Immediately the Normans ascertained their success thus far, they redoubled their efforts to complete their purpose, and very soon a tree fell with a tremendous crash across the roof of the Hall, accompanied by a shout of triumph from the Normans; a second followed its predecessor, and speedily a third. As yet, huge volumes of smoke only had proceeded from the ignited trees, but directly they burst into flames, the Normans divided, and returning to their former hiding places, with bent bows, awaited the coming forth of the Saxons.

The shock of the falling trees upon the roof was excessively great, but the old Hall stood it bravely, and with the exception of a few displaced timbers, gave no further evidence of the sudden and enormously extra weight imposed upon it. There was but one line of conduct for the Saxons to pursue, and that

was to make a sortie upon the foe, whose numbers did not greatly exceed their own, and in the event of that proving unsuccessful, to retreat to the forest. Little John gathered the whole of his friends together in the hall of the building, and thus addressed them—

"Friends—We are brought to our last resort by the Normans. In a short time the old house above us will be reduced to ashes; and we, to find a home among the caves and fastnesses of the forest; ye have not to learn whom ye have to thank for being rendered houseless, and will not forget when ye meet them in a few minutes, hand to hand, how much ye owe them. If ye are men who will revenge the deep wrongs ye have endured; if ye are Saxons who will remember that ye are opposed to foreign oppressors, who have made your brethren slaves, who have torn your birthright from you, made themselves masters of your country, and of everything which could make a man happy in his own land;—if ye have the hearts of true Saxons beating in your breasts, you will not forget to repay the obligation these mercenary, blood-thirsty fiends have laid you under; the remembrance of its nature will nerve your arms, make you strike strongly and surely, and while one hope remains, turn not a back upon your foes."

"Never, never!" burst forth from many earnest voices.

"We have yet some time to arrange what little plans we may find necessary to make ere we quit this building; for the fire will take some time to burn downwards; and when these arrangements are made, let each man strive to fulfil them to the letter. I have great hopes we shall yet drive these hounds before us like fleeing deer; they must be weak and fagged by their long-continued exertions, as well as dispirited by their losses and ill-success; they have no leader, and each man will act for himself, flying, when hard-pressed, without any one to rally them; their numbers may exceed ours, but we have the advantage of them in being comparatively rested—that we are fighting for life and liberty, and ye have at least a leader to direct your movements in my unworthy self. Of this be assured, whether ye stand by me or no, either the Normans fly this village, or I lie with my face to the sky, breathless, lifeless."

"I'll stand by you, and fall with you, if you fall; the whole race of Normans shall not make me quit this place, while there's breath in this old body," said old Lincoln, taking a step towards Little John; "those I loved, and who loved me, lie here; and it isn't in the power of any murderous hounds like the Normans (with their king to boot), to drive me, while life remains, from this spot; therefore, Master John, I stand or fall by you, be the others who they may."

"We will all stand or fall by Little John!" cried the Saxons with one voice, making the walls ring with their shout. When the arrangements were completed, they were divided into three parties, Little John taking lead of one, accompanied by Robin Hood, Friar Tuck the second, and old Lincoln the third. They were to quit the Hall by three different places; Little John by the principal entrance, old Lincoln by the entrance at the back, and Friar Tuck by the staircase, which was to be run out from an enlarged window, or rather door, made expressly for it at the end of the building. They were all to depart at once, and cutting their way through the Normans, join near the middle of the village, and then make every effort to drive their foes from their neighbourhood. As they were about to start, there was a sudden and unlooked-for opposition on the part of old Sir Guy, who

stoutly declared he would not quit the burning mansion.

"Beneath its roof I was born," reiterated the old man, in reply to all the arguments used to induce him to quit it; "here I will die. I received my breath here—here will I render it up."

Everything was done to conquer his obstinate determination, but without avail; time was pressing, the flames were roaring, and the burning wood crackling; smoke began to roll down to the hall in sheets, and Robin Hood, who had ascended to ascertain what ravages the fire was making, descended with great speed. As he reached the hall, he cried—

"Away, away, quick! save yourselves! in another minute the roof will fall!"

"Let it come!" roared the old man, waving his sword above his head, "I am prepared."

Little John shouted in a stentorian voice for the men to advance to the charge; the doors were thrown open, and out they sallied. He waited to see them all quit, and then snatching up Sir Guy in his arms, in spite of all opposition, he carried him out. Directly the draft from the opened doors ran up the house, the flames roared louder than ever. A report was heard like thunder—there was a sudden sheet of flame, accompanied by myriads of sparks—a complete coruscation of light—shot up and they knew the roof of the Hall had fallen in. The delay of a minute would have caused them to have been buried in the ruins. A moment only they paused to gaze on the burning mansion, and then, with desperate determination, they attacked the Normans, who had greeted them on their appearance with a shower of bolts, which, being badly directed, had no effect. Little John placed Sir Guy in the care of the villagers, with orders to retreat with him into the forest; then drawing his terrible two-handed sword, he flourished it over his head, and shouting death or victory, dashed into the midst of the Normans, dealing death with every blow of his tremendous weapon. He seemed to bear a charmed life; bolts, shafts, weapons of all descriptions were turned upon him, but he seemed to defy them all, continuing his career of death, cutting down all who opposed him, and every step he made in advance was filled as he quitted it by his followers. He and his party soon obtained the centre of the village, where they had determined to make a final stand. They had forced their way through the ranks of their opponents, but they were closely followed; every inch of ground was desperately contested, and when they had gained the spot they had tried for, it was only to continue fighting harder than ever. Daylight was now fast approaching, and the combatants began better to see with whom they had to contend. Lincoln's party, under his direction, had ensconced themselves in the ruins of several cottages. He had some of the best marksmen with him, and was an excellent shot himself. He directed the discharges of the bolts, and, as they were done with great judgment, they committed much execution. Friar Tuck fought his way, followed by his companions, up to Little John, and succeeded in joining him. When this union was effected, they, instead of acting so much on the defensive as they had hitherto done, now attacked the Normans with all their strength, with a fury which nothing could withstand. The enemy gave ground. It was soon perceived by the Saxons, and Friar Tuck, who was one of the first to notice it, roared out an hurrah so lustily as to direct the attention of the Normans particularly to him, and the sight of a friar, in the habit of his order, fighting furiously against them, had a most extraordinary effect upon them. He was a sturdy, lusty fellow, with

brawny limbs, and flourished his weapon to some purpose. Whoever opposed him did not relish fighting a friar, and the result of their hesitation was their being cut down. The Saxons pressed on, pursuing their advantage to the utmost. The voice of Little John was frequently heard cheering them on, while he was doing much for the victory in the havoc he made with his huge weapon. Robin Hood kept by his side, fighting with all the desperation, yet cool determination, of the most stalwart warrior there. Not an advantage did Little John obtain, but what he followed up to the utmost; calling many an admiring remark from his colossal friend. Together they advanced, backed by a staunch body of Saxons, who, taking example and spirit by them, continued their career with a success they wondered at themselves, when they considered they were opposed to men whose trade was fighting, who were accustomed to it in its severest forms, were disciplined to endure unflinchingly the attacks of troops, frequently in greater force than themselves, and equally inured to its toils and severity. Yet this little band of villagers, all unused to a warfare where success depended upon personal courage and ability to stand and surmount, as well as stand the efforts of a body of men in every way equal to its opposer, were on the high road to gain a victory over men accustomed to it, and constituted by habit, when fighting hand to hand with such as them, to overcome them with comparative ease; but in the present instance it was not so ordained; the Normans had been beaten back step by step, nor suffered to regain a foot of ground they had lost. The sun had begun to peep above the horizon, and it was now sufficiently light to enable the Saxons to perceive the advantage they had gained. This was a great boon to them; Little John could see from the haggard countenances of the enemy that they were worn out with fatigue, and by the actual defensive position which they had assumed, that they were being beaten. It was almost a crisis, and he resolved to make it a successful one for his party; so, raising his voice he shouted with all his strength—

"Victory! Victory! They retreat! Surrender, dogs! beg your lives!"

The Saxons shouted, echoing his words. Lincoln gathered his men from their lurking place, and they rushed, uttering their war cry, upon the Normans, who believed them to be a reinforcement of Saxons, fresh and unfatigued. A panic seized them; they retreated rapidly; the Saxons followed impetuously, cutting down those those they overtook. The fugitives, in panic-stricken flight, made for the spot where they had put their horses, mounted, and fled at a desperate pace. A quantity of the villagers mounted horses which had lost their riders, and followed in hot pursuit, in order to chase them effectually from the village. As there was the hill to climb, and the barriers to pass through, before they could gain the main road, many of those who fled were overtaken and slain. Out of three hundred who came the previous morning to destroy the village and most of its inhabitants, scarce seventy returned to relate their disastrous failure.

It was a proud moment for the Saxons when the absence of every Norman, but those who lay dead or badly wounded, clearly established the victory they had obtained over a number double their own, and who should likewise have been, as soldiers of an army constantly embroiled in war, doubly their superior. But they had no time to waste in idle talking or joy at their success. There were warm and earnest congratulations among them, it is true, that they should

have conquered the Normans, even at the expense of the loss of their village, and the forfeiting of their personal security; but they did not consume hours in doing that for which a few minutes sufficed. The first thing to be done was to erect a temporary shelter for the wounded, then to bury the dead. A deep pit was dug, the bodies of the Normans gathered together, and then thrown into it; but each Saxon who had fallen in the conflict had a separate grave dug for him in the burial-place, and prayers were offered up for the repose of their souls. When this task—a most laborious one—was completed, the hurts and wants of the wounded attended to, Little John summoned all his friends to meet him on the following day at the spot where they had obtained the victory, to discuss their future prospects. His summons was obeyed; and, when they had all assembled the ensuing morning, they formed a circle, and stood quietly awaiting what he had to say. He stepped into the centre of the ring, and, looking round with a glance of proud triumph, which quickly faded into a saddened expression, he began in a clear deep voice,—

"Saxons," he said,—*"for nobly ye have proved yourselves worthy of the name—ye have gained a victory over a band of tyrants—of—of—Normans—I know no word more loathsome to know them by: ye have driven them from the village in disgrace, in shameful defeat. But though ye have done this—though few of the number who came have returned to tell how ye treated them, yet have they left their stings behind them—they have gained their object. They came to make this sweet place a desolate waste: and they have. They came hither to drive ye from your homes, to make ye houseless outcasts: and they have. They have robbed ye of your paternal inheritances; they have taken from ye the roof which sheltered ye, those ye love and would have cherished, but for their ruthless conduct; they have deprived ye of the hearth by whose side your fathers sat in peace and honour. These and more have they destroyed; but will they rest here? No: ye have committed a crime never to be forgiven or forgotten by them: ye, a handful of Saxon villagers, have defeated and driven before ye—nay, destroyed—a band of Norman warriors, who came to bend ye down as the blast does the yielding reed. Ye have resisted them, have scattered them, and ye still remain. Think ye they will suffer ye to do so in peace and quietness as though ye had bowed your necks tamely to their yoke, and said meekly, 'We will do even as thou wilt it we should do?' Think ye they will not seek a deep and bitter revenge for what ye have done? Be assured they will, and that they will do their utmost to sweep away every Saxon who took part in the glorious fray. Your village is already in ruins: were ye to raise another from its ashes, how speedily would they lay it low again, and hunt ye from your homes like they do the wolves they themselves so much resemble, from their lairs. What then have we to do? must we scatter ourselves over the land away from our birthplace from all relatives and friends? Or must we seek in other lands, the home, the happiness denied to us in this? Is not each an evil in itself? Ye cannot remain here; there will be treble the number of Normans here anon, with whom it would be worse than madness to attempt to compete, unless you desire to be cut down like grass before the knife of the mower, without gaining one fraction of revenge. It would be a folly, a reckless waste of the life which we received from Him who created us, to preserve and to make the most of. There then remains but one path, one alternative for us; it is to find a home in the forest, in the old wood which has seen us as boys,*

as men, and whose green trees may wave over our graves when our spirit leaves this world."

"To the forest—to the forest!" cried many voices interrogatively.

"Aye, to the forest! Is there one among ye who has not passed many a night in merrie Sherwood, with the soft turf for his pillow and a roof of green leaves above him?"

"No, no," was replied.

"I knew it. Then what should prevent our making it our home? There are caves and hollow places which are large and dry, and what is better, secret; known to but very few, we can sleep lightly beneath their shelter; e'en though it may be somewhat rough, it has the charm of freedom, for we will own the yoke of no king but a Saxon one. We shall find plenty of fat bucks to keep us from starving; and if a Norman keeper should interfere, we must remove him; we shall not fear the interruption of a Saxon. What say ye, hearts, shall the green wood be our home? We shall live right daintily; we shall be upon the ground which we first trod—the scene of our childhood, the same old wood our forefathers made merrie and fought hard in; we shall be near those we love, nor fear a Norman's visit, come he when or how he may. Let me hear your tongues; if my proposition like ye not, fear not to express as much. What say ye?"

"The forest! Old Sherwood! A forest life! Hurrah for Little John!" with many other like expressions, shouted the assembled Saxons with one accord.

"That is settled. Now, there is something more important for the good of all: we shall all live, act, and work together for the good of each other; we must do this, or the safety of our forest life is no greater than if we were again to rear dwelling places upon these ruins in Gamwell, and wait the arrival of the Normans to slaughter us; but to live thus with satisfaction and comfort to all, we must have a leader, whom we must obey, who will act for the general good, and whose decision shall be a law which it shall be death to disobey. Do you agree to this?"

There was some hesitation in the general body, although a few gave a ready assent. "You cannot," continued Little John, growing quite eloquent in the earnestness with which he urged the point, "do otherwise, if you consent to have a leader. He is no leader if he is not obeyed, if his command is not law; and if there is not some heavy punishment attached to its infringement, the individual and selfish interest of the members of the community will be perpetually rising up in opposition to his orders, and render his power equal to nothing. You need not fear giving him this power, for it will only be exercised in positive cases of disobedience of a command which will be issued for the good of all; as every order issued by your leader will be guided by that intent, being the purpose for which he is placed above you. I ask you again, do you consent?"

The men, who now viewed it in its proper light, and who saw the necessity of a leader, and that of obeying his command, gave at once a ready acquiescence to the proposition, and it now only remained to decide who should be leader. Immediately this was understood, a voice from the throng exclaimed—

"Little John shall be our leader. Hurrah for Little John!"

"Hurrah for Little John!" cried the whole body of villagers, with a shout like a roar of artillery, their caps flying in the air to express the heartiness with which they met the proposition. As soon as silence was obtained, and Little John could make himself heard, he again addressed the Saxons, saying—

"Friends, I thank you for the honour you have conferred on me; but I wish you to elect as leader one I shall point out as the most proper among us to take that post of honour."

"Who is it? Who! Name! No! no! Little John for ever!" cried a dozen voices.

Little John waved his hand for silence, and when that was obtained, he retreated a few steps, and placing his hand upon the shoulder of Robin Hood, he drew him to the centre of the ring, and said in a loud voice—

"This is he—Robin Hood!" Many voices were about to make exclamations, but he again waved his hand, and said, "Hear all I have to offer, and then reply. I propose this youth because he is a true Saxon, has a heart as free from fear as the boldest here—but that ye have seen; an archer equal to him never stepped on green turf; the certainty of his aim saved us last night from defeat; it was he who, under disadvantages of which few of you are aware, slew the Norman leader. He can give a fall to the best among ye, and handle a quarter-staff with a dexterity few can excel, and fewer equal. His discretion and judgment are equal to his other qualities, and the last reason is as great as any. In him you behold the Earl of Huntingdon, a descendant of Waltheof, England's darling; but the grasping, thieving Normans, have robbed him of his estate and title, and King Henry has outlawed him for prosecuting his claim by law, and for helping to give the Norman Crusaders a taste of a Saxon's prowess. Some of ye here saw on that night that a man's duty was undertaken and ably supported by him; and I am well satisfied that if we make him our leader, we shall never see in him a lack of spirit and courage in the greatest danger, nor in other times a desire to encroach upon or misuse the power with which you have invested him. Did I think otherwise, I would not wrong you by proposing him, but I have known him from his earliest days—have seen him in all circumstances, and will, with my life, become answerable for his truth and honour, laying it down cheerfully if he evinces a breach of faith, or does aught to destroy the confidence reposed in him. I have, however, but spoken of his capabilities, to show you I would not propose one who was ignorant of forest ways, or the forest itself, for he is well acquainted with every foot of it fourteen miles round—glade, brake, thicket, covert, dell, cave, or any intricacies—aye, one and all—still this is not the only reason, nor the principal reason, why I particularly wish him to be our leader. I don't profess to know much of the cunning ways of cunning men; it is not in my nature to study them, and even if I was to try, I don't think I should do much at it; my qualities are those which best become a simple and a good forester, whose knowledge of cunning is confined to the ways of wolves and the timid deer; but I have been among soldiers, among vassals, and I have always found a leader more respected if he is better born than any of those he commands—that there is more obedience on their side, and less tyranny on his. I have always noticed it—I have reflected on it—and I believe it will always be so, because I think it is in men's nature to pay homage to those of higher birth than themselves! besides, from children they are taught to do it, and they never forget it. I have, therefore, concluded that Robin Hood, who is Sir Guy Gamwell's own nephew, and the rightful heir to the Earldom of Huntingdon, which Sir Guy will vouch, is the best one we can choose for our leader; and if you think his youth against him filling the post, I can only say that I will be ever at his side in cases of danger, and

where a lack of years may prove a drawback, I will do my best to supply the deficiency; but it is a fault which each day will mend. I have now said all I

burst, quite carried away by the reasoning of Little John, and no small share of their acquiescence to his views being obtained by the idea that, outcasts as



[Drawn by H. W. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.]

have to utter, and those who think with me, up caps and cry, Robin Hood for ever!"

"Robin Hood for ever!" cried the men with one

they were, they had an earl at their head. Robin Hood's heart beat loud and fast when he found himself placed in this new situation, for Little John had

not mentioned to him his intended proposition; but there was a proud feeling accompanying it, his spirit was one which ever was leading him to soar above his fellows. Whatever he undertook, there was a great ambition spurring on his efforts to excel every one in its accomplishment. The idea of not being able to do as well, if not better, any art or even handicraft than those famed for its practice, would have been death to him. He would have persevered until he overcame it, but his natural quickness—genius would be a better word—enabled him to effect a mastery over any acquirement he attempted to gain, however difficult; and it was always a proud moment for him when he had successfully accomplished his task. Now, when he suddenly and unexpectedly found himself a leader over a hundred men or more, his eyes glistened and his bosom swelled with almost a painful sensation of pleasure—paradoxical as it may appear. That he might be unequal to the post was a thought he did not for a moment entertain—it was a thought which, under any circumstance, would never have entered his mind. He had learned to adapt himself to any strait, whatever its danger; to grapple with and surmount it while chance or hope of doing so remained; nor during his essay ever felt within himself that he could not succeed. He also did not possess that false modesty which would have induced him to decline the post of honour at the time he most wished to possess it, and felt himself well capable of filling it. There were many thoughts and sensations came thronging through his brain and breast, but those which would have counselled renouncing the leadership were not of the number; so, when the hubbub had subsided, he removed his cap from his head, and looking round on the countenances and eager eyes fixed upon him, he said—

"Friends and brother Saxons—This is a proud and joyous moment for me, that you should so unanimously and cheerfully, at the instigation of Little John, elect me as the head of your community; warmly and earnestly I thank you for it. I will not speak of the motive which has induced Little John to single me out for your leader, or the conviction his reasoning has forced upon your minds that, from the circumstance of my birth, I am best fitted to preside over you. All I have to speak upon is the fact of my being your leader, of the duties which will be imposed on me by my post, and of the constant endeavours I will make to perform them to your entire satisfaction. I look youthful, and so far as years are concerned, am so; but my thoughts, and feelings, and actions—of which ye shall judge yourselves—remove me far beyond the limit which my age might seem to prescribe. Ye shall find me a man where manhood is needed, a friend when friendliness becomes a virtue, and a leader where such an one is essential. There lies the old forest, our future home; there is not an inch of it within fourteen miles I have not and cannot thread; my first footsteps were taken there, years have I passed in it, and can tell ye, for your satisfaction, that we can dwell there right merrily—that we shall have ourselves only to blame if we do not. There must, however, be certain rules to which we must all subscribe for the safety of all, the infringement of which I would wish should be only banishment from our community, but that, as our abode must be secret, none must quit us with that secret in his possession under the ban of punishment, or what security shall we have for his not betraying us? Although I do not fear that we shall ever have to proceed so far as to put that extremity into execution, yet it is quite necessary that we should make such law, in order that if at any future time such an event

should occur, the culprit should not tell us we made the law only for him. What I have to say more, I will communicate when the laws for our forest life are submitted for your approval. I will now conclude, by saying, that what further ye have to do in the village, do at once, and let us depart without delay; the news of our recent affray will get wind, and we want no prying friends from Mansfeld or Nottingham to tell the Normans whither we have gone. Therefore separate, and meet again three hours hence; then, if you will follow me, bearing with you whatever articles are still left, and which may be useful to us, I will show ye a spot where we can dwell and house as daintily as the happiest in the land. Friends, once again I thank you heartily and honestly for your kindness, and take the Holy Mother to witness that I will prove true to you in weal and woe, not wronging your confidence in word or deed, while life animates me. Hurrah for Sherwood, and those who are to dwell beneath the spreading branches and broad green leaves of its bonnie trees!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the villagers, and then separated, in order to complete any little arrangement they might deem necessary for their new mode of life. This, however, took them but little time; the Normans had succeeded in destroying almost everything which was or might be useful; still they gathered whatever they could, and were soon ready to take their leave of the little village of Gamwell, as their dwelling-place, for ever.

Old Sir Guy, who had been borne away during the conflict, and brought back on its successful termination, but whose head was bowed with grief for the loss of the home he had been so happy in and had so fondly loved, was placed under the care of three of his sons, and by them carried to his estate in Yorkshire; while Little John, Robin Hood, and the three remaining Gamwells, aided by Friar Tuck, endeavoured to get from the ruins of the Hall anything the fire had spared which might be available for use in their new abode. It may be imagined that there was but little rescued from the terrible ravages the fire had made, but there was one thing, which was a chest of gold pieces, and had been kept there by Sir Guy to supply any immediate wants, while the rest he possessed was sent with his valuables and family to his Yorkshire home. Early in the afternoon everything was ready, and the little band, taking a farewell of their once happy village, now one scene of desolation, slowly wended their way, under the guidance of Robin Hood, through the mazes of the forest, to their future dwelling place.

When they had plunged into the depths of Sherwood, and had left Gamwell some five miles behind them, Robin suddenly halted at the mouth of a dense thicket.

"This is our home," he said, "and judge ye whether a better accommodation will be met with in any forest in Christendom."

He led the way through the thicket, which was so dense as to completely exclude the light, and then, after reaching nearly to its extremity, he bade them descend. As it was quite dark they did so with some caution, and after they had continued for a short distance, they suddenly entered upon a most capacious cave, capable of comfortably lodging five times their number; it was perfectly dry and warm, perforated at angles to let in light and air. It was an excavation of considerable extent, and had evidently been made with great attention to the comfort and safety of its inhabitants. The roof in various places was supported by massive beams placed horizontally, and they by

others perpendicularly; its peculiar fitness to the purposes of the Saxons was so apparent, that they gave birth to a shout of pleasure.

"I am quite surprised, Robin," said Little John; "I had no idea Sherwood possessed so comfortable an abode; I knew you were acquainted with most of the caves and recesses, but not of such an one as this. Why, how came you to discover it?"

"Why, about seven years since, hardly so much, I was just sixteen at the time, there was a maiden I knew who wished for a young fawn—"

"Ah!" said Little John, significantly, "Marian!"

"No, you are wrong; it was just before I met her for the first time. There was a little maiden living in Gamwell, who had very nice blue eyes, and lips, if possible, nicer still. Well, as I tell you, she wished for a young fawn. I came into the wood to catch one, and phased it into the thicket at the entrance of this cave, from thence down the steps, and so into here. I caught the fawn and gave it to the maiden. To my father I communicated what I had discovered, and he came with me to inspect it. After we had searched every nook and corner of it, he commanded me never to disclose it to mortal until he should desire me, or that I should see an immediate necessity for it in some case of great emergency. I have not done so until now, and I believe none but ourselves know of its existence. Gilbert Hood suspected it had been made by a body of Saxons, in the time of the first William, and when quitted by them its locality never disclosed. It is in a very good state, and, with a little labour, may be made a pleasant place enough."

And pleasant enough they determined to make it. There was not a man among them but what could be of use in remedying any defects the place might possess, or adding things to make it more comfortable. The first night they slept rudely enough, but the second they had remedied that inconvenience. Robin and Little John went abroad in the forest and brought home provisions; domestic utensils were fashioned by the handiest workmen; and a party of four, who were least likely to be known, went to Mansfeld to purchase such things as might be indispensable, and also to learn what was being noised about the defeat of the Normans. They returned in safety with the articles they were commissioned to buy, and related that there was much talk of their beating the Normans, whose number was greatly exaggerated, while their own was lessened, and that it was confidently predicted a numerous band would return, make every effort to capture all concerned in the action, and destroy every vestige of the village. This was a prediction for which the Saxons had little heed, and the first week was spent by them much happier than they could have anticipated. A code of laws was drawn up for their strict observance, in order that the comfort and good fellowship they had already enjoyed might continue. They agreed to consider themselves as brothers in all things, to share and share alike in the goods and the evils it would be their fate to endure, making a reservation as regarded their wives, none of whom, however, were to dwell in the cave. To obey their leader in all things; to lay all Normans under contribution; the spoils to be appropriated for the good of the general body. No unnecessary blood was to be shed; no females to be molested, Norman or Saxon; their right to the green wood, and what it contained, to be maintained at all times. That none but Saxons should be admitted to their band, and those only who would find a member responsible for him when first introduced, and he must be a victim of Norman oppression without being a native rascal; all such who gained admission to the

band and proved themselves knaves, breaking the existing rules, to be immediately shot; and those who introduced them to be suspended for a time from such immunities and privileges the band might possess. There were many other clauses, all tending to give them as much security and comfort as such a body of men could be supposed to enjoy under the circumstances. The ensuing week had passed as pleasantly as the first, for the weather was delightful; the month of August is the next beautiful month to May in the year, and "the band of merrie men," as they called themselves, took every means to make the most of it. One evening two of the band who had strolled in the direction of Gamwell, brought word that a troop of five hundred men, under the command of an experienced officer, had arrived there, and had demolished everything still standing, leaving only a few bare and blackened walls to tell who had been there.

CHAPTER VI.

An hundred valiant men had this brave Robin Hood,
Still ready at his call, that bowmen were right good,
All clad in Lincoln green, with caps of red and blue,
His fellow's winded horn—not one of them but knew.

And of these archers brave there was not any one,
But he could kill a deer his swiftest speed upon,
Which they did boil and roast in many a mighty wood,
Sharp hunger the fine sauce to their more kingly food.
Then taking them to rest, his merry men and he
Slept many a summer's night under the greenwood tree.
From wealthy abbot's chest, and churl's abundant store,
What oftentimes he took he shared amongst the poor.
No lordly bishop came in lusty Robin's way,
To him before he went, but for his pass must pay.
The widow in distress he graciously relieved,
And remedied the wrongs of many a virgin grieved;
He from the husband's bed no married woman won,
But to his mistress dear, his loved Marian,
Was ever constant known. DRAYTON, 1610.

PRO.—Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving words
Can no way change you to a milder form,
I'll woo you like a soldier at arms' end,
And love you 'gainst the nature of love—force you.

SIL.—Oh, heavens!

PRO.—I'll force thee to yield to my desire.

VAL.—Ruffian, let go that rude, uncivil touch—
Thou friend of an ill fashion!

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

TWENTY years elapsed. There were few incidents of any interest occurred during the interval but what a few lines will tell; the band had become fully established in their forest home, had lived happily and merrily in strict unison; the fact of their existence was well known, for many a wealthy Norman was made to contribute to their store. Robin Hood had hit upon a method of detaching the odium of robbery from these exactions by inviting any one who bore evidence of wealth about him to dine with him, the invitation was given through such members of the band as encountered them; when he had feasted on venison, fowls, or venison pasty, he was made to pay for his dinner with a heavy sum, if he bore it about him, if not, he was detained as a hostage until the amount was sent; if the latter was the case, the prisoner was well treated, well feasted, and, when the money was forthcoming, was sent away, save a little fright, perfectly unharmed. In this way they contrived to gather a good round sum, which supplied all the wants of the band; and the whole matter was managed in so pleasant a manner that many a Norman spoke of it as a trip which, if expensive, was still, in some degree, agreeable. Three or four times a

troop had been sent out from Nottingham to extirpate them, but it always met with defeat, and the survivors were sent back, some with their faces tied to their horses' tails, some dressed as old women, others more grotesque still, but none injured except during the action which was to decide who should conquer; many pranks did they play with travellers, but only with those who could well afford to pay; the poor were unmolested, and, if Saxons, their wants relieved, many poor Normans meeting the like kindness. Monks were staid if they were Normans—and there were few, if any, Saxons who partook of the good things of the convent—made to disgorge some of their wealth, and occasionally to say a mass to them when Friar Tuck was absent; for, be it known, their mode of life was of too pleasant a nature for him to quit it, and having built a small hermitage near, he resided there, living on the best the forest produced, drinking of the best wine. When he could not get wine he quaffed strong ale; and when fortune denied him that, he swallowed water—but the latter was seldom the case; he always made a wry mouth at it, and vowed it to be deadly insipid and weakening to his constitution. Drinking bout or fighting bout, it was just the same; they held out equal pleasures to him. He was the same roaring, roistering, swaggering Christian as ever; he occasionally went on excursions with the band; and whoever fell in with them found them laughing and joyous, full of life and glee. Peasants, peers, or princes, it would have been all one to them; they levied their contribution in such a gleesome manner, all their acts were so mirthful, and their mischief ludicrous, and withal so harmless, that far and near they obtained the name of the “*MERRIE MEN OF SHERWOOD FOREST*.”

Of Allan Clare, the Lady Christabel, or Baron Fitzallan, nothing had transpired, nor could any tidings be gained of them. War had been raging in Normandy, and the baron had followed King Henry thither. He had not returned, nor was, as yet, likely to return. Will Scarlet, they had ascertained, had been carried to London with his five fellow-prisoners, been drafted into the army, and, as well as they could gather, had been fighting in the war between Henry and his sons. Hal of the Keep, after residing with the band one year, and taking an oath never to divulge the secret of their abode, was, by the permission of Robin Hood and his influence, suffered to quit the band, and take bonnie Grace May unto himself to wife, and he was now blessed with a pretty little girl of three years old, who had just the blue eyes and long fair hair her youthful mother possessed, who still looked the charming sweet tempered creature she appeared when Robin first saw her; and many visits did he, disguised, pay them in their happy home in Nottingham. Maude Clare still lived with the Gamwells in Yorkshire: the old knight had got over the loss of Gamwell Hall, and was as hearty and as hale as ever. His sons preferring the mode of life the band followed, joined them, and dwelt with them, albeit there was less occasion for them to do it, as Sir Guy's present residence would have offered a safe asylum for them, or even for Robin Hood as well, but he would not quit those who had fought his battle, and so he made his abode in the forest with his merrie men. Five years had produced a considerable change in his person; ever in advance of his years, he appeared thirty, though but just five-and-twenty; he had increased in height, and his limbs had become more set; his features, too, had changed, the beauty of the boy had settled into the handsome countenance of the man; his dark hazel eyes shone with brilliancy; his brown hair fell

in curls upon his shoulders; his moustachios and beard of the same colour, gave a manliness and nobility to his countenance, begetting great admiration, especially from the fair sex; the great flow of spirits he possessed as a boy still were his; there was the same clear laugh that rang so musically in the air in his younger days, the same carolling of ballads; his excelling power with the bow had increased with his strength, not one of his other capabilities retrograding. The judgment he had exercised in the affairs of the band, the way he had acted to them individually and collectively, had endeared him to them, and they who had elected him because of his superior birth, and of the strong recommendation of Little John, would not have believed, if they had been challenged with it, that they had not elected him for his extraordinary merits and noble qualities: they were devoted to him heart and hand, and would have followed as cheerfully through every danger to certain death, as though they had been going to join a merry dance upon a village green. Their devotion here paid by considering their interests before any other; by ministering in every way to their wants and comforts; by never allowing any selfish wish or personal desire to interfere with the general inclination; by treating them as brothers, excepting where that feeling would clash with his duty as leader; and, in fact, by every act which could endear their commander to a body of men. He still remained unchanged to Marian, loving her with the same devotion he had ever borne her. Frequently he quitted Sherwood, and visited her at Sir Guy's estate at Barnsdale, in Yorkshire, where she yet resided, with the family. Circumstances had not permitted them hitherto to wed; indeed, had they, she would not have consented until her brother's return, or she had received certain intelligence of his death. Their love was no secret to the band; and, from this determination on her part, whenever her name was coupled with their leader's, in drinking their health, it was always given as *MAID MARIAN*. It was not likely that she would change—that the affection she bore Robin should fade—from the situation in which she was placed, living secluded, and nothing for her mind to dwell on but his form and his repeated kindnesses—the magic of his voice, and the low earnest words he breathed in her ear when by her side. It was not natural that she should, when she remembered his fond looks, his devoted conduct to her, the warm pressure of his hand, and his sacrifice of self in all his acts to her. They never met but this was renewed. They were never apart, but her memory, if such were needed, was refreshed by sweet and delicate acts—little nameless kindnesses not to be described—but yet so tender and flattering in their nature, that they are ever appreciated and dearly remembered; and so she loved him as deeply and truly as ever, nor thought a time could ever come when it would be otherwise. But there was one who strove hard to bring that change about, who racked his brain from morn till night to seek a way to make her love him. It was a knight, whose estate joined Sir Guy's at Barnsdale; he had returned recently from the Holy Land, where he had joined the Crusade, was a Knight Templar, named Sir Hubert de Boissay; he had accidentally seen Marian while riding near the mansion, and being much struck with her beauty, followed her, and ascertaining where she lived, visited Sir Guy, proffered his friendship, and endeavoured to render himself very agreeable to the old knight; but this was a matter of much difficulty, for the old man possessed a most violent and unconquerable antipathy to the Normans, “the pestilent dogs,” as he termed them, and although he thought it prudent not actually to reject the prof-

ferred friendliness, still it was received with a coolness which, albeit, the Norman noticed with gnashing teeth, he would not appear to do so. He affected a frankness and an unrestrained air, which he did not feel; but as it might help him to gain his ends, he thought there was a good reason to assume it. Day after day he visited Barnsdale Hall, and by degrees conquered some of the constraint and distrust which the old knight felt towards him; told him marvellous tales of the East, which was then but very little known; made himself a pleasing companion to the old man, until he began to look forward to his daily visits as a matter of pleasing anticipation; the Norman knight's attentions to Marian were slight, and expressed no more pointedly than those he paid to Maude, or Sir Guy's two daughters, Winifred and Barbara; he worked cautiously and silently. Robin Hood knew not of his visits, Marian fearing that he would be endangered by the Norman's knowledge; and she well knew Robin's hatred and scorn of the whole race was so great, and his recklessness equally so, that he might be led into some indiscretion, were he acquainted with Du Boissy's constant attendance; she made Maude, Barbara, and Winifred aware of it, and gave a tolerable hint of it to Sir Guy, as Robin Hood was shortly expected. The old man felt a blush of shame mantle his cheek as he received the hint, that he should entertain a Norman, and his doing so be kept secret from a noble-minded Saxon; however, the deed was done, and as he had now no reasonable pretext of closing his doors against the Crusader, he was obliged to make the best of what he termed, by the most indulgent epithet, his heedlessness.

This Norman, De Boissy, was a man who, without possessing the natural qualifications necessary to recommend him to the good graces of the fair sex, without the charms of a handsome person, a grace of manner or of mind, had yet contrived to gain considerable success in intrigues with females whose personal advantages would have led an observer to believe them far above any attack such a man might have attempted upon their hearts. The rules of his order forbade him marrying, indeed enjoined a life of the strictest chastity; a rule which every Templar, saving those of an extremely ascetic turn of mind, took every opportunity of breaking, De Boissy being one of the most active in its infringement. Born of a wealthy family, cradled in the lap of every luxury, naturally of a sensual temperament, and passing his early years in a circle where the gratification of his desires became a matter of comparative ease, he learned to judge all females by the same standard. The frequency of his success in his gallantries had unfortunately given a colour to the conception he had formed of them, and chance never threw him into the society of a female whose personal charms were of a high order sufficient to excite his cupidity, that he did not set his mind to work with the endeavour of accomplishing her fall as speedily as circumstances would permit. The first sight he obtained of Marian rekindled his curiosity, the gratification of that raised a passion which he resolved to satisfy if it were possible to be done; a point on which he did not possess a doubt; he had been too fortunate hitherto to fear it. He had shrewdness, and, indeed, experience enough to teach him that it required much artifice to obtain a firm footing in the good graces of the family, ere he could develop or bring to bear his foul intentions. His previous gallantries had been chiefly carried on in families of his own nation, but in the present instance he was to accomplish his aim in one opposed in thought and deed to his; in a family who hated upon principle, and viewed with mistrust, suspicion, and dis-

gust, every member of his country, and who unequivocally declared their sentiments upon the subject; he had, therefore, much to combat in getting over this prejudice, much command of temper to put in requisition, to bear quietly or meet patiently the epithets of insult and opprobrium he was constantly hearing applied to them; but he schooled himself to check his rising passion as he heard his countrymen designated by some vile term, and while he endeavoured, with seeming frankness, to justify them, he took especial care not to urge his arguments further than to excite a favourable opinion of himself, without bringing the choleric temper of Sir Guy into excited action, by advancing the claims of his nation with more earnestness than prudence. He had studied men's natures, he had in a degree been compelled to do it, and possessed a description of intuitive knowledge when to bring his experience to bear. With a single-minded being, like Sir Guy, his labours were easy; having once thrown down the high wall of prejudice, the road to his heart was smooth and simple; but with Marian it was more difficult: she had, although partly of Norman descent, taken the tone of her opinion of Normans from Robin Hood's aversion to them; viewed them through the same medium; believed them to be bloodthirsty oppressors, base, deceitful, treacherous; possessing individually and collectively the attributes of all that was base and infamous in human nature. Added to this, her heart was pre-occupied by one who was a Saxon, who was pre-eminently superior to De Boissy in personal and mental charms; one who had, by his continued kindness, made the love she possessed a cherished idol; the household god whose home was in her heart; whom she worshipped with the tenderest, devotest affection, which she glorified with her constant thoughts; whose brightness might not fade, but remain unchanged, undimmed, while she found a dwelling-place on earth.

De Boissy wormed all this out by bits and parcels, until he had obtained a full knowledge of all. He had much to do to make her even regard him without a stony reserve, which would have effectually chilled a less ardent mind than his own; and yet it was not so much ardour as cool calculation which made him persevere, where even perseverance might expect to fail. He had experienced what opportunity would do for him, and he trusted to it to gain his purposes; his chief object was to remain unsuspected, and to trust to chance when the declaration of his love would be made, at a time when the surprise it would create would prove an assistance to him; and should he find that persuasion was of no avail, he resolved to try what personal strength would do. Having come to this decision, he could wait patiently until the time should arrive when he could put it into action; and in the meanwhile, being fully conscious that Marian had bestowed her affections, he thought it quite as well to try and discover who the object was, with the kind intention of devising a means of ridding himself of one who was an obstacle in his path, not easily to be surmounted. He inquired, as far as he dared, without exciting suspicion, but was unsuccessful. He set his people to work, but as they were Normans, and all Sir Guy's vassals were thoroughbred Saxons, and consequently no cater cousins, he was equally without success in this channel. He ascertained that there was much mystery attached to this lover, but the why and wherefore he could not learn, and therefore became the more anxious to know who and what he was; he had no difficulty in learning that he was a Saxon, and, inasmuch, that they were incipient

enemies, and should they ever meet, it should go hard, he thought, but they should become more decidedly so, or their enmity should cease by the death of one of them—De Boissy not intending or even calculating that he might be that one. He congratulated himself upon the opportunity which his successful rival's absence afforded him, of ingratiating himself with Marian, and left no advantage unseized which might advance his object. His behaviour, attention, and manner generally towards her, had been guided and tintured with an appearance of the highest respect, paying her a notice of a higher order than he did the other females at the Hall; but this was unnoticed, for it was a deference the family accorded to her, and it was not likely they would remark an attention which they paid constantly and intuitively themselves. This he saw and rejoiced at, but resolved that although the others noticed it not, Marian should, and therefore took care to make the attention marked when she could see that it was so, without its being observed by those present; but it had the reverse effect upon her of that which he intended it should have; she had a clear mind, unfettered and untrammelled by the pride and prejudices which too much, it is to be lamented, clog and deform that of the present race of females. She detected the distinction instantly, as quickly as he could have wished it; but she deemed it invidious, and therefore despised it, at the same time it lowered him three degrees in her estimation. She perceived, also, that his manner towards her was growing something beyond friendship; but as he had never breathed a word which might be construed into a declaration of love, there was no possibility of conveying to him that if he loved, his love would be hopeless, but by withdrawing herself as much as possible from his society, and by increasing the reserve she had originally shown him. This determination, so soon as she arrived at it, she put into execution, and he was an exceeding short time ere he discovered it; he cursed his precipitation a thousand times, in beginning to look and act with an air of passionate admiration before the fitting time; he knew it was of little use now to affect a sudden change of demeanour, because he was satisfied he would gain nothing by it, for if he pretended an indifference, with the hope of a return of her freedom from restraint in his presence, he was well assured she would detect in it an artifice to throw her off her guard, to lull her suspicions, until she had compromised herself by some act of confidence, which he would take advantage of; he was aware that she placed his cunning conduct in its proper light, and he now only hoped for an opportunity when his villany might, from a scornful beauty, bring her to his feet a wretched suppliant. This hope he cherished and fostered, with a resolve to carry it out to its fullest extent, if it was only in revenge for being unmasked before his time, and by her, too, whom of all persons he most wished to have a high opinion of him.

Robin Hood was now hourly looked for by Marian with much anxiety. De Boissy was right in his calculation—she estimated him at his full value—and his presence was not only irksome, but occasioned her considerable apprehension. She saw that he regarded her with passionate looks—she knew the rule of his order—she knew how little it was respected, and how remorseless the soldiers of the Holy Temple were in the gratification of aught which gave them pleasure, no matter what evils or horrors were the consequence, and she dreaded De Boissy, as one who was as villainous as the worst of the Order. There was no one to communicate her fears to, with any prospect

of her disclosure being regarded in any other light than a weak fear, for De Boissy had been artful enough not to compromise himself with Sir Guy or any of the members of the family, whatever he might have done with Marian, and thus made it out of her power to give utterance to aught but a few conjectures, which would be laughed at as groundless. To Robin Hood only could she speak her fears, and she dreaded even his knowledge of the Norman's visits; his fearless nature would at once lead him to seek an interview, which would probably end in a desperate combat between them. This she had feared from the first, and it had led her to persuade Sir Guy not to speak of De Boissy's visits to him. As she had done this, too, before she had discovered De Boissy's passion, it rendered her situation still more painfully awkward; all she could do was to make the best of the circumstances, keep watchful, and seclude herself as much as possible from De Boissy's notice. To this determination she kept; and the Norman, as he came each day, chafed with suppressed rage as he noticed her frequent absence or her immediate departure after his entrance, without a glance, or more than a cold greeting.

A festival of a saint took place about this time, and it was to be celebrated with much rejoicing in a village but a very short distance from the Hall, and upon Sir Guy's estate; his presence, and that of his family was indispensable, and the Norman begged to attend them. Marian, who expected Robin's arrival each hour, prayed that he might come during their absence, and, in the anticipation of such an event, excused herself from accompanying them; her motives were seldom questioned, and they departed without her, all the vassals but just two or three accompanying them. When they had quitted, she sought a sitting apartment overlooking Barnsdale-wood, the way Robin Hood would come; she advanced to the window, and there she stood watching for miles the route he would take, occasionally fancying she saw him upon his good steed, galloping towards her, but a more intent look would prove her error, producing a painful sensation of disappointment. It was a warm summer day, with scarce a cloud, save thin fleecy strips floating lazily along; no sound met the ear but the hum of distant song birds, warbling their little melodies in the cool, shady recesses of the green wood; the scene was beautiful to a degree, and the influence it bore threw a languor over the spirits of Marian, which, added to the loneliness and the sickness of hope deferred, caused them gradually to sink, until the depression produced tears. She wept, she hardly knew why; she felt inexpressibly wretched, she hardly knew wherefore; she looked upon the sweet scenery until everything grew dim with the thronging tears; and so, quitting the window, she placed her upon a seat, and gave vent to the grief that oppressed her in a passion of tears.

There are few things which sooner create a kindly sympathy in man for woman than in beholding a young spirit, broken by adverse circumstances, plunged into deep grief; the sight of a young female dissolved in tears is the most touching sight a man can witness, and there are none but those possessing patent granite hearts can stand it. If a man would withstand the blandishments of a woman, he may accomplish it pretty well by exercising all his strength of mind to counteract her smiles, and glances, and other winning ways; but if she once begins to weep, unless he gets out of the way instantly, it is all over with him, he is done for, he may consider himself sold, packed up, but not delivered. To alter the poet's words—

"The man that hesitates is lost."

It is of no use striving against it. A man may be proof against a thousand ills, but not woman's tears; let him who doubts it try it, and if he should be foolish enough he will regret that he did not take our word as gospel;—but to our story.

Marian sat with her face buried in her hands, indulging in unrestrained tears; she was so absorbed in grief she heard not the door unclose, nor he who opened it enter and close it behind him—it was De Boissy. He had quitted Sir Guy on a frivolous pretence and returned to the Hall; he knew that Marian was alone and unprotected, two or three old people only being about the place, and they not within hearing; he ascertained this before he quitted Sir Guy, he was made acquainted with Marian's resolve to remain at home, and he hailed it as the most favourable opportunity which could occur to put his infamous project into execution. Accordingly, having cleared himself from the company of Sir Guy, he hastened back to the Hall; he traversed the different chambers to find Marian, and opened the door of the apartment she was in, just as a low sob met his ear. To his surprise he saw her weeping, and that sight gave his resolution a hard shock, in spite of his stern, cold, unrelenting determination with regard to her; he felt pained to see her thus, and on the impulse of the moment he advanced with kind words in his mouth to inquire the cause of her distress. His footsteps smote her ear; she raised her head upon seeing him; she gained her feet like lightning, and uttering a scream of fright, retreated to the end of the room. This sudden act of hers checked his approach, and he waited a moment for her to recover herself, from the sudden alarm which she exhibited, ere he said to her—

"Marian, why this alarm? Is my presence so frightful to you that you shrink from me as though I were the Evil One himself who stood before thee? By our lady! but I gave my person credit for being a trifle less hideous."

"I knew not of your approach," stammered Marian, who scarcely knew what to say, her strength of mind much weakened by her depressed spirits—"I believed you to be at the fête; I heard you not; I had hoped—I thought I was alone."

"Alone! You seem to entertain a marvellous passion for loneliness, my gentle Marian, and are as much scared when anyone breaks in upon thee, as if thou hadst been disturbed in a moment of fond dalliance with a lover."

Marian made no reply; but recovering something of her old spirit from the insolent rudeness of his speech, threw up her head proudly, and advanced towards the door. De Boissy, however, perceiving the movement, and the intention which directed it, checked it by crossing before her.

"Stay, fair damsel," he exclaimed, "we part not yet. I came not from the sport of yon churls for so short an interview with you as this. I believed my presence would have claimed a longer continuance and a kindlier greeting."

"It is as unlooked for, as it is unwelcome."

"I regret to hear it, for I shall intrude upon your patience by not leaving you for some time to come."

"I would be alone. If you are of gentle blood, Sir Norman, and know the usages of gentle society, you will instantly take that wish of mine as a request for your instant departure."

"I am of gentle blood, sweet damsel, and all accustomed to gentle society, as thou shalt find when thou knowest me better; and beshrew me, I like gentle society so well, that it will take something

more than a hint, distinctly expressed, to make me quit it when it is my humour to stay."

"It is ignoble in thee, to acknowledge thy want of courtesy. If thou dost not understand that thou trespaskest upon hospitality in remaining when thy absence is demanded, do not add to thy rudeness by compelling my presence. Let me pass."

"Nay; were I to do that, I might better show my good breeding by quitting the Hall without putting you to the inconvenience of quitting me; but as I think it well to forget it in one case, it is unlikely I should remember it in another. No; think not of it. I have much to say, with the chance of no second opportunity equal to this again occurring; I therefore take the present without trusting for another. I repeat, I have much to say—much that you will in all probability anticipate, and therefore prepare to hear. You must have conjectured the state of my heart toward you, Marian, by the passionate glances I have from time to time bestowed upon you."

"I wish to hear nothing upon such a subject. It is unmanly to detain me thus against my free inclining; were Sir Guy Gamwell here, you would not dare thus rudely to act."

"I have provided against all such contingencies. Listen to me, Marian: you have strong sense, and I will not waste time by using the petty artifices of foolish flattery, which might cajole a weaker mind, but which would not influence yours. Understand fully your situation: you are here with me alone, without the possibility of being rescued or assisted. I have more of my people here than would conquer twice the number left in this Hall, who might attempt to render you aid? you are completely in my power, and shall be mine whatever the consequences; I will not quit this place until I make you so—"

"Monster!" half shrieked Marian, clasping her hands convulsively.

"Stay; hear me out; you will perhaps change your opinion. I have shown you that nothing can or shall prevent your being mine; but I would it should be of your own free will. Say but that you consent to be mine, and as the wife of De Boissy you shall rank with the richest and proudest lady Normandy can boast—"

"It is basely false; thou knowest thou art sworn to celibacy, thou false, ruthless man, unworthy the name of knight."

"While a Templar, I am; but I have influence enough to be absolved from my oath, and live with thee in peace and happiness. Hear me, Marian: by my immortal soul, I love you to distraction—never loved I woman like unto thee! If thou dost consent to be mine, thou shalt find that none can be more tender or worship thee so much as I will; the whole study of my life shall be to produce the happiness of a nature so rare, so removed from all the pains, the cares, the ills of this life, that few, if any, ever can or will equal it. Say, wilt thou be mine?"

"Never!"

"Marian, Marian, judge not rashly; decide not hastily; I have fair domains in Normandy; vassals whose only object shall be to minister to thy will—proudly shalt thou be honoured by them. There is nought the world produces which thou shalt not have; nor think I offer this in the mad enthusiasm of a frantic passion. I swear that, if thou dost bestow thy hand upon me, that all these things shall be thine!"

"And thou wilt keep thine oath as thou hast kept the oath of thine order!"

"Nay, I will swear an oath of the most binding form which can be breathed; you shall yourself propose it, and I will swear to obey it faithfully and

truly. If thou wilt not do this, my confessor shall himself form it, and I will subscribe to its conditions, or may the gates of Paradise for ever be closed against me!"

"It is a vain hope, De Boissy; even if I thought better, aye far kindlier of thee than I do, I could not consent—my heart is not at my disposal."

"Say not so, you will change your determination. Come, let us away, let us fly at once; think of me, and speak to me but kindly, and I will never ask ye to whom it was given."

"Do not urge me thus—it is useless; my heart is irrevocably fixed. I shall not—cannot—would not change. There is nothing under the face of heaven that you could offer me; your costliest scenes, your pleasures, aye, one undivided scene of happiness, which would make me quit him, even in thought, unto whom my love is given. One, whose every act to me was noble, who has never infringed upon the power he knew himself to possess over me; who even sacrificed his own chance of happiness with me, rather than give me the shadow of a cause for regret. To him will I be true, unchanged in act or sentiment, and rather than do aught that should give him pain, I would perish even on this spot and at this moment."

"Hear me, Marian; do not drive me to desperation; I would wish to be calm. I would wish to treat you with all honour, but say not that you will not consent to fly with me. This lover—he to whom you say your heart is given—he does not, he cannot love you more devotedly, more madly than I do; he cannot worship you with the adoration I will. Fly with me, you shall not have cause to regret it; you shall not have time to think of aught but delight. In a home far from this, where there are green woods, blue hills, broad lands, and sunny skies, excelling all you have seen or heard of; where there is everything to make you joyous and calm-hearted, and nought to produce a pang—there shall you pass your days. The luxuries of the East shall not equal your delights. I swear this by every tie sacred to human nature; tell me not that you cannot change. Marian, come—we will away now. I have fleet horses here at hand; a few hours will leave this place far behind. Come, you consent?"

"I tell you once for all, such a thing can never occur while life exists. Did you offer me an earthly paradise, where the name even of sorrow is unknown, I would not change. I am betrothed by my own free will, by my own earnest desire, to him I love in good and evil, in happiness and misery, in prosperity and wretchedness; all the riches you can offer only makes my heart cling more fondly, more devotedly to him. I am his, unalterably, unchangeably, in weal or woe, in life and death."

"You despise my offer then, proud girl."

"I do not despise it; I thank you for your good intentions, for your great promises—"

"There is not one I will not carry out to its furthest limits."

"I doubt it not, and thank you equally as though I had experienced it, but it can have no further influence over me than causing me to reiterate what I have already said. I cannot change; think no more of me; quit this place, and forget that I ever lived!"

"Were I one of those fools who stickle at punctilios, I might obey your injunction, but I am not. I have warned you, girl, of what you may expect if you still persist in refusing my proffered kindness; nor think, foolish maiden, that any consideration shall prevent me fulfilling my determination. I repeat, you shall be mine—I have sworn it; and if you will not

by your own consent to the proposition I have made, and which I still promise to fulfil, I will use means to make you, that shall not be so gentle in act or purpose."

"You bear the form of a man; you will not so disgrace humanity; you are a knight with Christ's holy cross upon your shoulder and breast; you have sworn to dedicate your life in the furtherance of His word and works; you will not so impiously violate that holy oath—you cannot be so vile. Let me depart—"

"Not until you are mine, either by your will or mine. I am a man, with perhaps the failing of man's nature strongly grafted in me; as for my oath, that is between me and my conscience, and no affair of thine. Thou wilt not be consigned to perdition for my perjuries, therefore they concern thee not. I ask thee, once again, wilt thou be mine?"

"I have already answered thee I cannot."

"'Tis false! thou canst, if thou wilt. Remember there is none near thee to aid thee; thy cries will be unheard, or if heard, unheeded. I can hold thee in my arms as powerless as if thou wert an infant, and as I press thee to my burning breast, and imprint my passionate kisses on thy dainty lips, taunt thee with thy niggard kindness; and when I have feasted on thy charms, who then will be the suppliant, the wretched minion, crouching like an abject slave at the other's feet? Why thou, girl, thou! Urge me not on to do this deed—I confess I would not have its weight upon my soul; but I am desperate. Be mine, Marian—consent at once, or thy hesitation will be thy ruin."

"Hear me, De Boissy. I am a suppliant now; if you have one spark of human feeling, spare me. If you have pity, one grain of compassion in your nature, let me depart unmolested."

"I have sworn you shall be mine."

"Nay, 'twas a rash oath—have mercy! If you ever loved another tenderly and devotedly in bygone years, think of her agony had she been placed in my situation—think of your madness when you had learned how she had been shamed and bitterly wronged: think of the mother who bore you—whose spirit may be looking down upon you in sorrow and in anger at your ruthless intent: think of these things, and spare me. Were I your sister, an only and beloved sister, and thus placed, what would be your anguish, your bitterness of spirit, had the destroyer blighted her, bowed her down in shame and abject humility to the depths of despair and wretchedness. I have one who loves me intensely—a brother, whose heart would break were I so wronged. Hear me De Boissy; you cannot mean so foully. Let me depart."

"Marian, I hear nothing, I will think of nothing but thy consent. You know the alternative. I am perhaps mad, but you have made me so. Consent at once, or I will give you no time for reflection, if you still refuse. You shall not at the last moment have the alternative of escaping by consenting."

"Then Heaven have mercy upon my soul! Base, remorseless monster, I despise thy threats; a Saxon maiden would rather perish by her own hand than submit to the defilement of a Norman touch." As Marian uttered this with a convulsive energy, she drew a dagger, which hung at De Boissy's girdle, with a sudden snatch; he saw it gleam in the air—he uttered a cry of horror, and darting forward, seized her wrist as it descended, and whirled it from her grasp. She disengaged herself from his hold, flew to the window to shriek, but suddenly she stopped, as if entranced—as also did De Boissy, who was following—for a soft

tone of a horn suddenly broke the stillness of the quiet air : the sound appeared at first to be some distance off, but as its tones swelled by degrees into full round notes, music was breathed, that it was a signal. Sweet, harmonious, and tenderly it fell on the ear, instinct with melody, rising loud, full, and clear, and then dying away



Drawn by H. W. Thwaites.]

[Engraved by J. Wall.

it was at once easy to perceive that it was in the immediate vicinity, and, from the peculiarity with which the } until it ceased into perfect stillness again ; but before there was time for the utterance of an exclamation, a full

manly voice rose on the air, singing in a fervent voice the following words:—

Ah, hear me, I implore thee!	Mariana!
I love, oh! I adore thee!	Mariana!
For thee my spirit's faint to death, As that flower which pants beneath The passion teeming in its breath—	Mariana!
No star in the deep blue sky—	Mariana!
No gem in the earth doth lie—	Mariana!
Which boasts such gleams as thy proud eye, For whose bright beam now I sigh, Wanting its fond gaze, must die—	Mariana!
Without thee I've no gladness,	Mariana!
I love thee unto madness,	Mariana!
The enthusiast devotes, Whose heart burns for his Deity, Loves not his god, as I love thee—	Mariana!

The voice ceased. Marian and De Boissy both stood immovable while the song lasted; the suddenness with which it broke upon their ears rooted them to the spot—it came so unexpectedly, but the cessation broke the spell. Marian recognised the voice, and uttered a convulsive hysterical shriek, so piercing, so shrill, that it passed like a sword through the brain of De Boissy—thrilling every nerve in his body.

"Help!" she shrieked frantically; "help! It is he! Save me, Robin! help, ha! ha! ha! He is near me—I am saved! O God! I thank thee—I thank thee!" She sunk upon her knees in thanksgiving to her Maker.

De Boissy, who had stood paralysed by the whole occurrence, now partially recovered himself; he seized her by the wrist and waist, endeavouring to raise her, but she uttered shriek after shriek—dragged herself with all the strength and energy she could bring into action along the floor, in vain endeavours to tear herself from his grasp; upon Robin she called for help and aid.

Suddenly there arose without, the noise of men in fierce contention; swords clashed with rapidity and loudness; human voices mingled in the din; then there was a sudden cessation, and a voice, in a tone which awoke every echo in the building, cried, "Marian! Marian!"

"I am here, Robin! save me!" shrieked the terrified girl, struggling hard to escape the firm hold of De Boissy. There were hurried footsteps along the corridor—the chamber door burst open with a sudden crash. In an instant De Boissy felt a powerful grasp upon his shoulder, and in the following moment was hurled to the ground, with a dash that shook every joint in his body. He was, however, on his feet in a second, sword in hand, to punish this unlooked-for antagonist; but, whether intense rage had rendered him unskilful, or his opponent was infinitely his superior, there were but two or three passes made when he found himself disarmed, and his opposer's foot placed upon his weapon. Uttering a cry of joy, Marian threw herself upon her preserver's neck, and, in an agony of tears, exclaimed,—

"Bless thee, dear, dear Robin! You have rescued me from shame and misery, to which death would be a blessing!"

"My own Marian, may I ever be as near thee in all danger," was Robin's reply as he pressed her to his heart; then turning to De Boissy with a look in which scorn and contempt were so strongly expressed

that the Norman felt abject as the glance lighted on him, he said, "Thou graceless wretch, thou worse than dog! whom thou art I know not—that thou art a Norman I can see, and hadst thou not *that* name I would call thee a loathsome reptile, but in that name is centered all that is base and infamous; begone, thou crawling caitiff, or I will cut thine ears from thine head, slit thy nose, and turn thee out for the dogs to worry; begone, wretch, nor pollute this place with thy presence. I would have cut thee down as I would a noxious leprous weed, but that I would not insult this maiden by letting out thy churlish blood before her; begone out of my sight; it sickens at thee so much, that if thou dost not clear it from thy ungainly carcase, I will waive the pollution, and send thee at once unshriven to the Evil One. Away!"

It would be impossible to describe the fury of De Boissy; deprived of his weapon, taunted and stung to madness, he had no means of helping himself, but darting a look of malignant passion at our hero, he dashed out of the apartment, to pass at several places three of his people wounded to death. Swearing an oath to have a bitter revenge, he retired to his mansion to brood over his defeat, and devise means of terrible retaliation.

"Marian, dear Marian! cease your tears," said Robin to the maiden, as she still leaned her head upon his shoulder, sobbing violently; "you have no more cause for fear. I am with you now; I will remain near you; no danger shall approach you while I am by your side. Come, look up and smile upon me; all is well now."

It was some time ere Marian could articulate a word; but when she did, with what enthusiasm did she thank him for this timely interference; she shuddered as she remembered what her fate might have been had she not have been so opportunely rescued, and she fondly and gratefully pressed his hands as she reiterated her thanks.

"And who is this Norman who dared to lay violent hands upon thee, my Marian?"

"A knight who has an estate joining this; he suddenly came here and forced his friendship upon Sir Guy; he sought the opportunity of the absence of Sir Guy, Winifred, Barbara, Maude, and nearly all the vassals, to-day, at the fête, a short distance from this, to break in upon my privacy and declare a violent love for me—"

"He? a base Norman hound! Dare he offer his love to thee?"

"He did, with a horrible alternative if I refused. He told me I was far from all human aid, no one was near me to hear my cries; I knew he spoke the truth. He said, too, his vassals guarded the entrance—"

"By the Mass he spoke truth! There were three," muttered Robin, "who know the taste of a Saxon's steel."

"He proffered wealth and other dazzling offers, which—I—could not but refuse; death even were to be preferred to the acceptance of his hand. Oh, Robin! you know not the agony of that moment. I persisted in my refusal; he threatened horrors; his dagger hung at his girdle; I was mad at the moment; I saw no way of escape from that terrible man but death; I snatched the weapon from his sheath, and but that he seized my arm as it descended, I should now have been a breathless corse. At the moment he obtained the dagger from me I heard your voice; I know no more until I found myself upon your neck, dear Robin, my deliverer, my more than preserver!"

There was a flush upon Robin's brow like a red band, as he listened with clenched teeth to her narrative.

"This—this Norman lives on an adjoining estate?" he asked, trying to speak calmly.

"He does. You may see the top of his mansion among the trees from this window;" and leading the way to it, she pointed out De Boissy's residence.

"It is enough; let us talk no more of him, dear Marian, but of things more cheerful and gratifying. I have good news for you—news which will make your heart beat as high with joy and pleasure, as it has recently with fear and alarm."

"Joy and pleasure have long been strangers to me, Robin; what can your news be that it should create such sensations?"

"Can you not guess?"

"My heart begins to beat strangely; you have had the brand of outlawry removed from you, dear Robin, and are again free to appear among men?"

"No, dear Marian, I would it were so; it is not of myself I would speak, but of one near to—"

"Of Allan—you have heard he is alive! Where is—he returned? He will come here? I shall again see him? Speak, Robin. For mercy's sake tell me all!"

"He is alive and well; I have certain intelligence of his return. A man has lately joined my band who some five or six years ago was taken prisoner in the affray in which my poor foster-father, Gilbert Hood, lost his life. He was made to serve in the army in Normandy; he got into the service of Baron Fitz Alwine, who has returned to Nottingham with his daughter, the Lady Christabel. This man, being a Saxon, was sought by your brother, who has hovered like a spirit round the Lady Christabel's abiding place, and he has been of service to him. He tells me that Allan holds a high rank in Louis' army; that he was trying to quit it when Fitz Alwine returned to England, that he had little doubt he would accomplish it, and he might therefore be shortly expected."

"This is, indeed, good news. You have come among us, as you ever do, Robin, like our good angel. I know of no time that you have come when you have not shed a cheering influence over us all, and now more than ever. How Allan will honour and respect you when I shall tell him all the kind acts you have done me; and yet I cannot tell him all, they are too many to enumerate."

"If you will tell him that I have tried to be a kind brother to thee, you will tell him all."

"Something more than brother, Robin."

"Dear Marian," muttered he, pressing his lips to hers, with the fervour of one who loved intensely, and with the purity of one who honoured her he loved.

Robin had, without the knowledge of any of the inhabitants of the Hall at Barnsdale, stationed a few of his band near it, in order to know, while far from it, that those he loved were not unprotected, and that in case of danger he might speedily be acquainted with it. He learned, the day before he arrived, of this Norman's visits, and, ordering fifty of his band to meet him in Barnsdale Wood, he repaired on the back of a good steed, without delay, to the Hall—how very opportunely he arrived the reader already knows—and after waiting the arrival of Sir Guy and his family, he repaired to the wood, where he met his men, headed by Little John. He knew the Norman would not rest quietly under his defeat—that he would take a sudden and terrible revenge—he therefore resolved to be prepared for him, and turn his schemes into weapons against himself. The conclusion he came to was a correct one. De Boissy gathered all the vassals the estate would produce, between thirty and forty, the majority being Saxon serfs, who had no relish for the service on which they were about to be

employed, and with their aid, determined to make a descent upon the Hall, consign that to the flames, its male inhabitants to the sword, the women to his Norman followers, and Marian he resolved to degrade by every means chance might place in his power. Upon the second night, subsequent to his attempted outrage on her, he led forth his men upon this enterprise, but they had not quitted the mansion many hundred yards, before they were set upon by Robin Hood, Little John, and his merrie men. The conflict was a short one. Robin sought out the Norman, and, after a fierce combat, slew him; upon his death, his men threw down their arms and cried for quarter; it was granted them, but they were dispersed in different parts. De Boissy's mansion was burned to the ground, while the body of the Norman was hung upon the branch of an oak tree, as a memento of Robin Hood's reward of the villany of a Norman.

CHAPTER VII.

"A herd of deer was in the bend,
All feeding before his face,
Now the best of you I'll have to my dinner,
And that in a little space.

Now the stranger made no mickle ado,
And bent a right good bow,
And the best of all the herd he slew,
Full forty yards him fro'.

Well shot, well shot, said Robin Hood then,
That shot it was in time,
And if thou wilt accept of the place,
Thou shalt be a yeoman of mine.

* * * * *
Tell me, good fellow, who thou art?
Tell me where dost thou won?
The stranger then answered, bold Robin Hood,
* * * * *
My name is young Gamwell.

* * * * *
But, Lord! what greeting and friendship were there,
When these two cousins did meet;
They went all about that long summer's day—"

Robin Hood and Will Scarlett.

"So speaking, and by fervent love endowed
With faith, the suppliant heavenward lifts her hands;
While, like the sun emerging from a cloud,
Her countenance brightens and her eye expands,
Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows,
And she expects the issue in repose.
—What hath she perceived?—O joy!
What doth she look on?—Whom doth she behold?"

WORDSWORTH.

UPON the morning of a day in August, the sun poured out his beams from the heavens with a brilliancy undimmed by the presence of a cloud, and the cool air, loaded with the fragrance of fruit and flowers, had chased away the white vapours which the earth had sent forth some hours earlier, and the sky looked, notwithstanding the flood of sunbeams, exquisitely blue, the trees, deliciously green, save here and there a golden tinge just to show autumn was coming, and the forest things all appeared in their richest dress, waving and bowing, and bending gracefully, as the soft fresh wind passed lovingly over them. It was just the morning to make London people regret they have not gone on

that identical day "a-gipsying," and those who really have been fortunate enough to do so to utter, in a whirl of ecstasy, accompanied by an energetic rubbing of the palms together—

"I say, Jones, here's a day, my boy—here's a day—eh? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh! glorious,—glorious, Smith; splendid! Ho! ho! ho!"

It was such a morning as to make an old blackbird, who had been secluded in an apology for a cage some years, open his eyes, fancy he had grown young again, and whistle a few notes, under the impression that he was warbling, as much to his own surprise as to the astonishment of those who owned him, they not having known him do such a thing for years. It was the sort of morning on which mothers' pets going to a day-school do not hesitate to play the truant; when merchants who have spent their prime in the stifling atmosphere of a counting-house will look up at the blue sky—that is, as blue as the dusty windows will let it appear—and have a recollection pass through their mind of a time when they were happy thoughtless boys, who gathered buttercups in the fields, or scoured the woods for birds' nests, sloes, wood-nuts, or whatever the season might produce, and then turn away their eyes with a feeling somewhat approaching sadness to continue their employment. It was a morning when cabmen and others of their genus wonder who invented cabs or any vehicles, and *why* they were invented; when watermen make a bustle, and clean out their wherries; when coaches out of London and steamers load well and omnibuses don't; when schoolboys wonder if their master is half-brother to Charity, and would indulge them with a half-holiday; and they hear the dreamy sound of bees, and think of butterflies and blackberries, of wading knee deep in cool shallow streams, making plunges at trout which they never catch, and being verily content with "tittlebats" which they do, and which they cram into that unhealthy dungeon, a ginger-beer bottle;—when young girls who have got sweethearts fully expect Charles will come and—but why proceed; in short, it was a most lovely morning when Robin Hood, after giving some directions to his band, strolled through Sherwood, in the direction of Nottingham. The morning shed its gladdening influence over him, as it had done over all things animate, and from a slight hum he began a few snatches, at last he burst forth in full voice—

Young Herbert knelt, and fondly swore
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
To love a maid for evermore,
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
He swore none had so bright an eye,
No lips e'er form'd so sweet a smile,
No soul e'er breathed so soft a sigh,
No heart was e'er more free from guile,
Heigho, heigho, my heart, heigho

Ah! then he ask'd her would she wed,
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
The maiden blush'd and hung her head,
Heigho, heigho, my heart heigho!
His words were breathed with accents mild,
He pray'd his future hopes she'd bless;
The youth he sigh'd, the maiden smiled,
And falt'ring faintly answer'd 'Yes!'
Heigho, heigho, my heart, heigho!

He had scarcely finished his ditty, ere he was aware of some one else similarly occupied. The wood was echoing yet the words of the stranger's song when he had ceased, and he listened with some surprise to hear a clear manly voice shout forth in a tone more

distinguished for its strength than for its musical properties—

There's no cloud o'er the moon, there's no sound in the dell;
Sing lily, oh hey! oh hey! sing lily!
There's no sound in the air from the convent's soft bell;
Sing lily, oh hey! oh hey! sing lily!
Wilt thou wander with me in the merrie Shire wood,
To the green trysting tree 'neath whose deep shade we stood
When you stole my fond heart, my own love, Robin Hood?
Sing lily, oh hey! oh hey, sing lily!

"By'r Lady!" muttered Robin, as the echo of the last word died on his ear, "but this is strange. Who can this be who sings songs known almost only to myself, and coupled with my name? we must reconnoitre the new comer." And upon the instant he retired behind a tree, and awaited the stranger's arrival.

The boisterous gladness in which the comer was indulging when Robin first heard him seemed in no degree lessened as he approached, which he did at somewhat of a lazy pace. He arrived within a few feet of the spot where our hero was hidden, and stopping short, he took a survey of the wood around him; a herd of deer came slowly in sight, passing through a grove of trees at some short distance.

"Aha!" said the stranger, "this looks like old times. I wonder whether I have still any expertness at woodcraft. The old feeling springs up in my heart as I see these bonny deer bounding along. By St. Paul, but I'll try a shaft at yonder fat fellow, whether he be King Harry's or King Satan's!" So saying, he drew a shaft from a quiver which hung at his back, and, fitting it to his bow, took an aim, and a quick one too, for the buck, suddenly alarmed, bounded off, only to leap high in the air, and fall with the stranger's arrow sticking in his side.

"That was well shot," said Robin, advancing from his covert and clapping him upon the shoulder. He turned and scanned Robin from head to foot, and merely replied, with something like a sneer curling his lip—

"Indeed!"

"Aye, for one unused to shooting deer in the green wood."

"How know you that I am not used to the green wood?"

"I can see by the way you handle your bow that you have been more used to bring a man down in a field of battle, than a buck in the green wood?"

"Oh! and who may you be, friend Sharpsight, that can tell a soldier's handling of a bow from a forester's?"

"A keeper of this forest, who has spent all his life in it, and does not intend to let the finest deer of a herd be singled out by any fellow who chooses to draw bow at it."

"Were you fifty times the keeper of this forest, you should not prevent me drawing bow at whatever I pleased, here or anywhere, at deer, buck, or fawn."

"You are a good shot. I have many men under my command, and there is not one who cannot bring down a buck at full speed. I would add to their number any one who draws a good bow, or has an honest heart without an over thick head. If you choose to join them, you shall have full liberty to shoot what you please in this old forest; if not, you shall not sojourn in it another hour."

"God-a-mercy, Mr. Forester, but you talk largely!

A word in thine ear. If thou dost not leave my way clear, I'll treat thee to such a buffeting as shall make thee skip higher than the buck I just brought down."

"Buffet me!" cried Robin, contemptuously. "I tell thee, fellow, unless thou goest at once, you shall

be soundly trounced, and then try how swinging from yonder tree by the neck agrees with thy constitution. Begone at once, while thou art well off!"

"Thou canst not trounce me; thou art not able!"

"I do not trouble myself to cudgel every swaggerer who crosses my path. There are those within my call who save me that labour;" and, so saying, Robin put his bugle to his lips to blow a blast, but ere the sound was given to the horn, the stranger had an arrow to his bow, and, aiming it at Robin, called out—

"Hold, forester, if thou wouldst not quit life at once! Before one could come to thy assistance, thou shouldst lie dead at my feet."

Robin dropped his bugle, and, with a speed which astonished the stranger, had his bow extended towards him.

"Art thou mad! Why, fool," he cried, "ere an arrow could quit thy bow, mine should pierce thy heart; but this would be bloody work," he concluded, dropping his bow. "We might slay each other, and no purpose gained. I have a quarter-staff, you have also one; if you know its use, try a bout with me. I like your spirit. Come, is it agreed?"

"With all my heart," said the stranger, throwing down his bow, and appealing to his quarter staff, a crab one, of substantial make. "Let him who cracks the other's crown, have his defeated opponent at his will."

"It shall be so. If I conquer thee, thou wilt be one of my band?"

"I will."

"Then come on, and may the best player prove the winner."

"Amen."

To it they went. Blows were liberally bestowed, but the principal recipient in this case was the stranger. He had no chance with Robin—he was hit in all parts, without the ability to return—so, suddenly throwing down his weapon, he cried—

"Hold!"

"You acknowledge yourself beaten?" said Robin.

"No; but you are so much more expert at that weapon, so much more accustomed to its use than I, that I have not a chance with thee. Dost thou know the use of the broadsword?"

"I do, pretty well."

"And will you appeal to it, to see which is the best player—thou hast courage enough for that?"

"Pshaw; no words; to your sword."

The stranger and Robin then set to work with their broadswords; both were excellent swordsmen. For near a quarter of an hour did they cut, slash, thrust, parry, and pass without effect. Neither received a wound. At length Robin, in his turn, cried—

"Hold!"

"Are you tired?" asked the stranger, with a triumphant smile.

"In good troth, I am," returned Robin. "This cutting with swords at each other in cool blood is not such pleasant work as quarter-staff play; besides, since I have been at play with thee I have a strong presentiment upon me that I know thee. There is a look in thine eye, a tone in thy voice, which comes over me, bringing the memory of an old and dear friend to me; and my heart, which leaps at the thought, would do so in right merrie gladness wert thou he. Wilt thou give me to know thy name?"

"You speak honestly, but I am not exactly free in my situation to tell every one who stands before me when I front them."

"You need not fear me. I am what men term an outlaw. Besides, I scorn the paltry meanness of

which he who learns a man's secret, and basely betrays it, is guilty of. That look again!—Do I see—"

"Will Gamwell."

"Bonnie Will Scarlet?"

"The same."

"And I am Robin Hood."

"Robin! ha! ha! ha! my old friend, how I have sought thee!"

"My bonnie Will! this is a happy hour."

And the two young men embraced with all the enthusiasm with which dear friends meet, aye, and should meet, after a long absence. Each looked into the other's eyes with glowing visage. The green wood did not hold two such gladsome hearts as theirs."

"And Maude?" muttered Will, huskily, happy tears streaming from his eyes.

"She is well."

"And she—is—"

"Aye Will, she still loves thee; she has kept her heart and hand for thee, and thee only, and has wept many bitter tears for thy loss."

"Bless her, bless her! I have not forgotten her, never for a moment, whether in a toilsome march, in the midst of the roar of battle, or in the wretched loneliness of a dungeon, for I have shared them all. She has ever been present to my heart, ever the angel who, in my dreams and my waking thoughts, has smiled upon me, cheered, and consoled me—made me hope on under all the privations and toils I have encountered. I bore all my trials cheerfully, for I was sure the day would come when I should again see her, perhaps to call her mine, and never to part again."

"And so you will."

"I believe so. You must know, Robin, that while in Normandy I had a strange dream about her. I thought I saw her, bleeding and faint, stretching out her hands, and imploring me to come to her. I was chained to the floor; I could not move; I struggled dreadfully; I saw her grow fainter and fainter, until scarce a breath of life remained; I grew frantic; I struggled desperately. Suddenly at once my bonds snapped asunder—I was free. I flew to her side, I raised her in my arms, and then I saw the colour gradually return to her pale cheeks, until they assumed the rosy hue of health; her lips, which were ashy before, now resumed their native colour, and, opening her eyelids, she fixed her clear dark eyes upon me, as though she had but just awakened from a refreshing slumber, and smiled upon me. The ecstasy of that moment was more than I could bear—I burst into tears and awoke, the hot drops still coursing down my cheeks. I resolved to return to England. I sought my commander, who was originally my father's steward: he was sent away for bad conduct, and entered the army. Being naturally crafty and designing, by bowing and cringing he had worked his way to his post as commander of a body of troops. While in the army I had most faithfully fulfilled my duties: he had promised me my discharge. I now asked him for it at once—he refused; I begged, entreated him—he still refused; I threw myself upon my knees before him—I, who have never knelt to man before, Robin—and he spurned me from him with his foot. My sword was by my side—I drew it madly—and cut him down as though he had been a blade of grass in my path. I fled; I was hotly pursued; I arrived in England, and came direct here—that will explain my hesitation in revealing my name to you. The sight of the green wood raised old thoughts in me, and, perhaps imprudently, I chaunted one of the ballads I learned of you; but it has turned out for the best, for had I not done so I might not have met you. Is Maude at Gamwell?"

"At Gamwell! No. Have you not heard?"

"Heard! heard what? I have heard nothing of home since I was borne away prisoner on that ill-fated night which deprived me of everything which could make me value life. Ah! Robin, I have had a bitter time of it. Suspense is worse than death—I have found it so; therefore, whatever you have to tell me, if it be ill news, out with it at once, that I may know the worst."

"There is no very great evil to tell you which may destroy your peace of mind effectually; but you will not be pleased to hear that Gamwell Hall, aye, the village itself, is swept away."

"Swept away—how? What mean you? Swept away! Holy Virgin! what has become of my mother, my sisters, my father? Speak, Robin!"

"It is a long story, which I will tell you anon. Let it suffice that your relatives are all well and happy, and are at Barnsdale; the Normans having, in retaliation for our attack upon them, destroyed the Hall at Gamwell, and every hut as well. However, those who got away from us after they had made the attack will not forget it while they live."

"Then they did not destroy it without some little trouble?"

"Not without a great deal of it. Their reception and departure will be remembered by the survivors with rather unpleasant reflections."

"And you are a keeper of this forest now—in King Harry's pay, of course?"

"Not quite. The Normans pay me—that is, those who are rich enough to afford it; and I am keeper of the forest for no King Harry, but for myself and my merrie men. I am king of Sherwood, Will Scarlet, lord of this forest, and all it contains, and maintain my claim by the aid of my band, and the strength of my arm, against all claimants and all comers, excepting no one."

"I do not understand."

"You shall see my meaning." With that Robin took his bugle, and blew three shrill blasts. He was answered by one at a short distance; and, before Will had time to speculate upon what would be the result of this, there crowded into the open space, from all parts, a troop of men, amounting to near an hundred, all clad in green, and armed with bows, bucklers, and short swords. Will was quite taken aback by surprise. Robin enjoyed his embarrassed air with great delight, and, beckoning to one who was the first to show himself in answer to the bugle's call, he exclaimed, slapping Will on the shoulder,—

"See! here is one who, in a bout with a broad blade, made me cry hold!"

"He?"

"Aye, even he; and glad enough was I to cry it."

"I will try if he can make me do it. My weapon is the quarter-staff. Nature made me expert at that more than any other; but I'll not mind that, but try this stranger's mettle at his own weapon. I'll speak of him as a bonnie player if he makes me cry hold!"

"He will do it, Little John, be thou assured. I'll wager thee a quiver of arrows to a cypress bow!"

"Agreed, master. Now, stranger, draw thy weapon; and if thou beatest me, thou wilt do what man never did yet."

When Will heard Robin Hood mention Little John by name, it satisfied a conjecture that he made as to his identity. A life in the green wood had browned Little John's features without much altering them; and his make, his brawny limbs, and great stature, prevented the existence of much doubt in Will's mind as to who stood before him, when his huge cousin confronted him. Answering a significant wink from

Robin, by a smile, he pulled his bonnet over his brow, and drawing his sword, threw himself into an attitude of defence—an act which was immediately replied to by Little John crossing his sword with his own. Will immediately affected to make himself up for desperate play; and when he had led Little John to believe he was proceeding to action, he suddenly exclaimed—

"What! Little John, have you forgotten your cousin Will—bonnie Will Scarlet, as you used to call him?"

"Hold!" cried Little John, staggering back at the sound of his voice, exhibiting an attitude of the greatest wonder and astonishment."

"Do you not recollect me, Little John?" cried Will, laughing at his cousin's surprise, tossing his cap in the air, and shaking his bright auburn locks back from his face.

"It is Will, by the Holy Mother! It is Will himself!" ejaculated Little John, eagerly, and then sprang forward, caught him in his arms, and clasped him with warmth to his heart.

"Welcome back, welcome back to merrie England, my bonnie Will!" he cried. "Welcome home! There will be glad hearts now in Barnsdale, right glad! Beshrew me, but there will be drinking, feasting, dancing, and rejoicing, for the lost one is found, the strayed one has come home to the fold. It is a merry, a glad, a happy hour to me. A—a—boy, you must not think me weak and childish because this water will run down my cheek. A—I—in good troth am glad to see thee once again—that I am—right glad, very—very—." Little John squeezed Will's hand almost convulsively, and in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, the big tears of joy would run down his cheeks. Will was equally affected. Robin Hood and his men were scarcely less so, and it was some little time ere they recovered sufficiently to converse freely. When, however, this was the case, Will was made acquainted, in as few words as possible, with every thing that had transpired during his absence; and all that day did he, in the society of Robin Hood and Little John, roam about the green wood, visiting all the haunts and secret places which the band used on various occasions. He was also, at his own express desire, enrolled as a member, subscribing to all the forms necessary to be observed, and when it was understood how he was related to Robin Hood and Little John, he was elected as a lieutenant, the same degree of rank held by Little John. When the day was over, and the next morning rose as clear and sunny as the day preceding, Will expressed some little impatience to start off to Barnsdale Hall, a wish which was natural enough and to be expected; Robin, therefore, prepared to gratify it, and before the sun had reached his altitude in the heavens, they had made the necessary arrangements. Little John being very desirous of accompanying Will home, made one of the party, and the three started merrily on their way to Yorkshire. Will's brothers were all at Barnsdale at this time, for their father's natal day was near at hand, and they had quitted their forest home for a short period, in order to make preparations for keeping it bonnily. Will's return would indeed make it a festival, and as both Robin and Little John, had intended to join in the festivity, their arrangements for quitting the band now with Will were easily made, as they were in a train to do when he arrived. Thus, everything seemed to fall pleasantly, each incident chiming with the other, making an agreeable harmony, and producing a great exhilaration of spirits. As they pursued their way to Mansfeld, where they intended to take horse, they indulged in the greatest merriment; even Little John,

albeit unaccustomed to chant, mingled his voice with his cousin's as they shouted some ballad, known to each other years ago, and now poured forth for the sake of the sweet recollections they produced. They laughed and hallooed, they recalled pleasant occurrences to each other's minds, and entered into the detail of them as though each was telling the other some fanciful affair which he knew not of, and as any one of the incidents might happen to contain some ludicrous association, they would laugh over it with the same glee and convulsive enjoyment which they had done when it took place. To have seen them passing among the old trees along the glades and pathways, a stranger would have deemed that they had been kissing the wine cup too freely; it was but the excitement of delight which produced an intoxication, almost similar to one produced from the fumes of wine. On they went, not abating one jot of their glee, hallooing their remarks and reminiscences as though each was afflicted with deafness. They had reached some distance from their starting place, and were not a very long distance from Mansfeld, when one of their paroxysms of mirth was suddenly interrupted by the unexpected appearance of three men, habited in a forest garb, who sprung from a covert into the glade along which they were advancing, and exhibited a decided intention of opposing their progress. Robin Hood and his companions stopped mechanically at this interruption, and for a moment not a word transpired. At length Robin began eyeing the strangers from top to toe, advanced a step or two towards them and said—

"Who are ye? and what want ye here?"

"We were about to ask that question of you!" exclaimed the tallest of the three, a sturdy fellow, armed with a forest bill and a long falchion.

"Were you?" replied Robin. "You might have spared yourselves that trouble, for had you done so, your question would only have been answered in such hard terms, that you would repent having asked it the longest day you have to breathe."

"You talk largely, fellow!" uttered the forester, rather chafed.

"Nay! not more so than I should have acted, had you been foolish enough to question me, but though I would not answer thee thou shalt me. I ask again, but mark me, not a third time, who are ye? and what do ye walking here, as boldly as though the forest were thine?"

"Gramercy! thy tongue runs glibly. Thou didst me the favour to promise me a cudgelling if I asked thee the question thou askest me. Now, my jolly fellow, for the love I bear bold spirits, I will show thee courtesy sufficient to answer thy question; but when I have done that, thou shalt see how I punish impertinence."

"Agreed!" cried Robin, with glee. "Tell me who and what thou art, and then thou shalt trounce me soundly—if thou canst with all my heart."

"I am keeper of this division of Sherwood, beginning at Mansfeld, and extending seven miles either way; these two companions of mine are assistants, and we hold our commission from King Henry, to preserve his deer from the ungainly hands of all such unlawful rogues as thee. Now you understand we are keepers—"

"The devil, you are?" interrupted Robin, suddenly, with a laugh. "That cannot be; we three are the keepers of this forest, and hold our commission from a far higher power than thine. We will show you this speedily if ye doubt my word, for with us, might makes right."

"Thou and thy comrades keepers!" uttered scorn-

fully he who styled himself keeper. "Thou liest, fellow; thou hast no right or claim to it."

"The lie to thy teeth, varlet!" said Robin, quickly. "I know thee to lie most gracelessly, for I am well aware who is keeper, by King Henry's commission, of this division of Sherwood, and it is not thee."

"Who then?"

"Why, Sir John Cockle, the burly miller of Mansfeld."

"Thou wouldst have spoken truly hadst thou said this some ten days since, but he has turned his keepership over to me, whom men call, 'Much, the miller's son.'"

"Thou Much, the miller's son?"

"Aye, even so."

"Um! there's not enough of thee to be called *Much*—why thou shouldst have been some six inches taller, and thy girth of proportionable increase, to have well-deserved thy name. I never saw thee before, and doubt if thou art he whom you name."

"It is Much," said Little John, "I know him by sight; he is reported to be the best quarter-staff player in Mansfeld, but I have never had a chance of a bout with him."

"God-a-mercy! yeoman," cried Much, scanning Little John, "thou mightest well be called *More*, if I am named Much for my size. It seemeth odd to me that if thou shouldst have seen me, that I have not seen thee; for, beshrew me, I should not easily have forgotten thee, had I once have clapped eyne on thee; still I can make a shrewd guess at thee and those who are with thee."

"If thou wert to call me Robin Hood," exclaimed our hero, "and he Little John, thou wouldst not have been far wrong."

"I should have named ye thus, hadst thou questioned me; and I am right glad that we have met, for there is a large reward upon thy head, Robin, which I would fain have in my possession; and now I have the chance, it shall go hard but I try for it, and get it, too."

"And if thou canst earn it by conquering me, thou shalt be most welcome to it, nor shall one of my followers take revenge on thee for thy good fortune. So, good Much, let us not waste more words, but doff your coat, as I will mine, and to thy sword and buckler."

"Stay," cried Little John, "Much hath the credit of being more expert at the quarter-staff than at the falchion; I know that I also am so; let I and Much make a match of it, and thou and Will oppose Much's comrades."

"So be it," replied Much. "We are three to three; and it shall never be said that Much, the miller of Mansfeld's son, and his friends, were afraid, or fled before Robin Hood or any of his merrie men."

"Boldly said," cried Robin. "Here is Much for thee, Little John, but not *more* than thou canst well manage; here is one for thee, Will; and this stout fellow for me. Art thou content, man?" he asked of the fellow he had picked out to fight.

"Well content, thou bold outlaw," answered he; "thou shalt find we have as much courage to fight, and scorn to flee before aught, as thee and thy gang."

"Come, this at best is but prating," exclaimed Much; "let us to our play, and the Holy Mother give victory to the right."

"Amen," said Robin; "the Holy Mother never deserts me in my hour of need."

"Nor any one," said Much.

"Nor any one," repeated Robin, taking off his cap, and devoutly crossing himself.

Each one threw off his doublet, girded his loins

tightly with his belt, and prepared for action. It was remarkable to see with what an alacrity and appearance of anticipated pleasure they set about their preparations; if they had been making ready for a joyous dance, their eyes could not have sparkled more brightly, or a gayer smile played upon their lips. There was a mixture of pride, too, in the cheerfulness with which both Robin and Will prepared to exhibit their skill, for each wished to show his old friend that, in the long interval during which they had been separated, they had improved in the exercise of their weapons, although before they were parted they had both arrived at the possession of great skill. When all was prepared, Much said—

"I have no quarter-staff with me."

"Here is mine," said Robin, handing it to Much; "a better or a truer crab-tree staff never played a bout. It grew in Sherwood, but the forest holds not such another; it is as tough as a priest's conscience, and will take as hard a knock without showing as much effect."

"That is great praise, by the Mass!" exclaimed Much, with a laugh; "and to say truth, it is the prettiest staff I ever handled. Gramercy! but I feel as though the staff said, 'Thou must win.'"

"If the staff could speak and say as much, then would it lie; but it is a true staff, and holds its peace on that score, as it will on any, until thou make it speak with thy exertions," quietly observed Little John.

"By the holy Paul! if blows are its words, thou wilt hate its converse," remarked Much, with a confident nod.

"I am not expert at witty words," replied Little John; "but if thou dost make thy quarter-staff wag as freely as thy tongue, then will I tell thee thou makest nimble play; but I think thy tongue and thy ability, Much, much of a muchness, and if thou dost wish to prove my words false, come on at once without more ado. Play!"

"Play!" echoed Much.

"Play!" cried Robin, Will Scarlet, and their antagonists.

"So they fell to it hard and sore,
It was on a midsummer day;
From eight of the clock till two and past
They all showed gallant play.

"There Robin, Will, and Little John,
They fought most manfully,
Till all their wind was spent and gone."

So says the old ballad, and well might it say it, for desperately they fought, giving no chance to their opponents to wound them. The passes and thrusts made by the keepers at Robin and Will were parried with exceeding skill by both sword and buckler, and they had frequently to praise, and the justice to do so, the skill of their antagonists. Occasionally they rested by mutual consent, to recover their breath; but when that was done, to it they went again with determined vigour, making the old wood resound with their repeated and heavy blows. At length Robin Hood, making a desperate effort, suddenly disarmed his opponent, sending his sword high in the air.

"Surrender!" he cried to his defeated opponent.

"Not with life," replied the man, holding his buckler so as to defend his person in case of attack.

"Why, fool, thou art beaten," said Robin, sternly.

"I have lost my weapon, but I am not yet beaten," he returned.

"Dost thou think thy buckler can prevent my taking thy life if I was moved to do so."

"I would try it," replied he, confidently. At the same moment Will Scarlet succeeded in disarming his antagonist, and cried in a loud voice to him, as Robin had to his foe—

"Surrender!"

"Never!" was the reply; the utterer, as he spoke, shifting his buckler as his comrade had done, with the purpose of shielding himself from his opponent's sword in the event of his continuing the fight.

"You will not!" cried Will, rather inflamed.

"Not while I have breath to say no."

"Then take the reward of thy temerity," roared Will, attacking him furiously. The fellow defended himself from Will's rapid and heavy blows with admirable skill, but it was evident that Will must conquer him; and as there had as yet been no blood spilt, of any import, Robin Hood was desirous of preventing an effusion, now it was in his power to prevent it; he therefore called in a loud voice—

"Hold! hold thy hand, Will, you have him at unfair odds—hold off!"

As soon as Will could recover his equanimity enough to pay attention to Robin's voice, he held his hand, and, as soon as he could get his breath, said—

"Thou mayst thank Robin Hood, thou obstinate bull, that I have not watered the plain with thy blood. Art sick of life, that thou wouldst throw it away thus wantonly?"

"I seek no quarter while I have a chance of defending myself; nor would I cry spare, while I was able to save my life. I do not consider that I am beaten by thee."

"No," said the other, quickly, "disarmed, not defeated."

"I like your spirit well," exclaimed Robin Hood; "ye are bold yeomen both, and I give ye all credit for your stout play. I am not the one to throw a man's defeat in his teeth; 'tis enough for us to know that ye are disarmed; and for you, that your antagonists testify you have behaved gallantly; still, if Much, thy leader, is defeated, thou must acknowledge us to be the better players—"

"But not better men."

"As you will, on that score; we will wait and see what Little John and Much do."

During the whole of this conversation Little John and Much had been hammering and battering away at each other with a dexterity and perseverance perfectly surprising to one of the uninitiated. They were both stripped to their waist, and the violent exercise, coupled with the heat of the day, had increased the circulation of their blood to such an extent, that they looked more like two Red Indians than a pair of fair northerners; and as soon as they became aware that the four late combatants were spectators, they each exerted themselves to obtain a mastery over the other, to decide the conflict. Long as they had fought, they exhibited very little signs of fatigue or fear of their success; there were several severe weals upon the arms and body of Much, but there were none upon Little John's—indeed, it was evident he was the best player, but that his opponent was not vastly inferior, and that he had his best work to do to conquer him. The agility which both exhibited said much for their acquirement, and Robin Hood could not but utter loud praise to Much for the masterly manner in which he opposed his staff to Little John's, as it came in all directions. For some time longer they fought, with little more apparent success on either side, save that Much appeared the weaker of the two; and when this evidenced itself by the want of force in some of his blows, where it was required to make them tell, it was then that Robin exclaimed—

"Come, Little John, finish your work, we are only waiting for thee!"

Little John nodded his head, and then commenced

succession, and delivered at all points. His exertions to meet them were tremendous; he shifted his staff and his position with all the nimbleness and agility



Drawn by W. H. Thwaites

[Engraved by J. Wall.]

a style of play which completely astounded Much, who, being fatigued, was unprepared for a discharge of blows, delivered in the most extraordinarily rapid succession, and delivered at all points. His exertions to meet them were tremendous; he shifted his staff and his position with all the nimbleness and agility

continued longer than he had strength to bear them: their rapidity confused him; he grew bewildered, and no sooner had that effect occurred than he lost his quarter-staff—Little John having by a sudden jerk twisted it from his grasp, as Much, growing desperate, made a blow with all his remaining strength. As the staff flew from him, Little John flourished his own over his opponent's head, and ere the blow could descend on Much, to give him the broken crown which was to decide the conflict, he leaped on one side with a sudden bound, and cried loudly—

"Quarter!"

"It is granted," was all Little John replied; and after wiping the perspiration from his head and body, he proceeded at once to don his clothes as quietly as if nothing had happened. Much walked up to him, and said—

"Little John, thy renown at quarter-staff has long been known to me, and I have often longed to play a bout with thee, but opportunity never served until now. I have had one, and I am satisfied; give me thy hand. I thought myself a good player—"

"And so thou art, Much. Mansfield has not given thee thy reputation for nothing; thou art as good a player as ever handled a crab-tree staff."

"Thou art better—the best. Never knew I until this day what might be done with the weapon; it is a lesson I shall not forget; and if I have hitherto prided myself upon my quarter-staff play, I hope I shall be able to do so henceforth with more justice, for I will put into practice much I have just learned from thee; and, believe me, I feel it no degradation to cry quarter to thee."

"Gallantly spoken, my bold miller's son!" cried Robin, merrily; "it shows a manly, a true Saxon feeling, to meet thy defeat thus generously; we must be no longer enemies, but friends. Thou needst not feel ashamed that Little John has defeated thee, for there never was, nor ever will be, such another player as he."

"It may be so," said Little John, "but it is according to the law of nature; she gifts each one with some power in the exercise of which he may surpass his fellow men; and if mine is the staff, yours is the bow, Robin, for there never was, nor ever will be again, such another archer as thee!"

"Truly we should be much obliged to each other for these rare compliments," observed Robin, laughingly; "but I think it would be far better if we adjourned to Mansfield and did all this with a flagon of wine before us; such a companion to our converse will open our hearts and make us better friends. Thy hand, Much; I like thy spirit and its generous nature."

"There it is, Robin Hood, and given with right good will. I have heard much of thee, much to make me think thee the greatest of outlaws; the poor speak well of thee, Norman as well as Saxon; none have I ever heard who has been unjustly wronged by thee, and I have heard that thou hast been unjustly wronged by others. I am not sorry that we have met, and not ashamed to reflect that I and those with me have been defeated by men of such renown as thou and thy friends."

"Why, thou hast the right down true Saxon blood in thy veins; it shines out in all thy deeds and words. Truly, Sir John Cockle should be proud of his son. Come, Much, thou and thy friends will with me and mine to Mansfield, there to make merry over a stoup of Rhenish wine."

"With all my heart!" observed Much.

"And mine!" said one of his comrades.

"And mine!" echoed the other.

Then in a party they travelled on towards the town,

and any that met them, to see them talking and laughing so gleefully, would never have believed, unless they had been witnesses of it, that they had just ceased fighting with each other. They reached the town, and as they entered Robin said unto Much—

"You are sure that I have no particular desire to have it known, when I am there, that Robin Hood is seated in the hostel, so as to cause me to have to fight my way to the green wood again. It would be unpleasant and awkward to me now, for there are matters which call my presence in Yorkshire immediately, and I do not wish to be delayed."

"I will not breathe a word," replied Much; "but even if I did, the only opposition you might suffer would be from the curiosity of the townsfolks to see so celebrated a—forester."

"Outlaw you mean. Call me by the right epithet," said Robin, with a smile; "you need not fear to hurt my feelings in so doing. I am made one by an unjust decree, and, therefore, the name and the contumely it bears are unheeded by me."

"Well, whatever name may be affixed to thine, the people think too well of thee to offer thee harm, therefore thou needst not be uneasy on that score; albeit, I will not mention to one whom thou art, and will caution my comrades to observe the same secrecy."

"Thanks," returned Robin, "I would wish it so."

Much led the way to a retired hostel, where he told them they would be sure of good wine. On arriving there they entered and seated themselves round a table, and had a merry carouse; and as the wine mounted to their brain, their hearts opened to each other; they shook hands earnestly and heartily, and it required little persuasion from Robin, when he told them how joyously his men lived in the old forest, to induce them to join the band. They readily agreed to his proposition; and declaring they had no tie to keep them to any spot, that they were desirous of following the free life his men enjoyed, made an offer to accompany him to his band at that precise time. Much only requested to take a farewell of his family, and he was ready; and so it was agreed that they should become members of the band. And it was in this way, and with such men, that Robin Hood added to the number and the strength of the "Merry Men of Sherwood Forest."

A party of new comers just at this time entered the room, and the conversation was changed; but after they had been seated for some little time, one of the strangers regarded Will Scarlet very attentively, which at length drew Will's attention, and then the man hastily withdrew his eyes, and after a little while, quitted the room abruptly. Will for a moment wondered at his strange behaviour, and at the same time fancied he had somewhere seen his face, but could not call to mind where. It puzzled him for a minute, but he speedily dismissed it from his thoughts. An arrangement was now entered into that Little John should immediately lead the new members to the band, and having done so, and regularly installed them, was to follow Robin and Will to Barnsdale. As the day was waning apace they departed at once; Little John and his new comrades to the forest, and our hero and his cousin, having obtained horses, mounted and proceeded to Sir Guy's estate in Yorkshire.

It was agreed between them, that when they arrived close to Barnsdale, Robin should go on alone, and prepare its inhabitants for Will's arrival, but as they drew near the Hall next morning, Will strenuously opposed it; he said he could not bear the

riding even that short distance, being so close to those from whom he had been so long separated, by himself—he was too nervous, too agitated to endure it; it was therefore agreed that as active service and much exposure, besides lapse of years, had much altered his appearance, he should come to the Hall as one who had brought favourable tidings, and then, when an opportunity occurred, disclose himself. Accordingly, at Barnsdale they arrived, and into the Hall they were ushered with many friendly greetings for Robin Hood, and courteous frank ones for the stranger, as he was deemed. Every member of the family crowded round Robin, and asked him questions of all sorts; for it was he who brought the news, and generally some pretty presents for the females. He looked round him, and was glad to see Maude was absent, for it gave him a better opportunity of breaking the ice; Marian was also absent, and therefore there was nothing to prevent his at once commencing. So raising his hand, he requested silence, and when he obtained it, he said—

"I have rare news for ye all—news to make ye as gladsome as a bird in the sunshine—I have good news for ye—"

"You always bring us pleasant news, Robin Hood," exclaimed Barbara, clapping her hands, and fixing her laughing eyes upon him as she tossed back her long fair curls.

"I'll bring you a husband next time, Barby," said he merrily, and a loud laugh followed his sally. The damsel blushed up to the eyes, but said in as mirthful a tone as his own—

"And that would be pleasanter still, Robin Hood!" This created another laugh.

"So you will say when you see him," rejoined Robin. "I will not describe him to you; but mark my words, my pretty coz, the moment you clap those merry eyes upon him, your heart will jump bob into your mouth, and before it can go back to its home you will cry, 'Here's the lad for Barbara Gamwell!'"

"We will wait till he comes, and then we shall see," returned Barbara. "He must be very bonny indeed, to make me cry that."

"What do you call bonny? are you very particular in your choice?"

"Oh, very. He must be as good-looking as you, and almost your equal in all things."

"Oh! then you would be content with one like me?"

"Yes, very content."

"Then I should suit you myself?"

"The very person above all others. You are just to my taste."

"I am very much flattered; but I am very sorry, my precious little kinswoman. If you have any hopes that way, pray destroy them at once, for I am engaged two deep."

"Aha! I know who are the two."

"So do I," said Robin, quickly; "therefore you need not mention their names."

"Certainly not; but I don't mind waiting to be the third or fourth, for I suppose there are plenty waiting for you. However, I can't wait longer than the fourth."

"If you wait to be the fourth before we wed, we shall never wed at all; indeed, it is not likely we ever shall, for I tell you, next time I come, I'll bring you a husband."

"I am very much obliged to you, as of course I ought to be; but I hope he is a very nice one, else I won't have him—you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well. What is the next piece of news?"

"Better far than that."

"Not to me," said Barbara, laughing, while a blush crimsoned her fair face at her own temerity.

"You shall see. I bring news of one about whom you all long to hear—of one who was far away—of—"

"My brother Willy?" cried Barbara, interrupting him.

"Even so. This good friend I have with me was in his company a short time since, and can tell you all about him."

"My boy is well?" asked Sir Guy.

"And happy?" inquired his mother.

"Where is he?" cried the brothers.

"Why does he not come home?" asked Barbara, looking with earnest inquiry at Will; but he could not trust himself to speak, and so he only bowed his head to hide the tears which were thronging into his eyes, and the quivering lip which forbade him articulating a word. A silence for a moment reigned, for each looked for an answer; it was broken, however, by Barbara suddenly springing into the stranger's arms, crying, with a sudden burst of tears,—

"Mother! father! it is Will!—this is Will come back! I know him—I know him now. Dear—dear Will! you have come home to us again;" and she laid her head upon his shoulder sobbing like a child. Her screams had operated like a charm upon those present. In an instant they pressed round Will, embracing him by turns; his mother weeping over him as if she had lost him for ever, instead of having just had him restored; while his old father chumped away at the huskiness in his throat, gulped and gulped, winked his eyes, and tried to appear calm in vain. His efforts were too weak to repress his feelings, and so roaring out, "Damn it, Will, my boy, why did you stay away so long from us?" he sunk down in his chair, and wept as freely as the weakest there. The brothers gave an hurra that shook the whole building, and embraced each other, waiting patiently until they could get Will out of the women's hands to embrace him themselves. Robin, who watched the scene, discovered himself gnawing the tip of his gauntlet, and half blinded by water filling his eyes, so he withdrew to seek for Maude, in order to prepare her for the interview; for he feared, in the delicate health she possessed, the sudden shock might have a fatal effect upon her. As he traversed the upper chambers in search of her, he encountered Marian, who had heard the note on the bugle with which he had announced himself, and also the hurra which the brothers Gamwell had given upon recognising Will, and she was hastening to the Hall to obtain an elucidation of the sudden uproar. As her eye lighted upon the form of Robin advancing, she hurried forward with a cry of joy to meet him; and when they had met, and a few kind words passed between them, she inquired the reason of the shout.

"There is a happy return in the family," said he.

"A happy return!" she echoed, turning pale; "it cannot be. Is it Allan?"

"No!" replied Robin, taking her hand, "it is not him, but even bonnie Will Scarlet, who has returned, unscathed, from the wars, looking the picture of manly health and robustness, fully redeeming the promise his person gave while yet a boy."

"Will Scarlet come home! How happy am I to hear it. Where is he?"

"Where he is not likely to escape for some time to come—literally in the arms of his family—the scene was more affecting than I could withstand, so I withdrew."

"And Maude?"

"I am on my way to find her, to prepare her, poor girl, for his arrival. It is rather a difficult task for one who knows more of the intricacies of the green wood than the recesses of woman's heart."

"You need not possess much modesty on that point, Robin: you know how to find your way to a woman's heart better, I believe, than a woman does to a man's—and that's a knowledge which comes to our sex intuitively."

"Really, Marian, I believe you have entered into a compact with the females here to make me blush—you are all in a league to say flattering things."

"I was not aware you had been flirting already with Barbara or Winifred; but I may guess very well now that you have. You had better beware, sir, or I shall coquet with our new arrival."

"And so you shall, Marian, if you please. But let me warn you of Maude. I faith, if you commence setting your cap at Will, she will quickly deprive thee of it—making poor Will blush as much as I have done ever since I have been in the Hall."

"Blush, forsooth!" said Marian, laughing. "If he can only blush as much as thee, I need not fear; for I tell thee, Robin, I never saw thee blush but once, and that was when we first met; since then the sun has called the colour into your cheeks so frequently that it has forgotten to leave them."

"Well, I am glad you give me credit for having blushed once in my life—that at least is something in my favour. Now, shall I tell thee why I blushed then?"

"I am almost afraid to assent; there is such a wicked laugh dancing about your eyelids and the corner of your mouth, that I fear me I shall repent it if I put the question."

"Nay; if you are afraid, do not ask. I will not tell thee—only I am sure you would like to know."

"You are very impertinent to-day. You wish to raise my curiosity—you know the weakness of our sex, and take advantage."

"No, indeed; 'tis likely thou dost not wish to know."

"Thou knowest to the contrary; but if I ask thee—I say, if I should, out of sport, ask thee—I'll not believe thy answer."

"Then, out of spite, I'll not tell thee at all."

"Nay; but thou shalt. I mean, I'll use a discretionary power in believing thee."

"Oh! to be sure; we all do that when we hear anything. Now, shall I tell thee? Mind, thou askest for it."

"You frighten me. What was the reason?"

"You remember the first time we saw each other I led the way to our cottage home?"

"I shall never forget it."

"Nor I; I have a most tenacious memory on such points. Well; all I could see of your features were those eyes, Marian, of thine; and they sparkled and glittered so brightly, that I had a great desire to look upon their companions; but you seemed determined to prevent me, for you kept your face covered with your hood."

"I had no such thoughts."

"Perhaps not; but so it seemed to me, and I could do nothing but think if they were equally beautiful; and if they were, that I would make love to you—"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, thought I. And if the lips are only equal to the eyes, it shall go hard but I will have a delicious kiss of them—"

"Robin! and you so young—"

"And I so young! Pshaw! I was a lover—a general one, understand—when I was ten years old;

but that is not to the purpose. I was then sixteen, and in my own opinion, quite old enough to make love to anybody. I had had some experience, and only wanted an opportunity to display it; your arrival, I fancied, ere I had seen you five minutes, and I was about to lead you to my home, placed a good one in my power, and I resolved to profit by it. Well, while I was speculating upon your lips, it struck me suddenly whether you would ever return the compliment, and kiss my lips—"

"How absurd, Robin!"

"Oh, no! not so absurd, I can assure you, for at that precise moment you uncovered your face, and took my heart by storm. I uttered something, unconsciously, at the very time that this fancy rushed again into my head; I looked into your eyes, and they seemed to say to me 'Some day, Robin, I will'; your face became crimson, and I blushed with delight at the thought. There, Marian, that is the history of my first and my last blush."

"I don't believe you, Robin. I told you I would not, neither will I. You blushed because you uttered some nonsense, and was detected in it; and that is the real truth."

"No, it is as I say, and for years I have dwelt on the thought. I have consoled myself that the day would come when I had a right to ask you for it, and yet I thought I would rather receive it as a free gift than when asked as a right, and so I hoped that a favourable hour would arrive when I could screw my courage up and say—dear Marian, beloved of my soul, wilt thou—"

"Nay, no more, Robin; it is not so much to ask from thee of me."

What more she would have said became inaudible, for Robin, while talking, had encircled her waist with one arm, and he breathed his words in so low a tone that he was obliged to put his mouth close to her ear that she might hear all he uttered. As she turned her face to speak the last sentence, his lips being provokingly near, he received upon them the kiss he so long had coveted; but it was given with such gentleness, such softness, that, had it not been for the thrill which passed like lightning through every nerve in his body, he could scarce have told that her lips had been in contact with his; still the pressure was perceptive enough to tell him that she had kindly accorded his tender request, and as he did not require a smack as loud as a clap of the hand to assure him that he had been kissed, he felt perfectly satisfied with that he had received. Determined not to be outdone in generosity, he repaid her gift with one of a similar nature, with the addition of being presented with, we-can't-number-how-many-times-the-warmth, and exceeding the duration of the other in equal proportion to the warmth.

When this little agreeable passage had terminated, and Robin had quite forgotten that there existed any one else in the world besides himself and Marian, the lady brought him to his recollection, when she had herself somewhat recovered the pleasing embarrassment into which this display of tenderness on both sides had occasioned her, by saying—

"You gave me to understand, sir, that you were looking for Maude, to communicate agreeable tidings to her. Judging by your haste, when I met you, your mind was filled with her, and I was no more remembered. Ah, Robin! I fear you forget, in any society in which you may be present, those who are absent."

"You are ever present to my thoughts, at all times and in all places."

"I don't exactly know that; however, unless you

depart at once, your kind intention will be frustrated. Maude will descend to the Hall, and you must ever after blame yourself for any ill effects her sudden meeting with Will may produce."

"It shall be as you wish, Marian. I leave you for a short time, until my sight shall again be filled with your fair form."

"Oh, you say I am ever present to your thoughts!"

"Ever—ever!"

"Very well, then, sir, your sight will not need filling with my fair form! for, if I am to believe you, you always carry my image in your mind?"

"Indelibly fixed there, ever shedding its gentle influence upon my heart, like unto a holy balm upon the fevered and parched limbs of the wounded."

"You make me smile, Robin. You should have been a courtier, you flatter so well."

"I ever speak truth to thee."

"Well, I will pay myself the compliment not to doubt you, and so there's my hand; and, as you have my imaginary form with you, my real every-day self will descend to greet bonnie Will upon his return to his father's halls."

Robin raised her hand to his lips, and then, with a pleasant smile upon their countenances, they waved their hands, and separated. When the winding stairs hid her from his sight, and he could no longer see her, he turned on his way to seek for Maude, feeling as if one of the gods had by accident suddenly snuffed out the sun. When he arrived at the door of the apartment, where he was told he should find Maude, he knocked a low tap at it, and he heard her gentle voice according permission to enter the room. He obeyed, and as he opened the door she advanced to meet him.

"I was sure it was you, Robin," she said. "I heard the blast of your horn, and the shout that welcomed your arrival. I should have descended and mingled with the rest to greet your coming, but—"

"But what, Maude?"

"You will not think me unkind, or unmindful of your services to me, if I say that I had not the heart or inclination to meet you?"

"Not the inclination, Maude?"

"Not when all others crowd round you. I am ever glad to see you, but feel when you first come as though my presence was, if not an intrusion, at least a damp upon the cheerfulness which all others feel."

"You must not think any such thing, Maude. Why, what put such a strange thought in your head?"

"I'll tell you, for you are like a brother to me, and listen so kindly and sympathizingly to all the little thoughts and whims—which to me seem griefs—I may possess, and which I can utter to no other than you, for there are none here to me like what you are."

"It is you who make me so, for you are so grateful for everything; so much more so than anything I have done for you deserves, that I am obliged in self-defence, as a return for your gratitude, to appear to thrust my services upon you almost ostentatiously."

"Oh, fie, Robin! you always depreciate the natural goodness of your heart by some strange explanation; I will not hear it—"

"Well, and why had you no inclination to meet me?"

"For this reason, that when you come you have always some little piece of news for every one but me."

"But you?"

"Yes; there is always something to tell Sir Guy and his lady about their sons, and other affairs interesting to them; to Winifred there is some long message from Little John; to Barbara, a description

of head gears, bodices, and skirts, of doublets and feathered caps, and those who wear them; to Marian, to whom the sight of you should be all-sufficient to make glad her heart, who receives in your presence more than the value of what all the rest receive collected into one gift, even for her you have still some tidings dear to her heart; for, every visit you pay, there is always some fresh intelligence of her brother, which you have gained during your absence; but for me there is nothing—"

"Nothing, Maude?"

"You never forget me, Robin, in the little presents you bring every time you come, and in dispensing kind words I ever have the largest share; for you always strive to make up for the lack of news you have to tell me, by speaking more kindly and proffering me the fairest gift; and I can see the motive which prompts it, and it pains me—indeed it does. When I reach this chamber, I give way—I am quite, quite down—near broken-hearted. It is foolish of me, I confess, but I cannot help it; and so, to-day, when I heard your horn, I thought I would not come to meet you, and if I heard not all the news you brought for each, I might not feel so sick at heart that there was none for me."

"But do I not bring news from Nottingham, Maude? Do I not, at the risk of my peace of mind, pay that merry-hearted Hal a visit, notwithstanding the danger of being in the presence of his lovely little wife—that Grace by nature as well as name? Am I not reckless of all hazard, when I reach their house in the morning and never get away until night, and sometimes Hal absent, while Grace's eyes are blazing away, and her sweet lips smiling all the time, and I feeling my heart go pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, until I begin to feel an affection for the whole world, especially every one bearing the name of Grace? and do I not do all this for the sake of bringing thee news?"

"I know I am a dissatisfied creature; still, albeit I am glad to hear of them; yet it does not appear news to me."

"Then I shall not tell thee I have been there; that I have seen Hal, and that he is looking so hearty and well, and is the same merry, good-hearted soul as ever; neither will I tell thee that I saw his bonnie Grace, who looks just as lovely as she did when I first saw her a sweet smiling girl, nor that she was as gracefully gracious to my graceless self as hitherto; and I am resolved you shall not hear from me that their fair child, whom they have called Maude, after thee, even thy godchild, has grown very much, and that what with her large blue eyes, and her light shining hair, she looks like a little angel come to pay us a visit, to show what folks in Paradise are made of; none of this will I tell you, because you say it does not come to news."

"I thank you, Robin," said Maude, smiling, "for your manner of keeping this all secret from me, and shall rest just as satisfied as if you had told me. But I have one thing to ask, does Marian know your opinion of Hal's wife; have you told her what influence her charms have had upon you?"

"It is a wicked question; but to show you that guilty conscience is not busy with me, I do not mind answering it. She does know, partially; but as I have taken a fancy to my hair, and am desirous that it should remain upon my head, I have not told her quite all."

"Then you are a deceitful fellow; and I think I shall proceed at once and inform her of the full extent of your villany."

"I would accompany you, Maude, only I have really some news for you."

"Really news for me!" echoed she, looking doubtfully at him; "you are jesting with me?"

"No, upon my honour, I am serious," he replied, taking her hand. "Tell me, Maude, what should you consider good news?"

"Good news?"

"Yes, really good news. Come, say, for I have some that I think particularly good."

"I cannot think of anything that would be particularly good to me. I hardly understand you. What is the nature of your news?"

"What think you of a husband?"

"A husband! What a strange idea! What made you think of such a thing? Is this your good news?"

"Why not? You tell me that I have news for others—that I hear of Marian's brother—why should I not learn something?"

"Of Will—of Will! Speak, Robin, have you heard of him? I am sure you have, by that smile. Tell me all. Oh! I am so anxious to hear—oh! my heart—" and she pressed her hands forcibly to her side, as if to repress the violent and painful pulsation which the inference she had drawn from his speech had produced.

"I have heard of him."

"And he is alive—he is well—and he is coming home—he will soon be among us again? Speak, Robin, is it so?"

"Even as you surmise."

"And when will he come? Where is he? When—when will he come! Oh, Holy Mother, I thank thee!" she uttered, falling upon her knees, and, with streaming eyes, raised her hands to heaven, breathing a fervent prayer of thanksgiving. She had scarce concluded, when, turning her head to put a thousand questions to Robin, she beheld Will Scarlet standing a few feet from her, gazing with glittering eyes of adoration upon her. She sprung to her feet, uttered a scream of joy, and, throwing herself upon his neck, fainted.

"Poor girl!" muttered he, his lip quivering terribly, and tears raining from his eyes, "poor girl, it is more than she can bear—it is more than she can bear—take her, Robin—I—~~a~~—all this makes a clud of me; I can't endure it—I—," and Robin gently withdrawing Maude from Will's arm, the poor fellow buried his face in his hands, and gave way to an uncontrollable burst of grief. In a little while Maude recovered, and when she had done so, and her arms were twisted round Will's neck, and his were round her waist, and she was looking upon his face smiling through her tears, Robin suddenly remembered that he had something to tell Marian—at least, he said so—and, therefore hurried away to communicate it, leaving them alone.

For a short time neither spoke a word, and then the silence was broken by Will uttering in a low voice—

"Maude!"

"Dear Will!" was the reply.

"I am back again, you see, Maude. I am once more with you, although I began to think, when so long a time had elapsed since we parted, that I should never see you again; but I hoped, and hoped, with as good a heart as I could, that we should meet again, and you see we have."

"We have indeed!"

"And you are glad, Maude?"

"Glad, Will! Can you ask that question?"

"I think you are pleased?"

"I am very happy; very—very happy, now!"

"And you would not like me to leave again?"

"Leave again! You surely do not think of such a thing? Oh! do not talk even of it!"

"It all rests with you, Maude. You remember the night we parted?"

"Oh, well! too well!"

"I have never forgotten one word or act that transpired that night. I left you with a heavy heart, Maude—a very sad heart; still little thinking that that separation was to be for years. I was called from you—the voice was Robin Hood's. I joined him, and he noticed my dullness and challenged me with it, and I confessed it. I told him the cause, for we had been like brothers, or more than brothers, from childhood upwards, and he explained away a misconception I then laboured under, but it was not until late in the evening, and that by accident, that I learned it was to him you had given your heart, when I begged it for myself. Nay, never hang your head, Maude. An explanation between I and Robin settled that matter rightly; and he made me understand that, if you gave me your hand, you would not be miserable all your life because you were not wedded to him you first loved nor have sacrificed your happiness, merely to repay some attention I had previously paid you."

"Robin was right, Will; and now I will set all reserve aside, and tell you all I wish you to know, for fear some unfortunate chance might again separate us. And I could bear it better, Will, if such a miserable occurrence was to take place, if I knew that there existed no longer a misunderstanding between us—"

"Dear Maude!"

"And so I will tell thee what I should have told thee on the night we parted, if you had not so suddenly quitted me. I told you I had given my love to Robin Hood, and so I had, with all the warmth and earnestness which a heart like mine could at such an age bestow. But consider, Will, under what circumstances we met. I was a giddy girl—far too thoughtless. He showed me kindnesses; he took me from a miserable, uncomfortable home; his every act was such as to raise such a feeling as love in the breast of a warm-hearted girl. I need not tell how such a passion grows upon you, if you do not desire to check it; with me it became a cherished idol, until I ascertained too surely that I could never share his love—that Marian was adored, idolised by him. It was a bitter time for me when I could no longer keep it from myself; when it forced itself upon me with a conviction which there was no evading. I acknowledge it was a bitter time. But I struggled hard with it during many a midnight hour, and even like a violent spasm passing away, as I surmounted its bitterness, though it still left a weakness, which was the result of violence, still I had cured the sting, and learned to regard him only as a dear brother. At this time your love for me became known to me, and it was exhibited in so free, so frank a manner, that its sincerity was beyond a doubt. It was accompanied, too, by such kindness, such extreme tenderness to one who was a stranger in your house, and possessing no claim upon your sympathy—do not interrupt me, Will, I had no claim upon it—and yet had there existed the greatest, you could not have been more kind to me. I felt it deeply, I appreciated it to its fullest extent, and I learned to regard, with an eye of affection, he who loved me for myself, and had acted thus kindly, thus nobly to me. And when you asked me for my love on the night we parted, I would have granted my hand as freely as if I had never loved another; there was no sacrifice of feeling in doing so, and I mentioned my former love, to you, for the sole purpose of convincing you that I met your sincerity by an equal feeling, and also that the love I had borne

another had merged into a sisterly affection. Since we have been parted, Will, your kind acts have risen up in such a formidable array, and I have dwelt upon your good qualities for such a length of time, that I really now begin to wonder if I ever loved anybody better than you—aye, half so well."

"And you do love me now, Maude?"

"Most sincerely."

"Ha, ha, ha! I knew you would some day! bless you, Maude, I knew you would! I said so. And you will marry me now, Maude, won't you?"

"Will!"

"Oh! say you will. You have only got to say 'I,' and then speak my name, and that will be 'I will,' you know, Maude."

"Well, Will, I will. There's my hand."

Will grasped it, kissed it, and then sealed the bargain by giving her a hearty kiss upon her lips with a fervour which showed he meant what he did, and did no more than he meant."

"And when will you marry me, Maude?"

"Oh! I cannot say—some day."

"Of course it will be some day. Suppose we say to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Will? Oh, impossible!"

"Impossible! why impossible?"

"It is sudden—so soon."

"It can never be too soon. If we were to be married this instant, it would not be too soon—at least not for me; but I would rather it be to-morrow than any other time."

"Why to-morrow?"

"For two reasons: first, because to-morrow is the anniversary of my quitting England six years ago; and secondly because it is my father's seventy-sixth birth-day, and they mean to have rare doings here, the more especially as I have come home; and why should not this festivity celebrate our wedding?—besides then I shall make sure of you."

"And what will your father say to our sudden marriage?"

"Say! Why he'll shout hurrah, and throw his stick to the other end of the hall for joy. I know him. He loves to see us all happy; and how could I be made happier than by having you for a wife?"

"Well, Will, you have such a persuasive power—or else it is taking me at an unfair advantage for to-day I can deny you nothing."

"And you consent?"

"Why, I suppose I must."

"Not 'must,' Maude."

"You are very particular, Will; I suppose I had better say I will with all my heart—"

"Be married to me to-morrow?"

"Be married to you to-morrow."

Will again enfolded her energetically in his embrace, then seizing his cap, tossed it to the ceiling, indulging in a shout of stentorian strength; then taking Maude by the waist with his left hand, and holding her right in his, he led her down stairs to announce to his friends below his intended marriage.

The greetings which Maude received from all present when Will presented her as his wife-elect, was quite sufficient to assure her of the perfect acquiescence of his family with the arrangement he had made. A council of ladies was immediately called, and Maude was led away by them to make preparations for the forthcoming celebration. The gentlemen were left by themselves, as is usual on all such occasions, to amuse themselves the best way they could, for the ladies' presence was required elsewhere on important business. The gentlemen, however, were at no loss to amuse themselves, and the remainder of

that day was taken up in assisting at the preparations for the morrow. And the morrow came, as morrows generally come, when they are expected—and a most lovely morrow it was. The people began to flock from all parts within a few miles, to partake of the bounteous provision made for them. Poles were erected, decorated with garlands, targets, and everything requisite for the exercise of all manly sports, and it was quite charming to see the many patient barrels of ale standing here, there, and everywhere, waiting to be broached. The time for the ceremony which was to make Will Scarlet and Maude Clare one, drew on, and when it had nearly reached the hour appointed, it was discovered for the first time that *Will was missing!* At first it was thought nothing of—that he was about the ground somewhere, and twenty voices were raised to call him and chide him for his absence at a moment like this; but the ground echoed back only their voices without bearing a response to their call from him. An hour after the time he was to have been united passed, and he was nowhere to be found; the family, as well as the visitors, divided themselves into bands and searched the country for miles round in vain; and when midnight arrived, the seekers had re-assembled in Barnsdale-hall—but he whom they had sought so earnestly with unwearied exertions the whole of that day, was not among them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"As Robin Hood in the forest stood,

All under the greenwood tree,

There was he aware of a brave young man,

As fine as fine might be.

The youngster was clothed in scarlet red,

In scarlet fine and gay,

And he did frisk it o'er the plain."

Robin Hood and Allan a Dale.

"Forth from the green wood they are gone,

Yea, all courageously,

Resolving to bring Stutely home,

Or every man to die.

The gates were opened wide,

And out of the Castle Will Stutely came,

Guarded on every side.

And when he was forth from the Castle come,

And saw no help was nigh,

Thus he unto the Sheriff said—

Give me a sword all in my hand,

And let me be unbound,

And with thee and thy men I'll fight

Till I lie dead on the ground.

But his desire he would not grant."

Robin Hood Ballad.

BARON FITZ ALWINE, after an absence of some years, was again seated in a chamber in his castle at Nottingham, engaged on some very important business. Opposite to him sat an old man, richly habited, and, if there is any richness in ugliness, he was immensely wealthy in that particular. His age exceeded, judging by his wrinkled visage, that of Baron Fitz Alwine something more than a trifle, and his voice bore a more tremulous tone. They sat eyeing and gibbering at each other like a couple of very antique monkeys, discussing old times; that is, if antique monkeys ever do such things. There appeared to be a point in question which each wished to obtain, and were trying their best to coax and carney out of each other.

"You are too hard with me, Fitz Alwine," said the very ugly old man to the baron.

"Not I, forsooth," returned he. "I gain no ob-

ject by it but the furtherance of my daughter's welfare. I am sure you will acquit me of any other feeling, Sir Tristram?"

"Most decidedly! most certainly!" he replied; "to be sure—to be sure! it is natural that a father should see to his daughter's welfare. How much do you propose to give her as a dowry, eh?"

"Five thousand merks when she is wedded, and five thousand more that day five years."

"It is not much—it is not much!"

"You try my patience, Sir Tristram; you will remember that you are to receive a young and youthful bride, and that you look not so youthful withal, as you did fifty years ago."

"Nay, don't be angry—I mean well; but I could perhaps put to her ten thousand merks, a million, perhaps more—say two—"

"I know you are rich. I tell thee I am not so, but would see my daughter shine like the highest born princess in Europe; would have her state equal to it. Then why refuse to place a sum in my care, which would insure it?"

"I don't see, my dear Fitz Alwine, what difference it can make if I keep the money myself; I can insure her state being equal in all respects to that of a princess as well as you, without, besides, putting you to all the trouble."

"But, Sir Tristram, you will excuse my daughter's happiness being the first consideration I have. I know well that it frequently happens that, where there is a disparity in years, man and wife live not quite so happily after as before marriage; therefore, you might take offence at some of her whims, and, if you should do so, what guarantee have I that you will not break the agreement now existing between us. On the other hand, if I have possession of half your wealth, you can quarrel as much as you please; I shall then be sure my daughter's rank will be supported even as I could wish it."

"My dear Fitzallan, there is no fear of Christabel and I quarrelling: I love the little dove too well. Have I not for more than twelve years been a longing suitor for her fair hand?"

"It is true; but the unsettled state of the times has prevented the accomplishment of our mutual wishes; and allow me to say now, Sir Tristram, that although we have made every other arrangement, and this the only point on which we differ, yet if you still persist in refusing what I conceive I so justly demand, I must waive all other considerations but my daughter's happiness, and with many thanks for the honour you have done me and her, beg to decline the offer of your hand."

"Stop, stop, you are too hasty: let us talk the matter over a little further."

"I have said enough—I am quite satisfied—all the talking in the world will not change me."

"A—a—don't be so headstrong; a—let us see. Suppose I was to place fifty thousand merks in your possession."

"I should laugh at you, and ask you if you meant to insult me."

"Insult you! Lord, no; the farthest from my thoughts. Shall we say two hundred thousand?"

"I know your wealth, Sir Tristram; I know of your property in Normandy as well as here in England; I know, with all King Henry's enormous wealth, thine is almost equal to his. What, therefore, dost thou mean by thy paltry two hundred thousand?"

"Did I say two? I meant five—I say I meant five hundred thousand merks. A noble sum—a right noble sum!"

"Why, so it is; but thou saidst but now thou

couldst place two million to my daughter's humble ten thousand; therefore, place one million in my possession, and my Christabel is yours to-morrow, if thou wilt."

"A million, Baron Fitz Alwine! Place a million of merks in thy keeping! it is too much. Place half my money in your hands? I cannot!"

"Do you doubt my honour?"

"Not in the least; of course not—oh, no!"

"Do you suppose I have any other motive than in seeing my child well provided for?"

No other, to be sure—I am satisfied of that; but—"

"But what? Decide at once, Sir Tristram, or our engagement must be annulled, never to be renewed."

"You do not give me time to reflect—"

At this moment there was a loud rap at the door, the baron gave the permission to enter, and a retainer opened the door, saying—

"My lord baron, a messenger from the king waits without to see you on matters of pressing importance."

"Admit him instantly."

The man bowed and withdrew. No sooner had he turned his back, than Fitz Alwine, seizing him by the arm, exclaimed, earnestly—

"Now, Sir Tristram, if you do not consent before this messenger enters, our contract is destroyed!"

"Fitz Alwine, hear me!—hear me!"

"Nothing—not one word. My daughter is passing fair—you say you love her—"

"Most dearly—most dearly."

"Well, Sir Tristram, she has another suitor, who is wealthy—who is young and handsome too, who only waits my consent to make her his. Now, if you hesitate a second, even till the messenger be upon the threshold, I withdraw my promise to give her to you, and to-morrow you shall see her another's."

"You are too hard—indeed you are—"

"I hear his step upon the stair. Do you consent, once for all—yea or nay?"

"I—I consent—I consent—but you are too hard."

"Nay, my dear friend, Sir Tristram, consider the prize you receive."

"Why, she is very fair. A—a—and her cheeks, if they are not so rosy as they used to be, still they are round and tempting."

"And worth a million of merks—eh? Here comes the messenger. Sir Tristram, she is yours!"

And so Baron Fitz Alwine sold his daughter, the fair Christabel, to Sir Tristram of Goldsborough, for one million merks.

The messenger bore tidings relative to the escape of a soldier, who had killed his captain in Normandy, fled to England, and had been traced to Nottinghamshire. A copious description was given of him, and Fitz Alwine received orders to make a hot search for him, and in the event of being successful in capturing him, he was, being sheriff, to hang him at once, without a trial. When the messenger had communicated his message, Fitz Alwine dismissed him, and breaking up his interview with Sir Tristram, proceeded at once to put into execution the King's commands. Shortly after this, he received some unexpected intelligence respecting the fugitive; he laid his plans accordingly, and his measures were so well-concerted that, in two days subsequent, the man he was in pursuit of was captured, and in as short a time as the distance could be accomplished, was confined within a dungeon in Nottingham Castle.

Robin Hood was one of the most active in the search after Will Scarlet, who, the reader will easily perceive, was the prisoner. Baron Fitz Alwine had received orders to capture him, and had succeeded in fulfilling them. Every conjecture but

the right was made as to his disappearance. It was impossible to arrive at any conclusion: the idea of Sir Guy proving one of joyous mirth and festivity, that he had been discovered, pursued, and captured, it was one of distraction and misery. Robin had



never entered the imagination of those connected with him, and they were at an utter loss to assign any other motive. All was one wide sea of speculation and doubt; and so far from the natal day of Sir Guy proving one of joyous mirth and festivity, it was one of distraction and misery. Robin had kept up an unwearied search after him, and, although he rejected the idea of his having fallen into the hands of ministers of justice, as impossible, still it was the

only feasible reason he could assign for his absence. In the event of such a circumstance, he was satisfied he could ascertain everything pertaining to it from such of his men as had been stationed in various parts of the forest, commanding the road to Nottingham, to which place, if the capture had been made, the prisoner would be sure to be carried. As the neighbourhood of Barnsdale had been scoured by parties in search of Will, without success, Robin determined to delay no time, but at once repair to Sherwood, and leave nothing untried to discover if Will had been taken prisoner; how it had been effected, if it had been effected, and if it had, how to rescue him. Leaving the family of the Gamwells in great grief, and poor Maude almost inconsolable, he departed, and on his way to Mansfield, when within a few miles of the town, he met Much, the miller's son, mounted on a mettlesome steed, riding at a brisk pace in the direction he was leaving. So soon as Much perceived Robin, he reined in his horse, and hailed him—

"I am very glad I have met with you," he said; "I was on my way to Barnsdale to see you, having some particular news to communicate concerning that friend of yours, who quitted Mansfield four days since with you in this direction."

"Ha! what is it?" cried Robin, eagerly. "It is on matters respecting him that I am now returning to Sherwood. Say, have you seen him?"

"Yes, last night."

"Where?"

"In Mansfield. After Little John had installed me and my two friends in your band, he quitted us to follow you. I had still some little arrangements to make at home, and so returned to Mansfield. On nearing my father's threshold, I observed a troop of horse clustered round it, and in the centre a man bound hand and foot, seated behind a stout trooper, to whom he was strongly fastened. My father, hearing the reputation with King Henry and his followers of being exceeding loyal, had been surprised by the troop with a visit, for the purpose of baiting these steeds, and I being his son had the opportunity of mixing among them unquestioned and unsuspected. I soon found that the prisoner was your friend and one of the community; I contrived, unnoticed, to let him know his situation was known, and that means would be tried to set him free; he understood me at a glance, and his countenance, which had betokened the greatest anguish of mind, now brightened up; he seemed suddenly to have become a new man. Some drink, which he previously sullenly refused, he now asked for, and drank with an appearance of great satisfaction. Altogether, he became as gay and light-spirited as he had been dull and wretched. I inquired of one of the troopers what was to be done with him, and his reply was that he knew no further than that they had been sent, under the guidance of a stranger, to Yorkshire to capture him—that they had done so, and were now on their way back to Nottingham, from which place they had departed on this errand. Conjecturing that the capture had been made under some extraordinary circumstances, which might, in some way, affect you materially, I thought it as well to lose no time, but seek you out and make you acquainted with the foregoing, leaving it to you to act further in the matter."

"You have done well, Much," replied Robin; "you have told me all I wished to ascertain, and it shall go hard but I will restore poor Will to his friends again, or there shall be a heavy payment for my failure. Come on, Much, to the forest haunt, and I will there concert means to carry our intentions into effect."

"Where is Little John?" asked Much.

"He will be at the haunt nearly as soon as we," returned Robin. "I despatched him there by a different route to this, in the hope that if I failed to learn anything respecting Will this way, he might be able to hear something in his path. I am the fortunate one, it appears, and I will do my best but the issue shall be equally fortunate. Let us on: if I conjecture rightly, they will make Will's punishment as severe and as summary as possible."

"Your will is the law I follow—I am with you, captain."

Robin smiled, bowed his head, dashed on at full speed, closely followed by Much. Upon arriving at the general rendezvous he found that Little John had just reached it, and Robin at once proceeded to concert measures for ascertaining exactly where Will was confined, and the means of effecting a certain rescue. He despatched Little John to call in the men, who were in small bands in different parts of the forest, and form them into one body; when that was accomplished he was to lead them to the confines of the wood, as near Nottingham as could be, and there await in perfect readiness Robin's summons, and to be ready for desperate action at a moment's warning. This being all settled, Robin and Much departed for Nottingham; but our hero would not enter the town, for fear of being recognised; not that he was afraid from personal motives, but on account that his person was well known to many of the inhabitants, and were it known that he had been seen in Nottingham, expectations would be formed that he proposed rescuing the prisoner, and, consequently, such means might be taken to frustrate every effort he might make to set his old friend free; he, therefore, sent Much to Hal of the Keep's residence, desiring him to repair to him on the borders of the forest. He sent for him because he knew that Hal's situation in the town was such that he was acquainted with every matter of any interest which occurred there or in the castle, and consequently, would be the person who could give him the most information on the subject he was interested in. He was seated under an old oak tree awaiting the return of Much with Hal, when he noticed the approach of a stranger most gaily attired.

"By my faith," he muttered, "if this spruce cavalier be a Norman, he shall pay for the bows and staffs which to-morrow or to-night may see broken. His gear is of the true Norman fashion, and right gorgeously decked too. You advance it right sprightly, my bonnie sir; we shall see, when your coffers are somewhat thinned, if you treat it away so merrily."

The stranger rapidly advanced; and Robin, arising from the shade of the tree, leisurely crossed his path, and confronting him, prepared to resist his further progress. The stranger stopped as Robin stopped before him, but said nothing, awaiting a greeting.

"Well met, my bonnie cavalier," said our hero, on finding the other offered no speech; "the heavens are somewhat cloudy, and thy attire is withal so gay, that thou comest like sunshine among the green leaves. Thy countenance, too, is so pleasant, that while thou art here, the old wood and flowers will not miss the sun, albeit there is a thick curtain of cloud to screen him from their sight."

"Art thou one of the famed Robin Hood's band?" demanded the stranger, slightly smiling at Robin's speech.

"Thou canst see, by my garb, I am a forester. Thou meetest me in Sherwood Forest, and so thou dost think I must be one of Robin Hood's band; all

the foresters in Sherwood Forest, sir Stranger, are not of Robin Hood's band."

"Possibly not; I can believe a man may be a forester, pass his days in this forest, but yet not be one of this celebrated band; I asked not for such an answer, but simply questioned thee if thou wert one of the band."

"Thou dost question simply. It is only at certain times, in certain places and to certain persons, that any of the band acknowledge themselves to be such; still thy appearance likes me so well, that albeit I can tell by thy accent thou art a Norman, a race for whom I hold the most thorough and unchangeable detestation, yet I mind not to tell thee I am of the band."

"Thou'rt mistaken, friend, with regard to me, though my appearance, and, as thou sayest, my accent, bespeaks me Norman; yet am I not of the race, but Saxon by birth, although there is a tinge of Norman blood in my descent."

"I am glad on't; 'twould be a pity the Normans should boast of one so comely as thou; and in knowing thou'rt a Saxon, I feel little hesitation in acknowledging to thee that I am one of Robin Hood's band. We have usually a different method of proclaiming ourselves to Normans."

"I can believe it; report hath taught me much of your method. I am glad I have fallen in with thee; I would be led to Robin Hood's presence."

"Supposing I were to say he stood before thee."

"Then should I say, is Allan Clare no more remembered?"

"Allan Clare! thou Allan Clare?"

"Even he. I knew thee, Robin, almost as soon as thou hadst spoken, and marvelled thou shouldst have forgotten me."

"How glad I am thou'rt here again! how entranced will Marian be to again clasp thee in her arms!"

"My dear, dear sister, and she is well and happy?"

"She is indeed well, and only unhappy on account of thy absence."

"She shall no more complain of that; we will never again be separated but by death. Dost thou know, Robin, that I have, since my absence from England, been in the service of Louis of France?"

"I have heard so from several sources."

"It was truth. I had succeeded in obtaining Louis' notice by my conduct in the army; I was fortunate enough to save his life, while hunting, from the desperate attack of some wolves; out of gratitude he inquired of me how he could serve me. I represented to him my long absence from England, and—knowing Christabel had returned hither—requested my discharge; he granted it freely, regretting, at the same time, I should desire to quit his service. I explained the cause of my yearning to visit the land of my birth again, and found in him an attentive auditor. When I had concluded my little story he no longer sought to detain me, but offered his services with King Henry if I desired; for though not at peace with him, yet they are in frequent habit of doing each other personal services. I spoke of my confiscated estates, and so soon as he learned that adherence to the cause of St. Thomas à Becket was the reason of their confiscation, he wrote a letter to Henry, which on quitting Louis' Court, I caused to be placed in his hands, and the result is that I am restored fully to my inheritance, and have an order on the treasury for all arrears from the time of their confiscation. I have also realised a certain sum, independent of my estate, which meets with an agreement I entered into with Baron Fitz Alwine seven years ago—at least the seven years expire to-morrow, and then

I offer myself as a suitor for her hand, which he has bound himself down not to refuse, if Christabel consents, and of her willing assent I am well assured—"

"Seven years!" interrupted Robin, thoughtfully. "It must be eight years since you entered into that agreement with him."

"No, I am positive with respect to the time, because the agreement expressly was, that I was to offer Christabel my hand, if reinstated in my family estates, as well as possessing a certain sum on that day seven years; that I was not to see her or make the offer before; and if that day passed without doing it, he was to bestow her hand upon whom he pleased; to this both Christabel and I assented. I have not seen her from that hour, and to-morrow I fulfil my conditions; I am satisfied of the correctness of what I say. Why do you assert it to be eight years?"

"It is now rather better than five years since the capture of Will Scarlet took I and Little John to Nottingham Castle."

"Little John! Is not that the gigantic nephew of old Sir Guy of Gamwell?"

"The same; and he is, if possible, more huge than ever. Well, we there had an interview with the Baron Fitz Alwine, and Little John succeeded in obtaining from him an account of you, as well as of the transaction you have just mentioned; he stated it to have then occurred three years."

"It was a vile falsehood, and done for some base purpose. It is now a trifle over five years since he quitted Normandy for England, and two years of our agreement had not then elapsed. An opportunity occurred shortly after to correspond with Christabel, which I availed myself of; it continued during his absence, but upon his return it no longer existed. I am, therefore, quite positive I am right; besides, you do not imagine I could let a year elapse without being conscious that it brought me nearer the object of my affections?"

"You are no doubt right; but I expect that Fitz Alwine will clap a year on the agreement, without the least compunction, if he believes by such a stratagem he can evade it; and unless you are provided for some such occurrence, you will yet be defeated in your hopes of obtaining the Lady Christabel, even after your long term of servitude for her gentle hand."

"By Heaven! if he plays me false, he shall rue the hour he made the attempt."

"You have then some means of making him hold your threats in awe?"

"I have; and if I had not, I would make a means. He shall find I am not to be trifled with; and I'll have Christabel, if I storm his castle to obtain her."

"If you should need assistance, you may command me; I have nearly two hundred men at my beck, stout hearts, who fear nothing, and can handle bow, spear, sword, and buckler, with any band in Christendom."

"I thank thee, Robin; I am well convinced if I lack assistance, I may command thine."

"You may, to its fullest extent."

"And should I need it, I will not hesitate to ask; for I know that if thou didst not wish me to have it, thou wouldst not proffer it."

"You do me but justice; and now, let me ask you, how you learned that I was connected with the forest?"

"Upon my arrival in London, I lost no time in coming to Nottingham; there I ascertained that Christabel was in the castle; from thence I proceeded to Gamwell; but judge my surprise upon reaching it, to find scarce a vestige of the village to

be seen. I fancied I had mistaken my way, and found my way to Mansfeld, where I learned the history of the events which had produced this change; that you had been outlawed, and made yourself famous by your acts of kindness, as well as daring, but that nothing was known relative to the fate of Sir Guy Gamwell or his family; it was only supposed they had been carried away to some place of safety, and that they still remained in secluded security: this eased my mind respecting my sister's situation, but I resolved to find you out, and learn from you the truth; ten years had not made such a change in you but I could recognise you when I saw you; still I fancied I might be deceived, and asked to be led to the presence of Robin Hood, purposely to satisfy my doubts."

"And yet ten years of a forest life makes a greater change in a man's looks than the same time does in a camp life, judging from your appearance. Your dress, too, is different in its style from any I ever saw you wear, and that is some slight reason why I knew you not at first, but now I look upon you, I wonder how I should have forgotten you, you are so like your sister Marian."

"Poor Marian, how looks she?"

"As beautiful as ever."

"Has she—is she married?"

"No."

"I am glad of that. Do you know if there is any suitor for her hand? Has she given her heart to any one?"

"She will tell you herself. Phew! it is very warm to day. I wonder Much does not return. Do you remember Will Scarlet?"

"What, the lad with the bright red hair, that used to do everything like you—one of Sir Guy's sons?"

"Yes. He has lately returned from serving with the army in Normandy. Poor Will! he was anxious to get home, and cut down his commander because he refused to grant him his discharge; he escaped, arrived in England; I met with him, I took him to his father's; he was only there two days—not two days—was to have been married to Maude Lindsay—"

"Maude Lindsay! Who is that?"

"She waited upon the Lady Christabel, you must remember, from childhood until the night on which she escaped from Nottingham Castle."

"What, that little merry-hearted, wicked-eyed daughter of the warder?"

"Yes. She and Will have long loved each other."

"Nay, I thought it was you she loved?"

"No, it is a mistake."

"Then you loved her; I know it was one or the other."

"No, never; I never loved *her*—that is, only as a sister."

"Oh!"

"Nothing more, by my honour! Poor Will Scarlet was to have been married to her the day after his return, but he was captured by Fitz Alwine's men, and I am here with my men within call to rescue him."

"To rescue him from whence?"

"From Nottingham Castle, as soon as I can learn for certain that he is there."

"Do not be too hasty in your decision. I shall most certainly be at the Castle in the morning; I will then ascertain everything connected with him I can for you, and if I should possess any influence at the same time, which I fully expect I shall, it shall be all exerted in his favour."

"But suppose the old villain seizes some pretext to act summarily?"

"Have you cause for such fear?"

"Can you ask a question which none could resolve so well as yourself? Does he not thirst for blood? Will he not gladly hail the chance to hang up one through whom he has received contumely, nay, corporeal punishment? My object is to keep all such opportunity out of his power; and to do so, I must be doing at once, or my efforts may come too late."

"Thy acts might compromise my desires in a great measure; but as I have no right to interfere, as thy motive is a kindly one to him thou'rt endeavouring to save, I will meet thee half way, and go to the Castle to-day instead of to-morrow; I will but express my intention to Baron Fitz Alwine of appearing to claim my bride upon the day appointed, and at the same time do my best to discover what is to be done with Will Scarlet; and so far as I have it in my power, I will render him service; but if it should be of little use, I will immediately acquaint you with his situation and position exactly, leaving you to decide what had best be done."

"Be it so. I see Much returning with Hal of the Keep; we will hear what they have to say, and then you can depart and put your intention into execution."

As soon as they arrived, Robin Hood, after greeting Hal warmly, and inquiring respecting the little wife and the sweet daughter, asked him to pour out what intelligence he possessed in a flood, and as speedily as possible.

"I have very little to tell you," he replied. "I know that a prisoner has arrived, and I learn from Much that it is poor Will Scarlet again in trouble; I fear me that it is desperate trouble, for a Palmer who happened to be near the castle, being a holy friar also, has been carried in to shrieve him."

"He shall not die yet, by the Holy Mother's help! If he do, then shall many a back be stretched on the ground for his sake," cried Robin, fiercely, clenching his hands.

"Know you more respecting him?" he continued to Hal.

"No," he replied, "but I have learned that the Lady Christabel is to be married at the end of this week."

"What!" cried Allan, in a loud startling tone.

"It is even as I say," said Hal, looking upon Allan with some surprise. "She is to be wedded to the richest Norman in England."

"Married? Impossible!" exclaimed Allan.

"The rumour is very strong, I assure you," he answered, "and great preparation is making for the festive occasion."

"Festive occasion!" reiterated Allan, bitterly. "What is the name of the villain who dares to offer his ungainly hand to the Lady Christabel?"

"His name?" echoed Hal, looking at Allan, as if he believed the young man to have lost his senses. "Why, every one knows his name, for the baron has been trying, I don't know how many years to catch him—it is Sir Tristram of Goldsborough."

"He! Why I thought the old miser had been in his grave years since. If he dares to continue his vile suit now, he shall descend at once to the grave he has been so long dwindling into. The Lady Christabel is betrothed to me, and none other shall she wed, while I have an arm and strength to defend my right."

"Betrothed to you!" echoed Hal.

"Yes," said Robin. "This is Allan Clare."

"Maid Marian's brother! the first love of the Lady Christabel?"

"The same."

"Wheugh!" and Hal gave a long energetic whistle. "I had no idea," he said, when he had concluded his strain, "that my news was so interesting to you. Welcome to England, sir; you have just arrived in time to save the lady from being forced to become the wife of one she detests. I am sure that it is to take place the last day of this week, and if you propose doing aught to prevent it, you have little time to lose."

"I thank thee for thy news; it is time to act, indeed. Robin, I will at once to the castle, and hear the worst. This accursed marriage shall not take place. I will perish rather."

"You may count upon my best assistance to prevent it; but Will's is a more pressing case of emergency; we have several days to concert measures for the furtherance of your wishes, while we have but a few hours perhaps to enable us to rescue Will. We will on, however, to the castle, at once, and see what can be done in both cases."

Accordingly, on they went—Robin Hood, under the circumstances deeming it unnecessary to disguise himself, the situation of Will being too urgent to admit of any such thought; still, precaution was taken to proceed by such bye-ways as the town afforded, and a short hour's trudge took them to the castle gates. Just as they approached, they observed the drawbridge lower, and they retired a short distance to reconnoitre. There was, however, only an old man who made his appearance over the drawbridge, and he was habited in the garb of a pilgrim.

"This is the holy palmer I told you of," said Hal, eagerly, "let us question him; he can tell us Will's fate."

"It shall be so," exclaimed Robin, "none can so well tell us as he the baron's purpose."

The old man slowly approached; he was feeble with great age; and long travel, with rigid penance, had helped to bend him to the earth.

"The Holy Mother keep thee, good father!" said Robin, as he neared them.

"Amen, to thy kind prayer, my son," replied the pilgrim. "*Benedicite!*"

"Thou hast travelled far, father."

"From the Holy Land, my son, whither I have been on a pilgrimage—a penance for sin done in my youth. I have walked thither and hither, and have now come to lay these old and wearied bones under the green turf, upon whose pleasant face, and among whose sweet flowers, I frolicked, when a laughing child, free from sin and care. Holy Mother! that childhood's innocence can change to such a nature as man's."

"Thou hast lived long, father?"

"Eighty years ago I was a sturdy boy of nine, smiling lovingly in my mother's soft eyes, and rearing my little head proudly beneath the pat of my father's hand. It was a dream, all a dream—all faded, gone long since; but, oh! it was sweet while it lasted; so sweet, that it refreshes, aye, gladdens me, even to recall it to my memory."

"May your succeeding hours be as calm and free from care as those of your childhood, father; and may you, when you pass away, rest as the wearied child after its gladsome play sleeps lightly and freely, dreaming only of the fair things dwelling in the world to come."

"Amen, my son! My patron's blessings on thee for thy kind wishes for an old man on the verge of the tomb; and let me request thy prayers for the repose of the soul of one who is now on eternity's brink, and who, ere a few fleeting hours have passed over a head scarce emancipated from childhood, will be sleeping to wake no more in this life."

"And is he now in the castle whom thou hast just shriven?" asked Robin, drawing a deep breath.

"He is, my son, and immured—Heaven help him!—in a lonesome dungeon."

"He is doomed to die?"

"He is, my son; and there is no earthly help for him."

"By the Virgin's aid there shall be, if I cast away my life in the effort!" muttered Robin, between his teeth, and then speaking loudly, said—"At what hour do they take his life?"

"At sunrise to-morrow morning."

"Ha! not before?"

"Not before! Holy Mother, is not that speedy enough? nay, too speedy. Dost thou wish him dead, son?"

"I would rather die myself; would cheerfully lay down my life, if by so doing I could save his. I know him, and love him, father; and it was a fear that he would perish earlier than you have mentioned, which made me ejaculate those words. Is he to die within the castle walls?"

"No, my son, he is consigned to an ignominious death; he is to perish at the foot of the town, upon the gallows tree, by the hands of the hangman."

"Fortune favours me," muttered Robin. "My old friend, thou shalt yet escape, if one true heart beats beneath the green doublet of him who owns Robin Hood for his leader. Father, will you do me a favour?"

"Name it, son."

"Will you again enter the castle, and say that you will attend the prisoner to the gallows tree, to perform the last offices for him, and that he may die as becomes a true Christian and a Saxon?"

"I have not forgotten my duty, son; I have already said so, and I shall be there."

"It is well; I thank thee, father, most sincerely. We shall meet it the morning, if thou wilt, ere the cavalcade approaches the fatal tree, be at the foot of the elm tree which stands between two oaks, an hundred yards west of the pathway from this town to Mansfeld. I have somewhat to say to thee there, which it is not fitting to mention now, and so will feel thy kindness greatly if thou sayest not nay."

"I will be there."

"Many thanks, father. I will no longer detain thee. Farewell—the blessing of St. Julian upon thee."

"Amen. *Benedicite*, my son. Peace unto us all." So saying, the old man, crossing his hands over his breast, walked slowly away.

"The good old man! and he will be there," said Robin, gazing after him; "and so will I, and so will my merrie men; and it shall go hard but Will Scarlet comes into the green wood with those who go back."

"It is to be done, if you can post your men so as to be near, yet securely hidden," said Hal.

"You ought to know, Hal, that my merrie hearts have a knack of hiding themselves even in open paths; and, trust me, they will not thrust their doublets under the noses of the troopers until I tell them with a blast of my horn it is time."

"I wish my prospect of success was as good as thine," said Allan, thoughtfully.

"We must contrive to make it so," said Robin, gaily. "Once let me get Will Scarlet into Maude's hands, and we will see if the Lady Christabel is not speedily the wife of Allan Clare. Nay, never shake thy head thus dolefully, Allan; I have almost the means to ensure it—I have all the will—and we will see if means and will cannot make a power sufficient to accomplish your wishes."

"I hope there will be no need to put thy kindness to the test. I will enter the castle at once, see Fitz Alwine, and learn from his own lips the truth of the report our friend Hal has conveyed to me. If it should be true, I will no longer be duped. Since he has thought fit to break through a solemn engagement, I will not respect what I deemed his due, but leave nought untried to make his daughter mine."

"Thou'rt in the right. Well, Allan, I will back to the forest again, to make preparations for the morning; and thou canst meet me there, some thousand yards from the spot where we met to-day. Some of my people will sure to be about, and bring thee to me. If Fitz Alwine should deny thee his daughter, will he not also detain thee?"

"He dare not. I hold a rank and power so nearly equal to his own, that he dare not, if he would; besides, if he purposes a denial, he will do his best to rid himself of me."

"True—I had forgotten that," laughed Robin; "but take care he does not do it by cold steel, instead of requesting it by word of mouth."

"If my fear of losing Christabel was no greater than that, I should have little cause for alarm. I fear his cupidity, not his sanguinary spirit. I know the immense wealth of Sir Tristram would be sufficient to tempt him to any degradation of principle; and if, as Hal tells me, Sir Tristram is a suitor, then my chance of wedding his daughter by his consent is indeed a poor one."

"We shall see—you must hope for the best. Christabel will be your best friend. She will not give her hand away to this old wretch without a hard struggle in your favour, depend upon it. Every delay she can make, I have little doubt she will, and every obstacle will be in your favour."

"I know not in what way her father may have worked upon her mind; the prospect of shame, misery, and ignominy occurring to him would induce her to sacrifice herself, without a thought upon the personal anguish she might endure afterwards. I must endeavour to see her, to ascertain the extent of his influence over her, and his means of obtaining it. To me there appears no more time to lose than you find in poor Will Scarlet's affair, so I'll e'en wish you good den, and meet you again, as soon as I can with satisfaction to myself quit the castle."

"Agreed. You will find me in the wood, as I have told you. Farewell for the present."

"Farewell," answered Allan.

Robin, followed by Hal, took his way rapidly down the town: while Allan demanded admittance at the castle gates. It was granted; and in a short time afterwards, according to his request, he was ushered unannounced into the Baron's presence.

If a spectre had risen from the grave and confronted Fitz Alwine, he could not have well looked more astonished or more paralysed; but when he recovered a little, he glanced round to see who had ushered Allan in; but the man, observing the sudden expression his face had assumed, as his eye alighted on his visitor, and thereby judging the amount of glee he felt at the visit, had thought it prudent to decamp as speedily as his two legs would convey him away. The Baron, disappointed in this, turned to Allan with rather an equivocal welcome.

"I did not expect to see you," he said, rather faintly.

"Very likely not—nevertheless, my Lord Baron, I am here," was Allan's reply.

"I see it; but you are, I think, a—a—little after your promised time, are you not?"

"No; on the contrary, I am a little before my time."

"I can hardly think that."

"I am sure of it; I have kept too correct an account to be mistaken on that point. Besides, I have good means of proving it; to-morrow is the day on which, complying with your terms, I claim the fulfilment of your promise—that of bestowing your daughter's hand upon me."

"Are all the conditions I made complied with?"

"To the letter. There were but three: viz., That I should be reinstated in my father's estates; that I should possess one hundred thousand merks; and that I should come upon the day seven years that the agreement was made, to claim her. If I was unable to fulfil these conditions, you were to bestow Christabel upon any one you thought proper; to which, in the event of my failing, I prevailed on her to consent."

"But you cannot have fulfilled these terms?"

"I have. King Henry has restored to me my estates, with an order to receive the arrears since they were confiscated until now; I have a hundred thousand merks; and to-morrow I shall be here to claim the redemption of your promise."

"To-morrow!" cried the Baron, a light suddenly brightening his features. "If you are not here to-morrow, the agreement is null?"

"It is. But mark me, Baron Fitz Alwine. I can tell by the expression of your countenance some devilish device has crossed your mind, to free yourself from your promise; but remember, that even should you proceed to such a length as to confine me, recollect I am here when the time arrives for my presence, and that it matters not whether I am in a dungeon or this apartment—I am *here*. There was no particular room specified in our agreement, therefore any evasion of that nature you may attempt will be of no avail; and if I see the slightest disposition on your part to play me false, you shall suffer terribly for it. I have you in my power. You have compromised your safety by treasonable acts, of which I am cognisant. Believe me, I have lived in a French Court, and choosing to have open ears, have learned what base knights, calling themselves English, have offered to sell their country to a foreign yoke for mercenary considerations. You may start, Baron Fitz Alwine; but the moment you break your solemn promise, my despatches, proving your boasted patriotism, shall be on their way to King Henry."

"Allan Clare, 'tis well for you that I am of a mild and forbearing disposition, else would I, after hearing such a speech as you have just favoured me with, not only refuse to fulfil the agreement, but have you thrown from the highest turret the Castle possesses—"

"You dare not."

"Do not provoke me. You are young and headstrong, and therefore I can make allowances for your impetuosity; but ere you make such a fiery outbreak, you should be well assured that I intended to play thee false."

"I am assured that you do—in this; that you intend to wed your child to that miserable, miserly hound, Sir Tristram, of Goldsborough, ere this week has passed away."

"Ha! what tattling fool has told thee this?"

"No matter, I have heard the report."

"But I am not responsible for every lie report chooses to circulate."

"Then you do not intend her to wed Sir Tristram?"

"I see no right you have to ask any such question yet; to-morrow is your day, and to-morrow you shall have my answer."

"To-morrow I shall have fulfilled my conditions, every one of them, to the very extent they may be

fulfilled; and to-morrow you shall consent—mark me, you shall. I have carried out all I promised to do without attempting to evade or infringe one clause in thought or deed; and now, when it comes to your turn to act with honour, you shall not have the chance of dereliction."

"I have no more to say; come to-morrow. You are free to depart; good den, Chevalier Clare."

"I know I am free to depart—you dare not detain me; but to-morrow I claim my bride, nor depart one inch without her. Farewell, my Lord Baron Fitz Alwine."

Allan turned and left the room, his bosom raging with anxiety and dread. He could tell full well, by the baron's manner and the tone of his voice, that some wrong was intended, and he resolved to seek Robin Hood at once, in order to have assistance at hand in case of need, when he made his application on the morrow. He had no sooner quitted the room, than the baron violently rang a small bell which stood upon the table; the summons was instantly answered by the entrance of a servitor.

"Send Pierre Front de Noir to me on the instant," cried the baron. The man bowed and disappeared, but returned in a minute followed by Pierre, and then departed.

"Pierre," said the baron, "you have some followers who will do their bidding without asking questions, and, if required, forget what they have done?"

"Yes, my lord, I have."

"It is well. A cavalier, habited gaily in scarlet gear, has just quitted my presence—follow him with two of your men, and let him trouble no one again. You understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord," replied Front de Noir, with a grim smile, half drawing a formidable dagger from a sheath which hung by his side.

"I see you do; but let it be done secretly; get into the wood if you can, and then stuff his carcase beneath the roots of some old tree, so that nothing may be ever known."

"It shall be done, my lord."

"And your pay, if you succeed well, shall be large. Away!"

"Your lordship is generous. I am gone, my lord; when next you see me, he will be sleeping with the worms."

Making an obeisance, the man left the baron alone, chuckling in anticipation of success, and proceeding to the quarter of the castle containing his choice companions, he found them, and a few minutes after Allan had crossed the drawbridge, Pierre Front de Noir, with two villains of equal calibre to himself in infamy, were on his track. Allan, too intent upon the chances of the morrow, and unsuspecting immediate foul play, hastened on to Sherwood, without casting a look behind; his followers, therefore, had little difficulty in dogging his steps unperceived by him. When they saw him making for the wood, they were especially delighted, for it seemed as if he was walking to the sacrifice with an intention of sparing them all the trouble he could; they determined that he should not be obliged to walk far, for as soon as he had entered the wood far enough to escape from sight of the town, they purposed to spring on him, and murder him at once. Allan slackened not his speed, gained the borders of the forest, and as he expected Robin would be actively engaged in making arrangements on behalf of poor Will Scarlet, he determined to wander about for a while ere he sought him. So, instead of turning to the west, as agreed, he struck to the north, intending to make a circuit to the meeting-place. He had not advanced more than

two hundred yards in the forest, when he heard hurried footsteps in his rear; he turned hastily, and beheld Pierre Front de Noir, with two fellows, coming upon him, holding drawn swords in their hands, and their forbidding countenances betokening their villanous purpose. To draw his sword and place his back to a tree, was but the work of an instant to Allan; and facing the three, with a determined look demanded, in a resolute voice—

"What is your will, fellows?"

"Thy life, my gaudy butterfly," cried Pierre, springing upon him, and making a desperate cut at him with his sword.

The blow was, however, parried with the greatest ease, for Allan was a most accomplished swordsman; and the second who attacked was not only disarmed, but his sword, whirled into the air by the jerk, lodged in the branches of the tree above them, he receiving at the same time a tremendous cut in the left arm, from which the blood poured like water. He retired from the contest, and Allan kept the other two at bay—nor could all their cunning gain them a blow in any part of Allan's body. He kept his back to the tree, and as both of his antagonists cut and thrust with great rapidity, he had as much as he could manage to defend himself, without returning a blow. They kept for some little time at this work, without abating one atom of their speed—and it seemed as if Allan would, by his superior use of his sword, be enabled effectively to defend himself against all their attacks. An end was, however, suddenly put to the contest, by the disarmed villain having torn a branch from a young tree growing near, struck over Allan's guard with all his force. Although he saw it descending, and raised his sword to oppose it, it was delivered with too much force to resist; it alighted on his head, and felled him to the ground like lightning, quite senseless.

"The prey is down, and the work is nearly done. Away, both of you, and leave me to finish it. One is less easily seen than three," cried Pierre Front de Noir. "I'll dig the hole for him myself—where's the spade?"

"It is here," returned the wounded man; "I am faint—I shall bleed to death if I am not helped."

"Away with him, Gascoigne, to the castle! I will do the rest," exclaimed Pierre, immediately commencing to dig a grave.

His two companions departed, and Pierre had nearly finished the grave, when he unexpectedly received such a tremendous thwack over the shoulders, that, besides being prostrated, he felt as if his back was broken. It quite took his breath away, and turning his eyes faintly to see from whence this gift had been presented, he encountered the rubicund visage of a sturdy fellow, clothed in the dress of a black friar, leaning over him, twirling a stout quarter-staff in his hands, evidently the weapon from which he had received the knock.

"Why, thou black-muzzled, ungodly rogue!" cried he to Pierre, "who art thou who knocks folks of gentle blood o' the head, and then hides thy villany beneath the roots of an honest oak? Speak, thou dark-visaged varlet!"

"My sword shall speak for me!" cried Pierre, springing to his feet. "It shall send thee to hell, and the foul fiend himself shall tell thee who I am!"

"Excuse me, I cannot go before thee; and, as to asking Satan any such question, I need give myself no such trouble. Thy visage shows me thou art at least half-brother to his first cousin, and, as a wind-up, let me advise thy sword not to speak at all, for, if it should attempt to wag its tongue, the language

my quarter-staff talks may silence thy sword's master for ever; therefore, depart while thy skin is whole."

"We will see!" cried Pierre, giving the friar a blow over the hand with his sword, which cut three of his fingers to the bone.

It was a rash act. He had much better not have done it—much better have departed quietly; for the cut had scarce been given when he received such a rap on the ear that it sounded loud enough to be echoed by the wood. He felt stunned—he was scarce conscious of a succession of terrific blows—he did not know that his sword had been dashed from his grasp! A dreaminess seemed to come over him, and he began to fancy himself among scenes and in times far away. When the friar paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, Pierre Front de Noir lay dead upon the ground, beaten to a jelly!

"The knave!" muttered the friar, breathing heavily—"the knave! the knave! Did he think Friar Tuck's fingers were made to be cut off by such a black-bearded Norman cur as he, the dog? I have taught him better. Marry! these Normans think it is their province only to cut, slaughter, and slay; they will be taught differently ere we Saxons have done with them. Who is this smart youth he has killed, I wonder? Ah! his body is warm; there is a beating here—he is not dead. I'll carry him to the haunt, and see if there is yet life enough in him to restore him to the world. So, so—there, you shall ride on my shoulders, albeit I am not used to be a beast of burden to any one—so, he is not so heavy. As for you, you ugly ruffian, lie thou there; and, if the wolves make a dinner of thee, it will save the worms a disagreeable meal, for I am sure such a hideous rogue cannot be pleasant eating."

With these words on his tongue, Friar Tuck—it was our old friend Giles—bearing Allan Clare upon his shoulders, took his way among the trees to the forest haunt.

A few words will explain the manner of Will Scarlet's capture. He was hotly pursued to England, and on his arrival was tracked to Nottingham. There all traces were lost, but a scout followed on to Mansfield, where he accidentally encountered Will in the hostel. He had served with him in Normandy, and knew him on the instant; but, being accompanied by five stalwart friends, he thought it advisable not to attempt to make him prisoner. He, therefore, went out and dispatched a messenger to Nottingham for assistance, while he followed the route which Robin and Will took, leaving ample directions for the expected assistants to follow him. His messenger arrived at the castle soon after the king's messenger, and, upon giving his information, received assistance in the shape of a band of troopers, whom he guided on the track which the scout had left directions to pursue. They arrived at Barnsdale in the middle of the night, as Robin and Will had reached there in the morning. They were posted in various parts of the grounds, securely hidden, and early the following morning Will, strolling about, fell into their ambush, was gagged, bound, and borne off ere he had an opportunity of making the slightest resistance.

He was almost broken-hearted at his adverse fate. To be thus snatched away when the cup of bliss was at his lips was terrible; and, although naturally of good spirits, he sunk under this reverse. He knew that he should be dealt with summarily—perhaps his friends never be able to ascertain what had become of him; and Maude—he could not bear to think of her situation—he felt completely sunk in the depths of misery, and quite gave himself up to despair. At Mansfield, however, he recognised Much, and saw that

he also was recognised, and from that moment hope took possession of his soul. He knew now that Robin Hood would know his situation, and, if there was a means by which he could escape, he felt quite assured that Robin would employ it, and never leave him until every chance was lost. He knew, also, that if he was unfortunate enough to suffer death now, that Robin Hood would revenge him fully, amply; and so he cheered himself up and looked his danger in the face with a calm air, and the satisfaction that if he fell there were eyes to weep, and hearts and hands to revenge him. He was immured in a wretched dungeon, but he smiled and talked gaily; he sung his old ballads, and appeared more like one anticipating a pleasant festival, than one who was doomed to die on the morrow. He made a good shrift. When the old palmer came for that purpose, he received him kindly, made his confession cheerfully, and dismissed him with happy words of hope for the future.

The morning came, and, although he had received no sign from Robin, yet he did not cease to hope: he took his very silence as a good sign. Ere the sun had reached the horizon, a party of guards came and fetched him from his dungeon; he was placed, on his arrival at the court-yard, in the centre of a strong body of troops, and, when the disk of the sun began to appear, the cavalcade moved on. As they descended the town, numbers of the townspeople thronged to join the procession; and, though Will turned his eyes anxiously right and left, there was no sign of Robin or of any of his companions. A pang shot through his heart, but he dismissed it; he would not believe but that Robin was at hand, and he hoped on, and even smiled cheerfully, as he saw the earnest faces of the town's people turned on him in pitying gaze. Presently he came in sight of a tall gallows with all its mournful appurtenances. A strong flush crossed his brow: he did not think he was doomed to such a death, even if Robin could not save him. He looked eagerly round—there was no one yet whose face he knew—his heart smote within him. And now they stood beneath the gallows, and preparations were made to append him thereto, and there was no one near to help him. How earnestly, how anxiously, did he scrutinise each face near him, to see if he could trace one feature of a friend who would assist him; but no! they were all strangers, with no more than cold pity on their inquisitive faces. In his agony he asked for the baron, who, as sheriff, attended the ceremony. He approached and said,—

"Miserable wretch, what want you with me?"

"I must die—there is no help for me."

"None."

"I have a boon to crave; if thou hast the soul of a man, if thou art of human kind, thou wilt grant it."

"Name it."

"Look you, Baron Fitz Alwine, I am of a Saxon family which has never been stained by the infamous death of one of its descendants; let me not die a dog's death."

"You must die upon yon gallows."

"Baron Fitz Alwine, thou art a soldier, hast seen much service, and know a soldier's feelings; it is hard for one who has risked his life in many a hard-fought field, to be strung up by the neck like a thievish cur."

"What wouldst thou have?"

"Let me be unbound, give me a sword in my hand, and set your whole troop on me; I am a soldier and would die a soldier's death—would fall with my back to the ground and my face to the sky."

"Dost thou think me fool enough to hazard the

life of one of my men, just to humour your whims? { let me not die like a slave; if you have a spark of
 pshaw! it is too absurd. No, thou shalt hang like a { human feeling, unbind me; I ask for no sword, no



rogue as thou art on yonder tree; nothing shall { weapon, but my free hands; I will fight with nought
 move me to alter my determination." { but them, and would smile even as the troops cut me
 "Baron Fitz Alwine, I entreat you to hear me! { in pieces, if thou with!"

"Never! a death by the sword would be too great leniency to thee, base Saxon dog. Didst thou not cut down a Norman? and for that thou shalt hang on a gallows tree, where all Saxon churls should swing, had I my will."

"Will you not give the alternative to stand here, bound as I am, and let me be cut to pieces by your men? I will not shrink a muscle, but bless thee with my dying breath for thy mercy."

"I will see thee hanged on yon gallows first, then I may have thee cut in pieces and tossed to the dogs; and it shall go hard but he who infests these woods, with his thieving outlaws, shall be treated to the same fate."

"Were he you speak of here, were Robin Hood by my side, with him only would I defy your vengeance, dastard, coward! Thou churl, worse than peasant's cur! Thou wolfish cub in man's form, hear my last words—beware of Robin Hood, if I die on yon tree; a week will not pass ere you swing from the same beam!"

"Fool, thy words are idle ravings. I will soon have him and his gang in my power, and he will be too kindly dealt with if he meets with thy fate!"

"My fate will be paid for by him in full, never fear; hadst thou thrice thy number to back thee, he would scorn thee and all thy efforts to capture him; but as thou art, I have at least the consolation to reflect that you will shortly dangle from the same gallows which will have held me."

"I'll have no more of this prating! Hangman, to your duty—away with him!"

"Hold!" cried the tremulous voice of the old palmer, who had stood by unnoticed during the latter part of this colloquy. "I have a few things to say to this youth ere he is launched into eternity—mysteries of our holy religion, which human ears, save those of the church, or those on the verge of death, may not hear."

"He has said and heard enough!" roared Fitz Alwine; "to death with him at once!"

"Hold!" exclaimed the palmer, in a voice which was startlingly loud for one of his years. "Impious man, would you interfere with the rights of the church?"

"Be speedy, then, in what you have to mumble, or it is very like I may."

"Let your people withdraw a space."

Baron Fitz Alwine waved his hand, and they fell back. He walked to the foot of the ladder to give directions to the hangman, and Will Scarlet and the palmer were left alone. The palmer suddenly changed his voice, and said—

"Make no start, Will—I am Robin Hood: I'll cut your bands in a minute and then we'll fight our way out."

"God bless you, Robin! God bless you, my old friend. I knew you would not desert me!"

"Not while I had life. Stoop down, Will, as if I was uttering a benediction—so—that is it. These thongs are tough, but the steel is sharp; so, that is well. Now, Will, there's a sword, clap your back to mine, and show them that you were not born to be bung."

At the same moment Robin Hood threw off his disguise, and showed himself in a dress of green. Back to back stood he and Will Scarlet, laughing at the astonishment which was depicted on every countenance.

"My Lord Baron Fitz Alwine," exclaimed Robin, in a loud voice, "Will Scarlet is one of my retainers—I cannot spare him; so, if you please, I have come to take him back with me. But, in order that you

should not complain, I can restore you one of your men, a fellow with long black hair and black beard, who thought to deprive of life one Allan Clare,—whom your lordship knows—but failed therein and lost his own."

"By Heaven!" shouted Fitz Alwine, "this is Robin Hood himself! Five hundred merks to him who takes him dead or alive."

"I would advise no man here, if he values his life, to attempt it," cried Robin, and blew three blasts upon his bugle, which made the welkin ring again. Before the echo had died away, it was answered, and, upon the instant, foresters, with bent bows, came running from the wood in shoals.

"Ha!" shouted Baron Fitz Alwine, "to arms!—out down the dogs; To arms! my brave hearts!"

A shower of arrows from the merrie men replied to his speech, and he saw fit to mount his horse and gallop up to the castle. The townspeople followed, shouting and shrieking, and the troops, panic-stricken by their cries, and the unexpected attack, were thrown into disorder, and fled almost as impetuously as the townspeople themselves.

"The greenwood and Robin Hood!" shouted the merrie men, driving their foes, like flocks of frightened fowls, before them. Up the town they went, pell-mell, all mixed together—the baron arriving at the top of his speed at the castle, followed closely by his retainers, who, when they entered the castle gates, formed and prepared to defend the castle, if attacked; but the merrie men had no such intent, for they had gained their object, and now quietly returned to their home in the greenwood again.

When they had departed, the townsman, who found they were not hurt, and had lost nothing, said that "Robin Hood and his men were gallant hearts—stout hearts;" while the young girls said, with merry eyes, "that they were more gentle than they seemed, and many of them declared they should not be afraid to go through the wood quite alone."

CHAPTER IX.

AND still, and pale, and silently,
Did *Parasine* wait her doom;

Her eyes unmoved, but full and wide,
Not once had turned to either side—

And there with glassy gaze she stood,
As ice were curdled in her blood;
But every now and then a tear,
So large and slowly gathered, slid
From the long dark fringe of that fair lid.

BYRON.

Young companies nimbly began dancing,
To the swift treble pipe and humming string;
Aye, those fair living forms swam heavenly,
To tunes forgotten—out of memory.

KEATS.

IN a great heat, but in a whole skin, Baron Fitz Alwine regained his chamber, after ascertaining that Robin Hood and his merrie men did not intend to storm his castle. The knowledge that upon gaining their point they had quietly retired, relieved some little of his anxiety and apprehension, and made room for a quantity of choler to be distributed among his followers. His personal safety was his first consideration, and after a slight

examination, he came to the assurance that he was unhurt. He then began to reflect upon the events of the morning, and the degrading defeat, with the more shameful flight, began to force itself with great power upon his mind. He threw the whole blame upon his retainers; he forgot that he was the first to set the example of flight, and he launched forth an invective upon the cowardice of his men. He commenced a speculation whether he had ever encountered, in all the affrays in which he had been engaged, such an instance of rank fear—such gross unsoldierlike fright, as that evinced by his men on that memorable morning. What would the townspeople say?—what would the army think when they heard that a band of outlaws had put to flight a body of well-disciplined troops, with scarce a blow being struck. His reputation as a brave and tried warrior, which he had *hardly* earned—very *hardly* earned—for he was by nature an extreme coward, and how he had contrived to gain and support the name was a mystery—this name would be lost to him for ever. The more he reflected upon it, the more he magnified its disgrace; and to such an extent did he shift the odium from his own shoulders, that he brought himself to the conviction that, instead of being the first who fled, he was the last, left alone by his men, fighting his way to his castle gates. Having arrived at this conclusion, he went into a paroxysm of fury, rage, and distraction. He danced out of his chamber—he dashed into the court-yard—the men were still, in straggling groups, discussing their defeat, and attributing its cause to the sudden fright of their liege lord; that liege lord ordered the whole to be ranged before him, and when the order was obeyed, he gave them a long tirade upon their cowardice. He cited every instance of flagrant panic-stricken fright which history could furnish, or imagination invent; and then begged them to consider that theirs surpassed it in infamy. He exhausted every contemptuous epithet which his long life in the society of a soldiery, scarce one remove from barbarians, could furnish—and to do his memory credit, it was a most extensive assortment. When his list was out he coined others. He spoke so vehemently—assumed such an appearance of injured and deserted courage, that, guided by the feelings of deference with which they were accustomed to receive all he said, his men, alternately, instead of blaming him, as they had at first done, shifted it to their own shoulders. Taking his ungovernable rage for virtuous indignation, they therefore bowed their heads with shame, and through his eloquence, arrived at the conclusion that they really were a set of disgraceful cowards, frightened at their own shadows, and that their conduct that morning had been to the last degree vile and shameful. When the baron had ceased—and he had made such a long-winded speech of it that it had carried off all his passion, acting as a heat-conductor—one of the men proposed that they should sally out, follow the Sherwood men to their forest lairs, and there conquer them, or perish in the attempt. The proposal was received with acclamations, and the baron was requested to lead them on. He was much obliged by their kind offer, but he would rather be excused; he begged to decline it—at least for the present—and wait until some auspicious moment placed them so completely in their power, that the victory might be gained at the expense of little bloodshed; and he then and there dismissed them, fearing that they might urge their request beyond a point where he could not well refuse to comply with it; and being now satisfied, and having satisfied his men that he was a most high-couraged, virtuous, and forbearing sufferer in the late case, he again sought his chamber.

When seated, his thoughts began to revert to his daughter and her two suitors. One he knew—at least he had good cause for believing—was dead, and the other could not, in the course of nature, live long; his daughter would then be a widow, with a million merks in money, besides enormous possessions in land abroad and at home; he should, as well as his own private property, have a million of merks of Sir Tristram's in his hands, of which nobody but himself should be any the wiser, having taken such good precautions as lay in his power, that the transaction which placed this sum in his possession should not transpire beyond the knowledge of himself and Sir Tristram. With this wealth on the part of himself and daughter, when the event occurred which should leave her a widow, what was to prevent him becoming the father of a princess? King Henry had several sons—money was a great object to them—a wife none. He was well-descended from an old Norman family, and there could exist no obstacle on that point; his daughter was beautiful, and her charms considerably heightened by her enormous wealth. Baron Fitz Alwine pursued these ideas with ardour; he arrived at last to being grandfather to a King of England, and wondering with what foreign powers his grandchildren and great-grandchildren would be allied by marriage. Suddenly the words of Robin Hood, respecting the failure of Front de Noir, rose like a bugbear, to knock his aerial castles to the ground; upon the instant, he rang the bell. A servitor appeared.

"Has Front de Noir returned?" he asked.

"No, my lord," replied the man; "he left yesterday with two men under his command, who have both returned, one of them severely wounded, but Front de Noir is still absent."

"Send one of the fellows who accompanied him to me."

The man did as he was ordered, and in a few minutes Gascoigne, who had led the wounded man back to the castle, entered the baron's presence. He gazed upon him for an instant, and gave Front de Noir credit for his choice of a companion, for a more remorseless, hard-hearted looking villain could not well be employed upon any business, however murderous.

"Where is Front de Noir?" demanded the baron.

"I cannot say, my lord," was the reply. "I have not seen him since yesterday."

"But when you left him?"

"He was digging a grave for one who lay beside it ready to fill it," said the man, giving a laugh which God preserve any one from ever hearing or witnessing the like! A shade passed over the features of the baron; a cold creeping thrill passed through him; he could not trust himself to speak, and he waved his hand for the man to quit his presence. That day he quitted not again his chamber, but the hours passed drearily and wearily with him; he had every reason to believe that Allan was dead, but yet he had a strange misgiving that he was not; every footstep passing the door of his apartments seemed to be an indication of Allan's approach, and as they died away, it was like a weight being removed from his chest; for he knew it was not him. He scarce dared look around for fear he should see some

"Wither'd, bloody-eyed,
And bloody-handed, ghastly, ghostly thing"

start up from some dark nook the chamber owned. Night came on, and the day's excitement, its harass and fatigues, induced a sleep which was not repose.

Dreadful dreams tormented him, and in the morning he awoke unrefreshed, sick, and weary from the night's restlessness; soon other thoughts intruded, and a walk on the ramparts in the fresh cool air of the morning, in some degree restored him to his usual callousness.

Sir Tristram, who was at present residing in the castle, and purposed doing so until after his wedding, sought him, and had a long interview, in which the money was again a point of controversy; the baron insisting upon having the sum agreed upon placed in his hands before the ceremony took place, a point which, after a severe struggle, Sir Tristram yielded, but a mutual distrust existed. The baron, who wished the marriage to take place in the castle chapel, met with a stout and stern opposition from Sir Tristram, who conceived that he wished it from some sinister motive, and the more he urged it the more refractory grew Sir Tristram, who vowed he would be married in Linton Abbey, which was situated about a mile and a half from Nottingham, or not at all. Fitz Alwine cursed him inwardly for an obstinate old ass, who was blind to his own interest in thus refusing to make sure of being uninterrupted; for he possessed an undefined dread that an effort would be made to prevent the marriage, springing from some one or somewhere; albeit, Allan being dead, he knew not where it was to come from, excepting that Robin Hood and his merry men might interfere for the sake of plunder. This he mentioned as a formidable argument to Sir Tristram, but he, however, set it aside by saying he would have a body of his own followers who would ensure, by their numbers, the ceremony not being disturbed; or, making an alteration in the day, perform the marriage very secretly, and thus defeat any project Robin Hood might have made. To both these propositions Fitz Alwine had an objection; to the first, judging Sir Tristram by himself, he suspected that his large body of retainers might, at the instigation of their master, walk back with the million merks so soon as the wedding was over. In those days might was right; none knew this fact so well as he, having exercised it upon all occasions where a chance presented, and the prospect of gain made it worth his while to attempt it; he had, therefore, no desire to call their services into play. For the second, he had an aversion to going anywhere in the neighbourhood of Sherwood Forest unattended; he had a natural fear that the odour of his name was rank in the nostrils of those who found a home beneath the broad boughs and green leaves of its old trees, and so he felt that if he must yield the point, it had better proceed as originally arranged; he saw that it must be done, and he yielded to it with the best grace he was able, trying to make Sir Tristram believe that all he said or did was guided by an honest open-hearted wish for the best, and toned it with an assumption of frankness which was anything but natural. Now, Sir Tristram was naturally a cunning, artful man, and knew as well as the most penetrating observer could have done, that the whole affair was a mutual accommodation, in which each had tried to overreach the other, in order to make the best bargain; he therefore estimated every act and word of Fitz Alwine at its proper value, and hated, despised, and contemned him accordingly. On the other hand Fitz Alwine hated Sir Tristram, because he had more wealth than himself; he hated him also because he thought him a consummate old fool, but he used him as a means to bring a certain wish to bear; he wanted his money, and he considered his fair daughter as goods equal in value to half or all the wealth Sir Tristram possessed—and having the chance, disposed of her accordingly, as an auctioneer would any article he

was selling to the best bidder. Fitz Alwine being well satisfied that no one could bid so high, took all the care he could no one else should have her, for she was the only equivalent he had for the wealth he wanted, and she once gone, in a different way to that he wished, his golden and ambitious dreams would at once vanish, never more to return. Each finding that their favourite points would not be waived by the other, at length yielded the separate objections, and agreed that on the seventh day from that the Lady Christabel should be wedded to Sir Tristram, in Linton Abbey, and that on or before the morning of the marriage, one million of merks should be placed in the hands of Baron Fitz Alwine. This arranged, they separated.

In Barnsdale-hall grief was yet working its tearful way—the parents and sisters were mourning for the loss of their son and brother, the mistress for her lover, and the friend from true sympathy. On the morning following Will's rescue, they were all assembled in the hall, speculating in sadness upon his mysterious disappearance, when, in the midst of a silence which was more painful than even an outburst of sorrow, the wind of a horn blowing a cheerful blast met their ears.

"It is Robin Hood," cried Marian, with ardour.

"And brings good news—I know he does—I am sure of it—he always does," exclaimed Barbara, with a laugh which was as near a cry as could be. "Come, cheer up, Maude, Will's coming home, I'm sure."

Maude shook her head mournfully, the tears springing in her eyes.

"Oh! but I am sure he is; you will see now; Robin Hood always brings good news, bless his dear heart," she exclaimed in a full voice, winding up with a loud scream; for sure enough there stood Will in the doorway. Her scream was echoed by Marian, for close behind Will was Allan, who, only stunned by the heavy blow, had with attention soon recovered, and with Robin had posted on to Barnsdale.

What a welcome home Will and Allan had; the smiles, the loud voices, and, most of all, the tears, which were plentifully poured forth, may be imagined; the glad hearts their presence made, the joy their return created, evinced itself in a language which no tongue can tell or words describe. We leave the task to the imagination—we confess our inadequacy to portray it; but there is a small still voice in the bosom of each one who looks upon these pages which shall tell them how greatly glad—how painfully joyous, the scene was.

"Did I not tell you that Robin Hood always brought good news?" cried Barbara, with sparkling eyes, as soon as she could recover her voice, and after she had embraced her brother a dozen times at least. "I think he does it purposely to make us all in love with him."

"I am afraid he does," said Marian, laughingly.

"Do you know, Marian," observed Barbara, with a very arch expression, "I have a great mind to make a mistake, and fancy him Willy, and—and—quite a mistake, you know—give him a kiss—"

"You had better not," answered Marian, "for in that case I think we should all follow your example, and probably kill him with kindness."

"I have not the least objection," laughed Robin, "to die so sweet a death. It would only be following the example of the bee, who, gathering too much honey, clogs his wings and dies of the sweet load."

"I have a great mind to fall in love with him with all my might and main," said Barbara, her sweet blue eyes laughing as only sweet blue eyes can laugh, "to seize him from all of you, and march off, bag and

baggage, to some fairy land, and there—keeping him all to myself, mind—live happy for ever.”

“Very pretty; but suppose I should object to go?” said Robin.

“You would not have the heart to refuse so nice an offer.”

It won't do, Barby dear,” cried Will; “you can just keep your heart snug in your bodice a while; if he did not refuse, I think I know some one else who would object to such an arrangement. Allan, you cannot imagine the extent of the obligation under which we all lay to Robin Hood. To my father, my mother, and sisters, he has been as the one who, on all occasions, has proved the harbinger and actor of something kind, generous, and cheering. To Maude here, my little wife who shall be, and to Marian, as a brother in the truest sense of the word—to myself—what can I say?—I have no words, Robin, to tell how I appreciate you, but in my heart there is no object more dearly, or so dearly, cherished as yourself. From our childhood we were friends; such friends, Allan—brothers bound by the closest ties of amity could not have been such friends as we were—and never, at any time, under the influence of any hostile circumstance my unequal temper as a boy might have given birth to, did he turn one shade from the old friendship, but ever carried it out with a generous warmth which will ever be unforgotten while my memory lives. Allan, you have as much cause to honour and esteem him as I have; he has been tried and proved as true as steel.”

“Willy, my friend, I would have you think of me kindly,” said Robin Hood, somewhat affected by Will Scarlet's earnest words, “aye, all here think as kindly and generously as you can, but I would not hear you say so; albeit Marian doubts the possibility of my blushing, yet I cannot but feel a scarlet mask upon my face while you are saying all these handsome and undeserved things of me, which glows as warmly as the love I have in my heart for ye, one and all.”

“Robin Hood,” said Allan, advancing and taking his hand, pressing it warmly, and speaking with feeling, “twelve years ago I told you, for a good service you then rendered me, which nor gold nor words could repay, I would esteem you as my dear friend; and on the night I quitted Gamwell, youthful as you were, yet only youthful in years, I entrusted my sister to your watchful care, to tend, cherish her as a loved sister, to act in all things as I, loving her truly, would have done had I been with her, and now I have returned, I need no words from her to tell me that you have fully, faithfully, nobly, redeemed your trust—”

“That indeed he has!” said Marian, with an energy amounting to enthusiasm. “Oh, Allan! if you could but know the numberless acts of his generosity, his delicate conduct, his forethought and unwearying efforts to cheer me and make me forget the pain of your absence, the anguish of being alone in the world, you would then, indeed, honour him, you would then love him—as—as—”

“You do,” suggested Allan, looking earnestly at her.

“As I do! aye, Allan, even as I do!” she exclaimed proudly, in a full rich voice, teeming and tremulous with emotion. “I see no infringement of the modesty which should invest and adorn a maiden's words and acts in such acknowledgment. Did you know, Allan, how unremittingly, how unchanging have been his words and works of kindness to me, you would love him as I do—if it is possible for another to possess an equal feeling. At all times, and under all circumstances, he has supplied your place, even as you could

have most earnestly desired; and it would be mean in me did I not—now I have an opportunity, and such an opportunity—acknowledge it as warmly as I appreciate it; he loves me, Allan, with a like affection. But my hand, although I freely promised it, has waited to be thy gift, and too well I knew thy spirit, Allan, to fear how thou wouldst decide.”

“To hear thee say during my long absence thou hast had a friend ever at thy side, who has been to thee all a brother should or could be, gladdens me most greatly,” said Allan, warmly; “it removes from my breast a feeling of shame and pain that I have ever felt while away, that you should have been left alone so long by one who was your natural protector, and who should have remembered his duty before his inclination—”

“Dear Allan!”

“Nay, I ought to have done so, but my youth and strong feelings—”

“And the greater and better excuse—the lady,” interrupted Marian, with a faint smile, which her brother returned.

“You are right, Marian, they will plead for me; I have only one way to thank Robin Hood, and, as I once told him, I hoped the day would come when I could repay his services in some slight way; I will see if that day is not to be this day. Robin Hood, as far as words can utter thanks, I thank thee; if feelings could be coined into words, you would hear how warm and impassioned my language should be; but as that is not, nor can be, the case, I must try and give you some equivalent. Here is Marian, whom you have attended as a brother for so many years, and must be, in consequence, well acquainted with her ways and little defects of temper, her thoughts and wishes, so much better than any one else, that I think you had better now try her as a wife, and see if you cannot live as harmoniously together for the future as you have done hitherto. You must be content with her, for I have nothing better—”

“Nothing better!” ejaculated Robin, but had not another word to say, his heart was so full. He looked earnestly at Marian, and she flung herself in his arms in a passion of joyous tears.

Will Scarlet could not contain his rapture at the turn affairs were taking, and he gave Maude two or three earnest embraces, by way of recovering the emotion the last incident had produced. His eyes were full of tears, and his throat was full, but he tried to make a laugh of it, and produced something like a husky screech, and forced out by some means an hurra.

“We will be married together!” he cried; “eh, Robin?—let us all be married to-morrow—no, no, I forgot, not to-morrow—to-morrow has been always unlucky to me; so we will be married to-day—eh?”

“No,” said Allan, you are in too great a hurry.”

“Too great a hurry!” reiterated Will, energetically; “it's all very well for you to say too great a hurry; but if you had been disappointed so many times as I have, you would not say too great a hurry, I'll wager my head. What do you say, Maude—eh?”

“Not to-day, Will—it can't be done to-day.”

“Can't be done to-day! Why not to-day? I don't see anything to prevent it. I think to-day will do very well, and plenty of time, too.”

“No,” said Allan. “Friend Will, I must away again to-day, and I would wish to be at my sister's wedding. I hope, before the end of the week, to be married myself, and then, if you please, we will all be married together.”

Stop a whole week!” cried Will, “it's impossible—

it is not in nature to do it. My heart is in one perpetual state of banging backwards and forwards—besides paying an occasional visit to my mouth—and it will continue this sort of fun until Maude is really mine as fast as the church can make us; and consider, if I have to wait a whole week, it will be worn out—I shan't have a bit left."

"Nay, Will," observed Robin; "a week will soon pass, and if we can add to the happiness of all by the addition of a couple to our wedding number, by waiting, our patience will not be much put to the test in suffering a few days to elapse ere we are made happy for life."

"Ah! I see how it is—I must give up. There's a conspiracy among mankind to keep me from being married as long as ever they can. Never mind, I'll bear my sad fate as merrily as I am able, and won't be down-hearted and low-spirited, in spite of the whole world. If I get into danger, there's a Providence and an old friend who gets me out again; and so I'll wait the week, and pass it in as gleesome a manner as though each succeeding minute was to unite me and Maude for ever; therefore, Maude, let us make the most of our week—we have many things to talk over. Suppose you and I take a stroll, and chat the matter over together?"

And without waiting her consent, and replying to the smiles of all by a full-toned merry laugh, he led Maude from the hall, to wander lovingly among the shadows of the tall trees which covered a portion of the estate. A happy day was spent by all at Barnsdale; and when the shades of night were beginning to clothe everything in obscurity, Robin, Allan, and Will—for, on learning the nature of their expedition, he would accompany them—were on their way to Sherwood Forest.

The seventh morning subsequent to the day on which Baron Fitz Alwine made his arrangement with Sir Tristram for the marriage sat the Lady Christabel alone, in her chamber. She was habited in a rich dress of white, superbly adorned with jewels of the rarest device and workmanship; a long veil was thrown carelessly over her head, and descended nearly to her feet; her hair was braided across the temples, and then descended in long curls over her shoulders; her features wore the stamp of melancholy, betokening a spirit almost annihilated by some sudden and killing blight. She was pale to ashyness; she sat with her hands before her, unconsciously plucking a flower to pieces, and looking like a statue carved in Parian marble; a tear ever and anon disengaged itself from her eyelid, and rolled down her marble cheek unchecked; and save occasionally a slight quiver of the upper lip, the evidence of acute inward anguish, there was nought to distinguish the existence of life—her whole aspect was that of deathlike rigidity. For some time she sat thus; at one time perfectly motionless, and then just such slight motion as the tearing leaf from leaf of the flower she held in her hand might occasion; and when her bitter thoughts found a voice, her words were uttered in a tone faint and low, and so instinct with hopeless misery, that it would make one weep to listen to them.

"He has forgotten me," she said, "he has forgotten me, who so fondly loved him, who never ceased to remember him when forgetfulness might have been a virtue; who vainly believed that time, and friends, and all things might, change and he still be true. True; Holy Mother! that I should live to think him false. I ought to have been unforgotten by him. I would die rather than have forgotten him or ceased to love him. Why should he then forget me? I

never gave him cause—never, never. I have loved him dearly and truly from a child, and, woe is me! love him now too deeply. None other have I thought upon but him. He knew it—he knew it. And yet, although he swore to love me, unchangeable, until one or both passed away to the world where sorrow is not, he has broken his oath, has loved and wedded another. Wedded! Oh, God! if this be true, there is no hope for me in this life. None, none. My heart will break with this load of agony. I have borne bitter words, stern looks, and harsh treatment; solitude, the most dreary and wretched, unrepiningly—nay, cheerfully; for I did it for his sake, nor deemed it hard; for I hoped the reward would come one day in being united to him whose love I thought mine, who bore trials and endured hardships and griefs for me. The thought that he loved me was my consolation under all despairing influences. I hoped on, and smiled at what I then endured, in the bright prospect for the future; and as the day drew near when he was to claim me, how fondly did I anticipate his appearance; and the day has come and passed, and he is not here. My father tells me he is wedded to one who is rich and beautiful, and they dwell in another land. Heaven is my judge that not wealth, nor want, nor aught could have changed me. I have never forgotten him, I never can. I would even now be true to him, despite his faithfulness, but for the promise which he made me give to wed another in the event of not claiming one. Holy Mother, support me! I had thought I had suffered all that could be endured; I thought I had borne all the sorrow human nature may know; but this is a grief which nothing equals, a misery which tints everything with its dismal hue, and I have nought left but to pray that the hour may soon arrive that shall see me change these bridal garments for the habiliments of death; there will be none to weep my loss, none to miss my presence; my own griefs and cares will cease, the blight which is now crushing my spirit with its bitter agony will be no more, and I shall be at rest, to wake no more in this weary world of woe. God help me! for I am broken-hearted."

It was terrible to see the amount of mental agony she endured; to see the utter prostration of spirit in the flood of bitter tears she shed; to hear the misery expressed in the low complaining voice. Her life, in sooth, had been a sad one; immured all her life in her father's castle, or, while absent from England, in a convent whose rules were of the strictest nature, and rigidly enforced, she had little to do but think of her first, dearest, only love; to dwell upon his form, upon the kindly attributes of his nature, to invest them with a romantic charm, until she had raised an idol in her heart which nought could overthrow or displace, and the hope always cheering her lone situation that she would be united to him by the laws of marriage as she was by the tenderest ties of sympathy—a hope which she hugged to the last, until all hope was driven out by the horrid reality of Allan's absence at the appointed time for his appearance, and her approaching marriage with Sir Tristram. These last events had come upon her with a blow which seemed almost to have stunned her—to have deadened her faculties; she beheld herself a victim to her father's cupidity, without an idea crossing her mind of refusing to consent to his wishes, and each day, since she had learned the fate to which she had been consigned, it was like a terrible vision before her, which absorbed all power of action; she felt that it must happen—that it would kill her, and that there was no help near—None—none

For two hours she sat there in her bridal robes, nor knew whether she had sat minutes, hours, or even days; she sunk into a reverie, quite carrying her far from present things. It usually occurs, in the midst of some frightful grief, that the memory refers to a time when sorrow and care were things unknown to us. Christabel's led her to a time when she and Allan first discovered they were lovers; that the affection was of a different order, of another nature, to that possessed by brother and sister; it was a time when their innocent gaieties began to be tempered by a degree of thoughtfulness; when Allan, he knew not why, began to find more pleasure in gazing on Christabel's eyes than on Marian's; and when Christabel thought his the most beautiful in the world. When they began to find that their playful games merged into a quiet walking in the dark shadows of the green trees, each with their arm round the other's waist, discoursing upon the sweet flowers that grew in their path, and of the streams of golden sunshine pouring through the openings of the trees, and then pursuing their ways in silence, their young hearts too full to utter a word, but their thoughts investing each with charms which their fond wishes created, and looking in each other's eyes with an earnest intense gaze of affection. Even did she pursue the train of these events until she arrived at the time when Allan, yet quite a boy, and she a slim, graceful, beautiful child, just in advance of her eleventh year, were walking, one very beautiful summer's evening, among the intricacies of thickly clustered trees, the warm air undisturbed by a breath of wind, the tree-tops tinged with golden hues from the last rays of the descending sun, the birds singing their cheerful songs ere they retired to rest, and every visible thing bespoke calmness, and beauty, and happiness. They had walked some time, and the influence of the beauty around them was on them, they had talked until they had found their eyes to speak the sweetest language, and then they consigned their tongues to silence; their footsteps grew slower and slower, until at last they stopped, and Allan went down on his knees to tell her he loved nothing in the world like her, not even his sister—that she was mixed up with all his thoughts, his prayers, and his dreams, and he would rather die and be forgotten by all than be separated from her, and that he would love her for ever and ever; and she stooped over him, he felt her warm breath upon his forehead, and she kissed it kindly and fondly, and told him that he was to her even as he had said she was to him, and she promised to love him for ever too, and never forget him or love another like him; and she kept her word! How had he kept his? Ere she had time to answer to herself the question, there was a loud knock at her chamber door, which awoke her from her reverie. She made no response to the appeal. The door was opened, and the wrinkled visago of Sir Tristram presented itself to her; she shuddered as she beheld it, and recoiled in her chair as if some fiend had appeared before her.

"My dear Lady Christabel," he mumbled, with a grin intended to be amiable, but only reached an idiotic contortion, "the time for our departure has arrived; pray allow me to hand you below, where the retinue awaits to escort us to Linton, there to become a happy wedded pair."

"I—I cannot go—I beseech you leave me."

"Nay, my dear little love, the cavalcade waits; you are dressed, and I am ready; we will depart at once: come, give me thy sweet little hand."

"Sir Tristram—Hear me, I pray you hear me! if you have a spark of pity, release me from this dreadful wedding."

"Dreadful wedding—release you?" echoed Sir Tristram. "I do not understand you, lady!"

"Spare me the agony of a recital, but consent to forego your claim to my hand; save me from that horrible fate, and I will bless you—pray for you."

"You speak in riddles, my pretty dove; I will spare you the recital, my love; you seem agitated; you can tell me after we are married, plenty of time for that; but now we have none to lose. Let us away."

"Hear me, I entreat you! I love another—have from childhood; shall continue to love him till I cease to exist. A marriage with you, or any other, will break my heart, make me utterly, hopelessly wretched while I live; if you have a grain of mercy, if you have one spark of humanity, spare me, release me, and on my knees I will pray for you night and day."

"You will soon forget him when you are wedded to me, my sweet love."

"Never, never; his form is engraven on my heart, ineffaceably. I cannot love another, and to be wedded to another will make me miserable for ever. Save me—you have it in your power; you are not so hard-hearted, so iron-souled, as to plunge me into an unceasing agony of mind. You will release me, I see—I am nothing to you, can be nothing; I am unsuited to you in age, in mind, in everything. It will be easy for you to forget me, and you will have my blessings unceasingly."

"Poor child! you are agitated; calm your spirits, you will be better anon; after the ceremony is over, you will recover wonderfully; you have flurried yourself in dressing. Come, my love, they wait for us below."

"But you will spare me, Sir Tristram—you cannot be so heartless as to force me to a marriage for which I have a horror surpassing description."

"Nay, I force no more than the fulfilment of a promise. Your father consented to this match—you consented—and I cannot now alter my arrangements."

"Then you will not release me?"

"Not by any means. Oh no; you are mine in promise, and must be so in reality."

"Then all is over. God have mercy upon me!"

"Amen! He will, I have no doubt. Your hand, sweet dame. Ah! that is well. This way."

So, mumbling and muttering, Sir Tristram tottered out of the chamber, leading the Lady Christabel to her doom.

In Linton Abbey, preparations were made upon a splendid scale for the wedding. There was to be a grand high mass, and the vestments of the priests who were to serve were of the richest order; the chapel was decorated with handsome draperies; the altar was beautifully dressed; the immense golden crucifix, candlesticks, tabernacle, chalice, &c., being of the purest metal, and the finest workmanship. The time drew nigh for the arrival of the bride and bridegroom; the monks were assembled in the chapel with the Bishop of Hereford, who was to say mass, and wed the couple; they were quietly awaiting the coming of the procession, when suddenly the heavy footsteps of a man advancing up the aisle drew their attention; the comer was habited in a long grey frock, like a friar's gown; upon his arm he bore a small harp; without turning to the right or left, or bending his head, he proceeded to the spot where stood the bishop.

"You are the Bishop of Hereford; you are to sing the mass, and are to unite those who are coming hither to be wed," said he.

"Well, fellow, and what if thou art right in thy conjecture?" answered the bishop.

"Why this—I am esteemed the best harper the

broad lands of merry England can furnish, and, for that matter, France either; I have played at all the grand masses, fêtes, and celebrations throughout the land: in passing this way I heard of this wedding, and have come to offer my services," replied the stranger.

"If thou speakest truth, thou'rt right welcome," said the bishop.

"And I do speak truth," replied the harper.

"I love to hear the harp played well upon," said the bishop; it is a goodly instrument, and suiteth the voice marvellously well; it accords with mine to a degree which is surprising. Play me a stave, harper."

"Were I a strolling thrummer such as thou hast been accustomed to hear, then would I do as thou desirest me," replied the harper; "but, reverend father, I am the first in my profession, and play only at my proper hour."

"Thou'rt insolent, fellow. I tell thee I'll have a stave now," cried the bishop, angrily.

"So thou shalt, reverend father, if thou wilt play thyself," replied the harper, coolly; "but I draw no string until the bride and bridegroom come, and then I can draw *one* that shall astonish thee."

"Thou vauntest too much to be clever; but we shall soon hear thy abilities, for here comes the procession," exclaimed the bishop.

Putting himself at the head of the monks, he advanced to meet them, and then led the way up, chaunting a prayer, the monks in full chorus assisting him. When they had reached the altar, the Lady Christabel, who was in a half fainting condition, clasped her hands convulsively together, turned to her father, and said in a voice of smothered agony—

"Father, have pity; do not sacrifice me, I implore thee, for mercy sake!"

He turned his back relentlessly. She then appealed to Sir Tristram—

"Have mercy, if your heart is not stone; it is not too late—you can yet save me—do so, or you will drive me to despair, and make me do what I shudder to think upon."

"We will talk of this anon," replied the old bridegroom. And nodding to the bishop, his particular friend, said, "Proceed."

The bishop was about to do so, when a full clear voice cried—

"Hold!" Everybody turned their eyes to see who had uttered this word, and beheld the harper standing close by the Lady Christabel's side.

"Presumptuous wretch!" cried the bishop in a rage. "How durst thou speak? how durst thou lift up thy voice to interrupt a sacred ceremony?"

"Simply because I think this an unfitting match, and I forbid its proceeding."

"Thou?" cried the bishop.

"Thou?" roared the baron, with a kind of laugh, which was singularly expressive of scorn and rage: "thou—ha! ha! Fool, begone!" and he laid hold of the harper's neck to thrust him aside; but he had scarce laid a finger upon him before he was himself hurled to the ground with great violence. Several retainers who formed the procession rushed forward to seize the harper; but, placing a foot upon the steps of the altar, he cried, in a fierce voice—

"Stand back, hounds! By the Holy Mother, the first who advances with the intent of laying a finger upon me, shall pour out his blood like water before yon holy image. Shame on ye! would you stand by and see a tender maiden sacrificed to such a withered, wrinkled wretch as this? Cheer up, maiden! to be a bride thou camest hither, and away thou shalt depart

a bride; but thy bridegroom shall be of thine own choosing, as thou shalt shortly see." Thereupon he drew a horn from beneath his belt, and blew three loud blasts, making the chapel ring with its notes; and while it yet echoed them, there was a sudden rush of feet, and in an instant the chapel was filled with men, habited in Lincoln green, each armed with a bow and arrow. To surround and disarm the retainers was a work of ease, and the harper doffed his gown, and a shout arose from the men in green, which made the building shake, of

"Robin Hood! and the Merrie Men of the green wood."

The foremost of the throng was Allan Clare. To Robin he threw his bow and arrows, and, rushing forward to Christabel, caught her in his arms, crying—

"Christabel, thou'rt mine, mine! and none shall part us again."

"And you are true, you are true! They told me falsely. I knew you could not desert me, dear, dear Allan," she exclaimed hysterically, and with the exertion fainted.

"This is sacrilege," roared the bishop, "vile, impious sacrilege."

"Nay, reverend father, it is justice; it is our idea of justice. We who live in the green wood have a simple and plain idea of it, and whenever we can we carry it out. We have profaned this chapel by no act of violence, and therefore have committed no act of sacrilege; and although I conceive you to have acted with a wrong, unbecoming thy sacred character, yet I will forgive it on the condition you at once unite in the holy bonds of matrimony this youth and maiden!"

"Forgive me!" ejaculated the bishop, in unaffected astonishment. "Insolent slave, hast thou no respect for the holy church?"

"Most sincere and most profound; but, beshrew me if that respect is extended to its servants. Good master bishop, my purpose here is not to bandy words with you, concerning the deference due to you as a minister of the Holy Word, but to do an act of justice. Mark me; this youth and maiden have loved each other from childhood upwards; they have each made personal sacrifices, endured much and continued anguish, in the hope that they would be ultimately united, a desire to which the maiden's father consented upon the youth's fulfilling certain conditions, which he did—"

"'Tis false!" shouted the baron, foaming with rage, and striving to extricate himself from the hands of two of the merrie men, who had him under their especial care; "he came not on the day specified to claim her!"

"Peace, thou hoary-headed, blood-thirsty wretch! Darest thou, beneath this sacred roof, allude to the cause of his absence—thou, who sent thy myrmidons to slay him? You first forfeited your word—broke the conditions by thy foul intentions. If he, from the effects of thy villany, did not fulfil all the conditions, the blame rests with thee; and if there is a sufferer, thou shalt be he. Now, good bishop, this youth's state is equal to the maiden's, in birth, in wealth, and in years; as children they were betrothed, their parents consenting at that time to the union; and now I call upon you, my Lord Bishop of Hereford, to fulfil an act of justice and wed them."

"Does the lady's father consent?" asked the bishop.

"No!" roared the baron. "Never!"

"Then I will not wed her to any other than Sir Tristram," observed the bishop, decisively, "if he is still willing to proceed with the match."

"Most willingly—I am very desirous; I am quite ready," ejaculated Sir Tristram, whiningly.

"But the maiden is not, neither is the youth, and they are the principal parties concerned; neither am I, who at present have the greatest power here," said Robin Hood; "so, good bishop, by your leave, the wedding shall be between those whom God and nature made fitting for each other, and not as those who have only a selfish will to guide them would have. Come, be speedy, for there is two couple more who purpose being wedded at the same time."

"I will not wed them," cried the bishop, hotly.

"And why not?" asked Robin, advancing to him with a look beneath which he quailed.

"A—why—a—because they have not been asked in the church, as is the law."

"That is a point easily remedied," returned Robin; "here, Little John, just borrow the vestments of yon tall priest, and call out the names of those to be wed."

"Ay, truly," returned Little John, with a quiet laugh. "Marry, among all the crafts to which I have turned my hand, priestcraft has not been one of them, and I expect I shall make a strange job at it; but a man cannot expect to be expert at what he never practised." By the time he had finished his speech he had obeyed the command of Robin Hood; and when he stood by the side of the bishop, who was fuming and chafing, holding up his hands and threatening excommunication to one and all, the merrie men set up a tremendous shout of laughter; but Robin commanded silence; and Little John, being instructed what to say,

"Asked them seven times in the Church,
Lest three times should not be enough."

"Now your scruples upon that point are satisfied, good my Lord Bishop, you cannot refuse to proceed with the ceremony."

"I can and will, impious ruffian. Listen and tremble. On thee and those with thee, for desecrating this sacred edifice with thy sacrilegious acts, I impose a curse—"

"Hold!" cried Robin, in a loud stern voice. "Peace! it is thou who art impious, who, taking advantage of thy sacred office, would, for an infamous mercenary consideration, side with an act of injustice, and curse those who fulfil the duties which our Lord has prescribed. Shame on ye for a false servant: thou art not infallible, though thou deemest thyself such; and wert thou to rain out curses in torrents, the Holy Mother would but hurl them upon thine own head; thou art unworthy to officiate, and shall not. Much and Arthur O'Bland, divest him of his robes, his mitre, and his crosier; there is one here who is ordained, and a true servant of the holy Church; he will fulfil the duties which the Bishop of Hereford refuses." The Bishop resisted, but in vain; he was powerless in the hands of Much and Arthur O'Bland, and the venerable pilgrim from the Holy Land, who shrievd Will Scarlet while he lay in the dungeon, stepped forth, was clothed, and took the Bishop's place; the monks, who had looked on in wonder and fear at the whole of the proceedings, seeing that Robin Hood was determined upon carrying his point, assisted the old pilgrim in the ceremonies, and when everything was completed, the old man asked—

"Who gives this maid?"

"Will you?" said Robin Hood to the Baron Fitz Alwine.

"No, never!" returned he, in a voice hoarse with passion.

"Father!" said Christabel.

"Never, minion! Hear me curse—"

"Silence him!" interrupted Robin. He was instantly obeyed. And then he resumed. "Since he who should give her, who breaks a sacred oath in withholding his consent, persists in refusing, then do I, and ye around me, contrar to this match, hear me swear, in this holy place, may God's mercy be ever denied me, here and hereafter, if any one takes, or attempts to take her from Allan Clare, her lawful husband, then shall he pay dearly, bitterly for her! Proceed."

The ceremony proceeded, and Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel were wedded—united to each other—never more to part until they ceased to exist.

The ceremony had barely concluded, when the arrival of a second party caused a stir in the body of the church. All eyes were turned in the direction to see old Sir Guy Gamwell and his wife, supported by his two eldest sons, enter; behind them Barbara and Winifred Gamwell, leaning upon the arms of two of their brothers; these were followed by Marian, Will Scarlet, and Maude, and the rear was brought up by the remaining two sons of Sir Guy. When they had reached the altar, Robin Hood took Marian by the hand, and Will Scarlet Maude, and when they had placed themselves in front of the altar, those around could see that marriage was intended. Allan stood at hand to give his sister away, and Hal of the Keep was there to give Maude away, and Winifred and Barbara were the bridesmaids. As Will Scarlet passed Robin, he whispered,—

"At last, Robin! at last, ha, ha, ha! I thought they had forgotten to come—how I looked out for them. Do you know my side is quite sore, my heart has beat so much. Doesn't Maude look beautiful? bless her little heart! Oh, Robin, I am so happy!"

Robin squeezed his hand warmly, and they took their respective places. The words of the marriage ceremony were repeated by the old man in a clear and solemn tone, that brought tears into the eyes of many there; although the chapel was thronged, yet there was a silence as of death, interrupted only by the voice of the old man, the occasional low response, or a faint sob from the overwrought feelings of some of the fair maidens there; and when the ceremony was completed, and they were fast united, Marian sunk into Robin Hood's arms, and Will embraced Maude, saying—

"Maude, dear Maude! you are my wife—mine, mine, only mine! I thought it was too good ever to happen; but it has, it has! God bless us both, Maude! may we be as happy always as I am now!"

Maude could not reply; she tried to smile and look in his eyes to echo the happy gaze which he bent on her; but her eyes were so filled with tears, she was blinded, and Will whispering she was a foolish, weak-hearted little thing, wept like a child.

The merrie men, when they saw their leader wedded, raised a succession of shouts which made the walls shake again, and then they prepared to separate. The Baron Fitz Alwine and Sir Tristram were handed out of the chapel, and were politely requested to walk home; their horses being detained, they took hold of arms, and toddled away in "such a state of mind," that we cannot describe it. Sir Tristram saying as they quitted the door—

"You will restore to me my million merks placed in your keeping by me, you know, Fitz Alwine?"

"I don't see that," replied Fitz Alwine; it was not my fault that you did not have my daughter—I could not help myself."

The reply was unheard; but judging from the horrified aspect of Sir Tristram's countenance, it was,

neither an amiable nor an amicable one. The retainers were also sent to Nottingham on foot, deprived of their arms and horses; but to do them justice, they intimated to the merrie men that they would make no resistance nor seek a retaliation, being satisfied that what had been done was no more than ought to be done, and it was a pleasant sight to see them shake hands and cheer each other as they parted.

The wedding party, escorted by the merrie men, all habited in Lincoln-green, and their leader, Robin Hood, in bright scarlet, took their way through the leafy wood, winding among the huge trees, which were here and there decorated with garlands; and ever and anon a deer would start forth dressed in flowers, or a young fawn glide swiftly by with a necklace of wild plants daintily arranged; and soon they reached a wide glade, and then they saw that preparations had been made for a festival. Vast trunks of the trees everywhere around were decorated with garlands of the most fanciful description; poles, clothed with the choicest-hued flowers, were erected for a merry dance; targets and rings for quarter-staff play, or quoits, were marked out; in fact, everything which could add to the festivity or happiness was there. In one place, there were some busily engaged in cooking venison; in others, broaching ale and wine. A right merrie repast made they, and when that was o'er, they betook themselves to all sorts of amusements and sports. There were many maidens from Nottingham who had never been in the green wood before; but Robin Hood having strictly commanded, and rigidly enforced, the highest respect for females, the timidity and half fear which they felt of the wild outlaws, as they were deemed, had worn off, and they mixed in the dance and games with all the zest imaginable. Will Scarlet was all that day mad with delight, and Maude mixed in the enjoyment with all the glee she would have done years ago; her heart was filled with the almost painful sense of entire happiness, and, in her extreme joy, she was almost hysterical. It was yet early in the morn when the festivities in the greenwood were getting into full swing; and, in a paroxysm of her happy laughter, our friend Friar Tuck encountered her, her waist encircled most fondly by the arm of her delighted husband, Will Scarlet, and her delicate arm clinging affectionately round his neck. It was a pleasing and a pretty sight, and he could not quarrel with either for thus displaying their love; yet, out of the tomb of buried circumstances, the spirit of his first fondness—nay, love for her, rose up and spread over his brain and soul a pall, thin and web-like, but cold and sickening, and his heart and being seemed filled with a deep and regretful sorrow that the happy lot of Will was not his own. His first impulse was to turn aside and wander alone in another direction, but Will having perceived him, the thing was not to be accomplished. With a lusty shout, our friend of the sanguine locks, but of the true and open heart, cried out to him, "What, Tuck! jovial Giles! good-hearted, jolly old father Tuck! seest thou not me and my prize, my treasure, my world's wealth, my soul's hope—mine—mine own!—what, art thou blinded at the sight, that thou dost avert thy head, as though thou didst encounter that only that thou hadst met day by day for years, and caredst not an' thou didst never meet again. Hast thou nought to say to me and mine—ha, ha!—mine, Giles—on this day of days, this bursting into blossom of my life?"

"Well, I have a word to say," exclaimed Tuck, with a resolute effort to speak clearly, but his voice was husky, and it was with some difficulty that he quite cleared his throat.

"Aha!" cried Will, "you have caught a cold through sleeping in some chamber; your voice is as hoarse as the Baron Fitz Alwine's an hour ago."

"Nay, it is no ailing of the system that makes my voice a little thicken," cried Tuck; "it was a little impish sprite, one of the elfs of memory, that tugged at my heart-strings and reminded me that, in days long gone, I aspired—no, perhaps it is wrong to say so—but, without any hopes or reflections upon the subject, I, some years since, believed that little witch clinging to you a pearl of great price, a jewel of countless value, that it would have given me the most unquestionable satisfaction to have called my own."

"What! you, Tuck, in love with my Maude!"

"Well, perhaps—"

"Perhaps—pooh!—ah! you knew her before Robin."

"I did—long before him."

"To be sure! then why do you say perhaps? Why, of course you loved her. How could you be flesh and blood and not love her? Did not Robin Hood love her? and did not I, the first moment my eyes fell upon her—and now—oh Maude!"

He imprinted a fervent kiss upon her lips, which had many times that morning received a warm impression of his own. When he had a little recovered this delicious little episode, he turned his glittering eyes upon the Friar, and it struck him that his features by no means displayed a responsive satisfaction to that which his own bore. His eyes changed their expression, and opened to their full extent, and his face for the moment grew grave.

"Why, Tuck, you have not been a sufferer by my happiness?" he asked quietly and eagerly. "You have not borne the pangs of hopeless unrequited love? You have not in secret mourned for the loss of one who, in your heart of hearts, you prayed might be yours? Have you wasted and pined—?"

He paused. That last word upset the whole of the sympathy which really breathed through his words.

Friar Tuck wasted and pined! he was full fifteen stone, with a face like a rising harvest moon. The serious which each bore changed with the swiftness of an electrical movement, the faces lit up, and all three burst into a hearty laugh; it was repeated again and again, until their cheeks were literally bedewed with tears, created by their convulsive laughter. When somewhat recovered, Friar Tuck stretched both his hands out heartily, and took one of each of Maude's and Will's; he pressed them earnestly, and said in a full-toned voice—

"By our Lady's grace! I wish ye both the most entire happiness it is possible for human lot to be endowed with. By the mass! sweet Maude, you pierced my heart through and through with shafts from your enchanting eyes, and many, aye, many many times made me feel that I had too much of the old leaven in me to well assort with the gown and shaven crown; but soon I found the coveted prize was not for me. There were others brighter, younger, comelier than I to woo and win; so I e'en patched up the hollows and the holes which were in my heart, and looked out into the world for some other object to fill my eyes and head with, and I found it."

"You found it!" cried Maude and Will, in one voice.

"I found it," repeated Tuck, with a chuckle.

"A little dark-eyed maiden," suggested Maude, "one who appreciated your worth more readily, good Giles, than one so thoughtless as I."

The Friar laughed a gleeful chuckling laugh.

"A bright-eyed dame, truly," he cried. "A glit-

tering, diamond-like eye, and lips that vie with the brightest ruby, friend Will; but whether she appreciated my worth, sweet Maude—ha! ha! that is another matter truly—I believe that she is as fond of others as I, quite as liberal in her favours, and returns kiss for kiss most impartially.”

“And you love her?” asked Will, with a look of unmistakeable incredulity.

“Well, I openly confess I do, although she does bestow her favours without discrimination.”

“She is no true maiden,” gently observed Maude, looking upon the grass.

“Out upon her!” cried Will, with sudden vehemence, “out upon her! Why, Tuck, you must be mad. Love a maiden that loves any body and every body! Why, sooner than I would—”

“Tush, tush, no hasty avowal, friend Will; be careful what thou sayest.”

“Wherefore?”

“Why? thou must not speak disparagingly of one thou hast kissed often.”

“Kissed?” echoed Will and Maude, in a breath, electrified.

“Aye, kissed often,” shouted Tuck, in strange glee.

“Thou canst not deny it.”

“Will!” cried Maude.

“Maude!” exclaimed Will, astounded, and looking his astonishment most unequivocally. “What, I?—ha! ha! What do you mean Tuck? You are dreaming. I kiss your ladye love?”

“Aye, often, and I can prove it.”

Maude half screamed.

“Prove it then, this instant,” cried Will, with vehemence. “Prove it! This is not a joke, Tuck; no, no, this is too serious. Where is the maiden? shew her to me, confront me with her, bring me face to face with her, and let me see if she will shamelessly persist in an assertion so untrue.”

“So untrue!” chuckled Tuck, the water running down his cheeks. “It is thou who dost persist in the untruth. Bring her face to face with thee, aye, that will I; aye, and lip to lip too.”

“No, no, no, no!” cried Maude, with sudden energy, and laid hold of Will’s arm, as if to prevent any such appropriation of property in which she had such a vested right.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Tuck. “My life on’t, he kisses the maiden when he sees her.”

“No,” said Will, doubtfully.

“No, indeed, I am sure he will not,” cried Maude, positively.

“Where is she? let me see her,” demanded Will.

“Nay, never heed her, dear Will,” exclaimed Maude, with a small twinge of jealousy, “thou canst not wish to meet her, and I fear me, though beloved by our friend Tuck, she can be no meet companion for you—your wife, Will.”

She uttered the last words very gently. The word ‘wife’ seemed to make Will feel taller, and fill his heart with rapture. He gave her a comforting squeeze to his heart, he kissed her forehead, and said earnestly—

“My own dear, dear little wife!”

Then turning to Tuck, he added—

“Say as thou wilt, Tuck, thou shalt not move me from the best of humour, although thou dost so unblushingly aver I have oft times kissed thy mistress, which thou knowst to be abominably wide of the truth.”

“Nay, for the honour of my word, I must confront thee with the damsel.”

“Nay, good Tuck, we do not wish to see her,” interrupted Maude.

“Nay, but thou shalt. Here she is Will. Behold her,

gaze upon her, look her in the eyes, and then say, if thou darest, thou hast not kissed her ruby lips many a time and oft.”

As he concluded, he drew from beneath his gown a silver flagon; he disengaged the massive silver chain by which it was attached to his body, and held it up close before the eyes of Will Scarlet—so close as to make him retreat a step or two backwards. His chuckling, merry laugh was echoed by both Maude and Will, and the latter, seizing the flagon from the hands of the jolly Friar, cried mirthfully—

“I acknowledge my error, I confess my sins, good Friar Tuck. I have kissed these lips many a time and oft, right honestly do I confess it; but, oh! father, right reverend lover of so free and bright a damsel, I never abused her favours, and she has never played me false; and now, in the presence of my own dearly beloved little wife, will I kiss the ripe ruby lips again, and she, my own fairy, will not quarrel with me for it.”

“Not unless thou dost too freely kiss the tempting lips; and shouldst thou, Will, thou knowest that thou wilt suffer accordingly.”

“Said I not that I would not abuse her favours, neither will I, but on her lips, dear Maude, will I fervently pray happiness to us both while God grants us the sweet joy of walking on this earth together.”

“Amen! *benedicite!* amen!” cried Tuck, and added with much heartiness of manner—“Nay, I will press her lips to mine, while I give breath to that toast, and hug her, hug her, my boy, while her spirit flies through her lips to my heart.”

And he did drink the toast right heartily, draining the flagon in his enthusiasm; and then, pressing the hands of his friends with true sincerity, he wished them earnestly the happiest term possible on earth.

It would have mightily suited his feelings, and the fervour which he felt, to have sealed his good wishes upon the lips of the fair Maude; but there rose up many little remembrances to prevent his even offering such a token of his good will, and so with a jolly wave of the hand, he suffered them to pass on, and himself plunged with a better spirit into another part of the wood to mix with the many blythe spirits there assembled.

And truly he had not gone far before he was encountered by a band of merry youths and maidens; and, before he even surmised their intention, they formed a circle round him, clasped firmly hold of hands, and whirled round him until the sight of their rapidly passing figures made him grow so giddy that he suddenly and very plumply found a seat upon the green turf, amid the ringing laughter of the merry foresters and the lively maidens. Thus seated he was not quietly suffered to remain, but lifted by the strong-armed to his feet, he was beset with questions. One handsome young forester, mated with a pretty blue-eyed lass, his arm very tenderly round her waist, brought her prominently into notice by telling the friar that she wanted to confess, that she was dying to unburthen her soul to him.

Friar Tuck glanced at the sweet smiling face beaming upon him, wreathed with fair flowing hair, and very much approving of its contour, of the very, very charming eyes that, like stars in a clear, soft sky, glittered deliciously upon him, he at once acknowledged his readiness to receive her confession.

The young maid laughed, and shook her head, and vowed there was no truth in the assertion; but the nut-brown forester persisted in his story, and Friar Tuck affecting to believe him, said, with an unmistakeably wicked look twinkling in his eyes, “Nay, sweet one, be not afraid, I am ready to receive thy confession;

remember, what thou hast to say will be said to me alone—it is not for the ears of the sinful—there is a copse hard by—”

“No! no! no!” cried the laughing youths, with a shout of glee, “No! here on this spot; no, no, good father, no secret confessions in a copse; here she must confess before us all.”

“No,” cried the maiden, “how foolish! I have nothing to confess.”

“Aha!” cried her swain, “mere timidity; you must confess.”

“What?” asked she, in affected ignorance.

“What!” he iterated, “Why, have not I been making a clean breast to thee; have I not been shrived by thee?”

“By me! no.”

“Ah,—shamelessly uttered, by the mass! Have I not been confessing to thee that I love thee better than all the world, ever since I have known thee, which is a full two hours ago!”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the merry group.

“And now it is only fair,” continued the forester, as soon as he could obtain a hearing, “that thou shouldst confess my love is returned to the full, heartily, truly, and completely. Is not this fair, good father. Is not this a true confession to be demanded?”

“Well,” exclaimed Tuck, with a shake of the head, “I admit that the confession may be demanded; but it rests with the maiden to say if thy ravishing charms hath had the same effect upon her which hers have had upon thee. Mark me, worthy youth, her eyes are blue and beautiful, her skin is fair, her cheeks rosebuds, her features lovely and her lips—possibly paradise—I cannot, however, pass that judgment positively unless I were to taste them.”

He was interrupted by a shout of laughter, and the finger of the forester was raised warningly, and he cried lustily—

“Forbidden fruit, O friar! forbidden fruit!”

Tuck bowed his head, and crossed his hands over his breast with affected humility.

“Granted, O son! granted—at least to me,” he said; and then added quickly, “that is, I am to presume so—however to my argument: this maiden hath charms of feature and beauty of form, making her certainly a little fairy-like mortal, not only to be admired, but to be loved; while thou, master forester, for face hath—”

“Hold thy hand, good father,” interrupted the forester, with a laugh, “I admit thy skill in painting the maiden, but I doubt the truth of thy limner-like abilities, when at work upon me.”

“Proceed, and spare him not,” cried the maiden, with a merry laugh.

“Spare him not—spare him not!” cried many voices.

“Well, thou hast a head,” proceeded the friar, “and so had the beast which bore Balaam.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the merry group.

“Thou hast in it eyes tolerable, when they look not two ways at once; a nose that thou canst easily find in the dark, and, in hot weather, could well support thy cap, if hung upon it; a mouth, which if closed small enough to salute a maiden, can yet gape wide enough to swallow her; thy legs, too,—why a deer hath trim limbs, but thou —”

He was interrupted by shouts of laughter; and the forester vainly endeavoured to make himself heard.

“Therefore,” continued Tuck, as soon as he obtained a little silence, “I well may ask, though thou dost confess to her, why she should confess to thee? Now, in my vocation, I am specially ordained to receive confessions of all kinds; and if the maiden will trust herself with me alone—”

“No, no, thank you, father,” cried the forester, with a merry laugh, “she will away with me as thou seest.”

He caught her round the waist, and ran off with her, followed by the rest, shouting in the wildest delight, leaving Tuck alone. He quaffed a draught from his flagon, and then sought out another group of revellers.

All that day the gaiety and joy went on without the slightest check or drawback.

Robin introduced Much to Barbara, and told her to make much of him, and whispered something about him being the husband he had promised her; but she laughed, shook her head, and would not hear him. Little John, who was not formed for merry tricks, came quite out on this day in his exhibition of sprightliness; but he engrossed the company of Winifred Gamwell all to himself, which, when it was noticed, drew forth sundry important yet smirking nods and significant winks. To Allan and Christabel this was a day of joy—the more so as they had waded to it through years of disappointment and wearying hope deferred; the debility produced by her mental agony prevented her joining the sports as the rest did, but she sat like a fairy queen presiding at a great festivity of her people among the trees and flowers.

“And is this the way you live in the green wood, dear Robin?” asked Marian.

“Even thus as you see,” returned he.

“Then will I take up my abode with you here, living as you live, until the unjust decree of the law is removed from you; and be the future good or evil—such as it is now, or surrounded with toil and privation—I shall never seek to change, or repine at my situation, so that thou’rt with me; and here we will live together, while life is ours, in joy and love, in calm content and happiness, until death shall separate us.”

“Bless thee, my sweet love, my dear wife!” said Robin, imprinting a passionate kiss upon her forehead.

It was a happy day that wedding day of Robin Hood!

END OF BOOK II.



Festivities in Sherwood Forest.

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CHAPTER I.

"Then among streams and flowers,
The little winged powers
Went singing carols without torch or bow:
The nymphs and shepherds sat,
Mingling with innocent chat,
Sports and low whispers; and with whispers low,
Kisses that would not go." LEIGH HUNT.

"My lands are sett to wad, Robin.
Until a certain day.
To a rich abbott here besides,
Of St. Mary's Abbaye.

* * * * *

I have none other, then, said the knight,
The very sooth to say;
Except that it be our dear ladye,
Who never failed me a day.

By dear worthy God, then, Robin, he said,
Ye may search all England throw;
Yet find me never unto my pay,
A truer better borrowe."

ROBIN HOOD BALLAD.

MARIAN kept her word: notwithstanding the persuasions of Robin Hood to the contrary, she made her home in the green wood, because it was his home, because he found a safety there which the law elsewhere denied him. Her brother, Allan, too, had offered her an asylum in his residence, which was situated in a sweet dale to the west of Mansfeld; but kindly thanking him, she preferred sharing the couch of skins where her husband rested, to all the luxuries his mansion afforded; and so she dwelt in the bonnie Shirewood, queen of the forest, even as Robin Hood was king. Allan, at the instigation of Robin Hood, immediately upon his marriage, had entered into negotiations with Henry II. to sell his estates in Huntingdonshire, at two-thirds of their value; at the same time making an offer to forego a part of the arrears due to him, on consideration of his confirming his marriage with the Lady Christabel. Henry, who sought every opportunity of becoming master of the richest estates in England, availed himself of the offer with avidity, and by an especial act, confirmed the ceremony, the performance of which had been so unceremoniously taken out of the hands of the Lord Bishop of Hereford. Allan had been so speedy in this affair, and Henry so eager to conclude it, that he scarce inquired into the facts of the case; and when the Bishop arrived to lay before the king a statement of the contumely with which he had been treated, the negotiations were concluded and ratified. The only redress he obtained was a warrant and reward to apprehend the bold outlaw, Robin Hood, and the power to inflict summary punishment upon him when and wherever he might be taken. This had been already done, and the Bishop therefore returned as he went; but he resolved to endeavour to capture Robin, and proceeded to raise an addition to his armed retinue, with the intention and hope of succeeding in persuading Baron Fitz Alwine and Sir Tristram of Goldsborough to join their forces with his, and exterminate the outlaw and his band. Allan, having concluded his sale satisfactorily, had quitted Huntingdonshire, and built a pretty dwelling in the centre of a beautiful dale, a short distance from Mansfeld, and here lived happily with Christabel, obtaining the name, from his residence, of Allan of the Dale, or as it was then abbreviated, Allan-a-Dale.

Will Scarlet, in the possession of his wife, was as happy as any man could possibly be. Naturally possessing a good flow of spirits, of a sanguine temperament, and of a warm imagination, he had

pictured to himself nothing could be so agreeable as a wife like Maude, and had invested her with all the charms of an angel. She knew the extent of his affection for her, and she strove hard that she should not fall much short of his high opinion of her. Will made his home in the wood because Robin had done so; and as Marian had set so noble an example, Maude could do no less than follow it, and therefore became a tenant of the forest also. There were many maidens who followed their precedent, and were incited to this from the enjoyment they had received during the festival of Robin's wedding. Robin Hood loved the fair sex generally, from an innate predisposition towards them, and for the sake of the fair being whom he had wedded, he had inculcated this feeling among his followers, so that a female might at any time have passed alone and safely through any part of the forest peopled by his men; and if it so chanced that they encountered any of the band, they were kindly invited to partake of refreshment, which, if they did, was spread bounteously, but unostentatiously before them, and then they were escorted safely through the wood, without being offended by word or deed of those who were guides; and when this began to be known, as soon it did, and spread far and wide, many young girls with bright eyes, and feet almost as light as their hearts, often strolled through the valleys and glades of Shirewood, and when by their firesides, were frequently heard to say that the merrie men, natthless what was reported of them, were dear creatures after all; and upon that joyous day which saw Robin the husband of the beautiful Marian, there were many of the maidens, with their sweet smiling faces, making the heart glow to gaze upon them. As they danced lightly and gladsomely, they would look into the flashing eyes and merrie features of their partners, to wonder how they could ever have had any fear of them, and then sigh and think a life in the green wood, with such companions, must be vastly pleasant and very much to be desired. In the innocence of their pure hearts, they hinted such a thing, and the hint was no sooner given than taken; those who hinted, found the tongues of those whom they esteemed, to have bright eyes and merrie features, to be as persuasive as their countenances were engaging. The resolution of Marian and Maude was opening a pleasant path for them, and no sooner did they entertain a wish to pursue it, than they were persuaded to do so; and no sooner were they persuaded than they did so. The consequence of all this was, that jolly Friar Tuck found himself suddenly engaged in marrying couples from morning till night, and naturally expressed a desire, after he had been some time thus occupied, to know whether an epidemic of this peculiar character was raging, how many people it would carry off, and when and where it would stop. After reaching a certain height, it began to abate, and soon the cases were reduced to a few, and ultimately, to one now and then; but strange to say, there was no abatement in the symptoms, they continued to exist with undiminished force, and do to this day.

Merrily, most merrily, did this body of people dwell in the green wood.† The cave, already spoken of, had been enlarged and improved considerably; it

† "His men" says Major, "most skilful in battle, whom four times that number of the boldest fellows durst not attack." He further says, "I disapprove of the rapine of the man, but he was the most humane, and the prince of all robbers."—"Majoria Britannia: Hist.," Edin., 1740.

"And of these archers brave, there was not any one, But he could kill a deer his swiftest speed upon, Which they did boil and roast in many a mighty wood, Sharp hunger the fine sauce to their more kingly food. Then taking them to rest, his merry men and he Slept many a summer's night under the green wood tree." DRAYTON'S Polybion.

was divided into cells and apartments, principally employed for sleeping in—the broad glades being the hall or dining place; and the inconveniences of bad weather, or the inclemencies of winter, were met in the arrangements which their extensive underground establishment enabled them to make. They made the chief object of their life to render each other as cheerful and as happy as they could, and succeeded; it can scarce be imagined how joyously and merrily they passed their days. The men were all Saxons; many of them men who had been defrauded of birthrights and possessions, by Norman oppression; scarce one in the band but what had been a sufferer through Norman avarice or violence; and upon Normans they retaliated whenever it was in their power; succouring, when opportunity served, those who were oppressed and trampled upon; feeding and clothing the poor, and levying contributions upon the rich. There were two classes from whom the poor suffered—indeed, the public generally; the wealthy landholders, who at that time were chiefly Normans; and the Church, who left no means untried or unpursued, to squeeze money from both rich and poor, to swell their already enormous revenues. It was, therefore, upon these two classes that Robin Hood commanded levies to be made for the support of the band, and for the purpose of assisting the poor; but he ordered that they should be levied in such a manner as to prevent the necessity of bloodshed. His orders in everything were implicitly obeyed, and as an infringement of any strict law was punished with certain death, from which there was no escape, they were carried out to the letter. By these observances they attained a name for forbearance and good-will, while their abilities as archers gained them a fame which spread far and wide. Several expeditions had been made to dislodge them in vain, and at length they were suffered to dwell there, as they committed no ravages on surrounding property, unmolested by kingly interference.

Marian found the forest life far more agreeable than she could have anticipated; her every wish was anticipated and gratified as soon as understood. She was made, and felt herself to be, the queen of the merry people tenanted the old wood; and proudly did she witness the warm and affectionate, yet respectful homage, which was paid to Robin Hood, who retained his hold on the hearts of his followers by his uniform kindness and cheerful friendliness to them, and preserved their respect and deference by his extraordinary abilities. Day after day, she wandered out with him to learn all the sweet places and cool recesses which the green wood afforded, and to acquire a knowledge of such sports and pastimes as were then known and pursued. She was presented with a rare and choice set of hawks, and with some little tuition, could fly her hawk with the best and most practised hand; but the art she strove most to accomplish to perfection, was the use of the bow. Robin, with unwearied assiduity, taught her the mysteries of acquiring an accurate aim; he would stand by her as she took her aim; would tell her when the bow-arm was not straight enough, or the wrist curved sufficiently in; would raise it when too low, or depress it when too high; would teach her to fill her eye with the object at which she aimed, and bring the feather to her ear, and having obtained her aim, steadily to let the string loose without a jerk; many other things did he teach her, which she listened to with avidity, followed closely, and obtained the reward by becoming an expert and most accurate archeress. It was a beautiful sight to see her, clothed in a tight dress of Lincoln green, stand to take an aim; her tall, graceful form, exhibited to per-

fection, her left arm extended, holding the bow, her right bent gracefully upwards, drawing the arrow towards her ear, her fair head turned towards the object at which she aimed, and her body half turned from it, one foot slightly advanced, and the whole form proudly erect, forming as noble a view of the human form as can be obtained in any attitude; and when she began to attain the power of performing the niceties of the art, for which Robin was so famed, and which was the stimulant to her not to disgrace his tutoring, her fame ran through the wood, exciting still further the admiration of those who dwelled there, and looked up to her affectionately and respectfully. Time passed on, and there seemed little or no abatement of their contentment; she received frequent visits from Christabel and Allan, from the inhabitants of Barnsdale Hall, and from many who, dwelling in Nottingham, felt a desire to see so rare a thing as a quantity of fair, gentle females, dwelling happily in a wood with a band of rude foresters. To her friends Marian was the same warm, earnest, affectionate friend as ever; to strangers, the most courteous and kindest creature imaginable, and the latter never departed but they went away with warm hearts, and tongues full of her praises. We must not omit to say that on the day of her marriage, among many whom she saw for the first time, Hal of the Keep's pretty wife, Grace, was presented to her; after kindly greetings, and while yet retaining Grace's hand in hers, with an affectionate pressure, she turned to Robin and said, a sweet smile illumining her features—

"Robin, when you told me, some time since, that it was not always safe to go into Nottingham, I suspect you were making some allusion to our sweet friend here. I can now well believe you that it is not quite safe, and for the future you go not there without me. My dear Grace, you will pardon me, but I must positively forbid it."

"Why, dear lady?" asked Grace, innocently.

"Why!" echoed Marian, with mirth; "why! Why, how can you put such question with such a grave face? The temptation must be terrible; those eyes of yours would turn an angel from the paths of paradise."

"You are pleased to flatter, like a certain friend of yours," returned Grace, with her musical laugh; "but you need not fear, dear lady; Robin Hood loves you too fondly, and I my Hal too dearly, to give either you or him cause for jealousy."

"Besides, you do not doubt me," said Robin, a wicked smile lurking in the corner of his eye.

"To be sure not," said Maude, merrily; "but if I were inclined to be spiteful, I should perhaps tell how Robin once said to me, when I told him he never brought me any news—"

"What?" asked Marian, observing her hesitate.

"Something which, for the present, I think I shall keep to myself," she replied.

"Oh no!" said Marian; "I cannot allow that, Maude; let us know all his delinquencies. He has been so much petted lately, that unless we discover something against him, he will be so elevated we shall never be able to reduce him to his proper level."

"That's truth," answered Maude; "and so, Robin, you see it is my duty to tell."

"By all means," laughed he; "wreak your vengeance at once, for I mean to make myself so amiable presently, that you won't have the heart to do it."

"There," said Marian, "you perceive I spoke nothing but truth; he is commencing to presume upon our kindness. You have no alternative, Maude; let us hear all."

"I am afraid I must then," she responded, with

affected solemnity. "Well, then, he told me that he frequently went to pay *Hal* a visit, much to the danger of his peace of mind, in being in the presence of his—mark the words—lovely little wife!"

"Very well," interrupted Marian.

"Oh, but the worst is to come," cried Maude.

"Pray don't spare me," exclaimed Robin.

"I don't intend," replied she.

"Nor I," remarked Marian; "pray go on, Maude."

"He said he reached there in the morning and never got away till night, *Hal* very often being absent, and Grace's eyes were flashing away, her sweet lips smiling, and his own heart going pit-a-pat, until he felt an affection for her and everybody bearing the name of Grace."

"You have a tenacious memory, Maude," said Robin.

"And so have I," cried Marian, "and a great deal of credibility, too; I believe all Maude said to be true; and it is well I did not hear this yesterday, or I should not have had him—that is, I think I should not. You see, dear Grace, I cannot possibly suffer him to come to Nottingham without me."

"I shall be very happy to see you, dear lady," said she, earnestly, and looking in Marian's face to see if she meant what she said seriously, for both Maude and she had spoken with such an affectation of gravity, that her innocent mind could scarce detect it, and she began to think Maude was really spiteful; "but you have nothing to fear from Robin, for I am sure he loves you very much, for he has often told me so, and I—I—do not remember ever making my eyes flash to my knowledge, or smiling, only when I ought to do so—"

"Oh, that was all his vanity, dear Grace," cried Marian, with a merry laugh, which was at once changed to seriousness on finding Grace suddenly burst into tears. "My dear, dear Grace, what is this?" she cried earnestly; "we are only jesting. I shall never forgive myself for having wounded your feelings."

"Why, Grace!" said Maude. "Grace, what an ill-natured, wicked creature you must think me, if you believe what I said was more than sport; nay, 'twas but mirth, a heart light—almost too light, made me say what I shall always repent having said, for it has made thee suffer pain."

"It is past. I beg your pardon; I am very simple—I did think you were serious; but now I find it was a joke, I can smile, you shall see, as merrily as you;" and, as Grace uttered this, she lifted up her shining eyes, still glittering with tears, and smiled in such a sweet manner that Marian, to hide the emotion it occasioned, embraced her warmly. After she had recovered somewhat, she turned to Robin and said, with a pouting lip but smiling eyes—

"You have been the cause of this scene, Robin; it is all your fault, and you shall pay a penalty for it."

"With all my heart!" he cried gaily, "name it!"

"Why, sir, that is to kiss Grace at once, as a reparation for your crime."

"I shall obey you, Marian, with alacrity; nor would I care how often I repeated the offence, if such were always to be the penalty."

"What *would* *Hal* say if he were here?" said Grace, blushing a deep crimson, as soon as her lips were disengaged from Robin's.

"Why," said *Hal*, coming up at the moment, "that if he was not exactly pleased with your lips he had better try your cheeks, your forehead, or eyes; and if he is not pleased with them, why, I *should* say he was unmistakably the most fastidious being in existence."

"I confess to being very much pleased with the lips," said Robin, jocularly.

"Without doubt," said Marian, "so no more trips to Nottingham without me."

Hal, with some surprise, inquired the cause, and Maude told him in such a merry manner, that he laughed till he cried again.

"Ah, well!" he exclaimed, when he had recovered his breath, addressing himself to Marian, "I think you may rest happy on that point; I am sure you have no cause to fear, and I am sure I have not."

"I don't question your happy certainty," said Marian, with a smile, "but I must honestly confess that, were I a man, and much in my pretty Grace's company, I should doubt considerably whether the temptation were not very much stronger than my strength of mind to resist its fascination."

"Not if you had another to love such as thee!" exclaimed Robin, fondly.

"I think so, too," said Maude, looking about for Will, who, being at a short distance, the moment he saw her turn her head towards him, ran hastily up to her.

"And so do I," said *Hal*, kissing his wife affectionately.

"Well then," continued Marian, extending her hand to Robin, which he seized and pressed to his lips, "I do not think we can do better than each keep to our own."

This was a point on which they agreed unanimously, and then they went and mixed in the sports which others were pursuing, with glad hearts and nimble limbs.

A year passed away—a year of joy it was to them, for it passed and brought no alloy with it, and much, very much pleasure had it brought; it had been crowned too by the birth of three children, Allan being blessed with a girl, while Robin and Will Scarlet became fathers to two fine boys. They had a rare bout of feasting to celebrate the happy event, and Marian, who with Maude had been removed to beneath the roof of her brother, gave Robin no cause to fear by being better than could be expected. His visits to Allan-a-Dale were as frequent as it was thought prudent they should be, and he was usually dismissed, after kissing the child, with some cheerful intelligence respecting his beloved wife. In these visits Will Scarlet invariably accompanied him, and as they journeyed home to the haunt, his spirits scarce knew bounds; he leaped and danced about with joy, to know that Maude was well and his little counterpart was better. One day, after returning from one of these visits, he assembled the whole of his men in one of the broad glades; it was necessary; there had been many additions since he and many of his men had wedded; the laws of the forest, which he had established, had been evaded by some of the new comers, upon the plea of ignorance; they had been pardoned upon their plea, and to do them justice, had rarely again infringed, excepting in cases where their passions led them astray, and from their ignorance of an existing law to prevent it. To obviate this, he called them all together and recapitulated to them every law, the reason of its being framed, its adoption, the necessity for its observance, and the punishment of breaking it. He wound up by saying—"Our force now exceeds any power which may be brought against us with an endeavour to oust us from our leafy home; our wealth is such that we are enabled to do much to withdraw from us the odium of the name of outlaws, by such gentle conduct as may shame those who dwell in the protection of the law, and are in the enjoyment of all the luxuries

which wealth can afford. To do this, we must, under all circumstances, abstain from unnecessary violence; give to the poor whenever it lies in our power; upon

to act otherwise, we should only be following the base practices of the vile Normans, oppressing those already too much oppressed. Honest yeomen, too,



all occasions refrain from injuring ploughmen, husbandmen, or any who live by the sweat of their brow, and do the best to support their families. Were we

fulfilling their duties, molest not. All Saxons are free, gentle and simple; and even our courtesy may be extended to such Norman knights, who not being of

such a grasping, avaricious nature as their brethren, have little more fortune than their sword, and who do not, by overbearing conduct, merit wholesome and seasonable chastisement; but wherever a wealthy Norman is met within the limits of this forest, he must be made to pay handsomely for the entertainment we will give him. All monks, bishops, and archbishops, without reserve, shall pay richly; their infamous exactions and extortions demand it; let none escape; respect the cloth but not the men; they have abused the faith which they should by virtue, charity, and an absence of all selfishness, have upheld; spare them not. But above all, forget not the High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, my Lord Baron Fitz Alwine, he who sold his child, and but for our interference would have sent her blighted in spirit and broken-hearted to the grave; who did Will Scarlet the favour of exerting himself to the utmost to send him to the other world, on an especial high gallows, and who frequently vows he will capture all of ye, hang ye on trees in rows for the birds to peck at, and I in the middle of you. Wherever you see him catch him, but for Lady Christabel's, Allan-a-dale's sweet wife's sake, hurt him not by violence—we shall hurt him more by making him pay richly for his release; and should you see any of his people, capture them, and he shall pay well to recover them. I have said! Away with ye to your respective stations. Remember the laws, the Churchmen, and the High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire!"

The merrie men gave a loud cheer and separated, laughing heartily. At the conclusion of the speech, Little John, who had listened quietly, said, when left alone with Robin and Will Scarlet—

"It appears to me, my noble master, that no man wants more or better laws than you have given us to guide him through life; everything a simple man may require to be insured a comfortable life, by the consideration of the forbearance to him and himself to others, has been cared for, and means taken to punish those who violate their observance. But I am told there are roomful all laid down and fashioned upon skins to rule us by—that is, the whole country—and how are we ruled? To my simple thinking, they had better only have our forest laws, and I am sure they would be all happier and honest men."

"You speak truly," said Robin; "were men's possessions limited to their wants, and the laws to their possessions, simpler laws than we exercise would be sufficient. But that is not the case, nor ever will be; the selfishness of man's nature, the inherent craving after more than he requires, will always give rise to an infinity of laws, whose sole basis, after all, is to protect the weaker against the strong, right against might; but were we to live for a thousand years, we should perceive that, although this country will have progressed to an extent which it is impossible to imagine, yet even then oppression, exaction, and state necessities, will make requisite a number of laws far excelling in the average what they do now."

"It does not seem natural," returned Little John, thoughtfully.

"Nor is it according to the dictates of reason," replied Robin; "but reason and passion are two opposite things. Were men's passions ever subservient to their reason, we should need no laws."

"I can believe you, for I am so sure you do everything for the best, that your word is law to me," said Little John, earnestly. "My reason—"

"Your experience, perhaps," remarked Robin. "And after all, there's but little difference; we reason most frequently by experience, because that has taught us what is—"

"Hark!" cried Little John, "I hear a horse's footstep clattering down yon glade. Will Scarlet, come with me, and we will see who it is."

"You know your instructions," observed Robin, as they prepared to depart.

"Well," was the reply.

"It is good. If it is some wealthy Norman or Churchman, invite him to dinner, and bring him forthwith, for my appetite tells me it is near the hour we take our meal."

With an assenting nod of the head they quitted him, and glided through a thicket in the direction of the footsteps, and soon obtained a view of the stranger.

"By the mass! what a miserable-looking dog," remarked Will, with a slight laugh. "I should think there was little wealth about him."

"He does look wretched and wo-begone, I confess," replied Little John; "but he may only affect that, and, under the appearance of misery, think to pass through the forest scatheless; if he is bent upon deceiving, he will be himself deceived."

The stranger did look wretched; it is true he was habited as a knight, but his garments were hanging carelessly about him, as if much grief had made him reckless of appearance. A hood attached to the gown he wore was thrown over his head, which rested thoughtfully and heavily upon his chest; he had given the rein to his horse, and only one of his feet were in the stirrups; the other swung listlessly by his side, taking its motion from the horse's movements; he looked the embodiment of care and misery; he was absorbed in a deep reverie, from which he was aroused by the sudden stopping of his steed, and hearing the full-toned voice of little John exclaim—

"Good morrow, sir stranger!—a goodly greeting to thee; thou'rt right welcome to the green wood—thou hast been expected."

"I? expected?" echoed the stranger, fixing his full melancholy eyes upon Little John.

"Yes," cried Will Scarlet, "our master has been looking for thee, waiting dinner for thee these three hours."

"Waiting for me? impossible!" urged the stranger, thoughtfully.

"Indeed has he," said Little John; "he knew thou wert coming."

"It is not even probable," replied the stranger, regarding both Little John and Will Scarlet with a perplexed look.

"It is true, nevertheless," cried Will.

"And who is thy master," asked the stranger, "who knows of my coming, and extends his courtesy to me thus?"

"Robin Hood," answered Little John, meekly.

"What! the celebrated forester of that name?" inquired the stranger with an air of interest.

"Even he," was the reply.

"I have heard of him many a time and oft, always to admire his noble conduct; he hath done much and hath done nobly. I am glad I shall have the opportunity of meeting with him; he is a good yeoman and true. I accept his invitation, though I cannot guess how he could have expected me."

"That thou shalt know anon," replied Little John.

"Be it as thou wilt, stout forester. Lead on—I will follow thee."

Little John took the horse by the bridle and led him forward, Will Scarlet bringing up the rear; and they pursued their way to the trying tree—Little John not having a doubt but what this appearance of sorrow and poverty was a cloak to hide wealth; while

Will Scarlet thought him a poor devil, of whom the only good to be obtained by carrying him before Robin Hood was the satisfaction of seeing him eat a good dinner. They were soon beneath the trysting tree, at whose foot sat Robin. When the stranger reached him and alighted, he rose to welcome him, and was struck with his "dreary semblaunt;" at the same time he could not but notice the knightly air of gentility which pervaded every act, and he came to the same conclusion which Little John had already arrived at, that of believing this appearance of sadness was assumed in order to save his money. Robin did not appear to notice it, but greeted him warmly, cheerfully, and kindly, and their converse was of a like nature. Robin led him to a seat, and some clear, cool water from a spring was brought him to wash himself from the effects of his travel, while his horse was given to the charge of one of the band to rub down and feed. When both the stranger and Robin had washed, a savoury dinner was spread before them: there was every dainty laid out which the season or circumstances of the time would allow, as the old ballad tells us—

"Of bread and wine they had enough,
And nombies of the deere;
Swans and pheasants they had full good,
And fowls of the rivere;
There fail'd never so little bird
That ever was bred on brece."

Robin kept up the name of his good hospitality, and if sorrow is hungry as well as dry, then was the stranger most sorrowful, for he partook of as hearty a meal as a fellow with a fine natural appetite sharpened with a twenty-four hours' fast could well consume, and he washed down his meal with draughts of wine, which betokened that either the wine was marvellously good, or else sorrow was very dry. And the fasted were feasted, the remains were cleared away, and Robin and his guest laid themselves down in the cool shades of the tall trees, and talked with free and open heart. There was something in the knight's opinions of men and things which gave Robin a favourable opinion of him, and, notwithstanding his sorry attire, he could not believe but he was wealthy. Now, of all things Robin Hood abhorred deceit; naturally open and frank to the echo himself, he disliked to see the reverse in other people, and paid what he considered its value to the person who incurred the debt; therefore, natthless the good opinion he had formed of the knight, he resolved he should, were it only for the mean deceit he believed him to be practising, pay handsomely for his entertainment. An opportunity soon occurred for putting his intention into practice, for, after referring to the small amount of gratitude shown by man to man, the stranger said—

"Great as my disgust is at such ignoble practices, it is too common a matter to excite surprise, but I trust I shall never be guilty of it. I thank thee, most hearty, Robin Hood, for the manner in which you have this day treated me, and should you ever pass near St. Mary's Abbey, at Lee Castle, you will find a warm reception."

"Probably," replied Robin, drily, looking earnestly at him, and yet seeing nothing to guarantee a suspicion of his faith and frankness; "but, sir knight, those who feast with me in the green wood, are never troubled by me with a visit in return. To those to whom a dinner is a charity, I give a share of what I have with a good-will, and think no more on't; but to those who are wealthy, and can pay for their entertainment, my treatment is different. I would not insult their pride by giving them a dinner; and

so serving them up the best I have, I make them pay for what they have had, even as they would were they in a town—in truth, I lead them to consider this wood but as a hostel, myself the innkeeper, my merrie men the waiters, and they the noble guests who have to pay liberally for what they receive."

The knight laughed. "It is a singular view of the case, and an ingenious way of levying contributions, I confess," said he. "I have heard much of thy courtesy to those whom thou hast relieved of their superfluous wealth, but never before had an illustration of it."

"Indeed," said Robin; "well, to make the illustration more perfect, you shall experience it," and blowing one blast of his horn, he was immediately attended by Little John and Will Scarlet. "Now, sir knight," he resumed, "the entertainment being concluded, you will perhaps be kind enough to pay for thine entertainment; these are my cashiers, and will take the money."

"As you consider the forest a hostel, you charge according to its size?" questioned the knight, composedly.

"Exactly," returned Robin.

"And do you treat every one alike—knight, baron, and peer?" he demanded.

"Assuredly I do," replied Robin Hood. "You would not have a yeoman treat a belted knight, an earl, duke, or prince, to a dinner? it would be quite foreign to good manners."

"Very true, my good yeoman; but in truth you will find me but a povertystricken guest, even though a belted knight. I have but ten merks upon my person, and that is all my store."

"I can scarce credit it."

"It looks not like truth, and yet it is such. Nay, I shall not be offended, let thy followers search me."

Little John, who rather discredited his statement, did it at once, and found no more than the knight had stated.

"The knight has spoken truly," he said; "here are but ten merks."

"It is my whole worldly wealth," repeated the knight.

"Then much do I fear me thou hast been too speedy of ridding thyself of thy inheritance, or it must have been a sorry one for such a noble knight as thee," said Robin.

"My inheritance was a noble one," returned the knight; "a right noble patrimony, which I have not wasted, nor squandered, poor as ye see me; never in my living, or in my gifts and dispensations, have exceeded my income, but ever lived within it."

"You speak in parables!" exclaimed Robin. "If ye have lived frugally with a noble patrimony, how is it thou art thus poor? Beshrew me, for a knight with a noble inheritance, ten merks to travel with is but a poor sum, and looks marvellously like the effects of squandering and dissipation."

"It seemeth what it is not, and to unravel this seeming contradiction is to tell thee a sad story."

"Let me hear it, sir knight; if thou hast been grievously wronged, it may be in my power to right thee."

"I have heard thou dost extend thy aid ever to the wronged, and when thou hast heard my story, I have little doubt that at least I shall have thy sympathy."

"I seldom deny that where occasion demands it. Proceed."

"My name is Richard, my family is descended King Ethelstein"

"Thou'rt a Saxon?" interrogated Robin, interrupting him.

"Even so; and being one has been the principal cause of my misfortune."

"I am glad thou'rt a Saxon! Continue thy tale."

"Men call me Sir Richard of the Lee, my castle being situated in an extensive lee, two miles north of St. Mary's Abbey. When young, I married one whom I had loved from childhood. Our union was blessed with an offspring, a fine boy, who grew up a proud noble youth, whose form excelled in masculine proportions, and whose face, the counterpart of his mother's, was the incarnation of manly beauty. As he grew up, each day developed some new beauty of person or of spirit. Never did parents so love a child as we loved him, and never did child so deserve a parents' love as did he. The history of boyhood, Robin, is the same in all men. It is true, the detail may vary, but there is a governing principle by which, at that age, our actions are influenced and pervaded—it is what is called love. He who possesses the kindly attributes of human nature, has this passion grafted in him more strongly than any other; and it evinces itself in all his deeds, his thoughts, and inclinations. It is the most beautiful attribute of human nature. I think meanly of his spirit who has never possessed it, or acknowledged himself to possess it. My boy was—is an enthusiast. Dwelling so near St. Mary's Abbey, my confessor being, too, one of the order, I frequently visited there. A lay brother, one day, while there, drew me on one side. He told me he had been a yeoman; he had married a young and beautiful girl, whom he had loved with a passion amounting to intensity. She had died, and left him so broken-hearted, so crushed in spirit, that life had become a burden. He had, therefore, withdrawn himself from the world, and purposed, so soon as his probation had expired, to devote the remainder of his days to God with the most rigid devotion; but he had a child, a little girl, and he begged of me, knowing my nature, as he said, and having lived on my estate, he knew of no one in the world to whom he could confide her with such a contented mind, and begged of me to take her. Struck by the man's earnestness, by the wretched, misery-stricken expression of his features, I consented. Thanking me warmly, he went and brought the child from the refectory to me. I never remember to have seen anything which made such an impression upon me as my first view of that dear child. She was tall and gracefully slim, like the slightest fawn, which, in its lightness, scarce impresses the tender grass on which it rests. Her hair, which was light and long, fell in a profusion of rich clustering ringlets adown her long neck, resting upon her small shoulders. She fixed her large melancholy blue eyes upon me with such an expression of sweetness, that I instantly felt a sensation of gladness pass through me, in having consented to adopt this beautiful child. Her father noticed the admiration my countenance expressed, and said to me—

"Thou seest I have cause to be anxious for the welfare of this tender child."

"Indeed, thou hast," I replied. "I have never witnessed such a thing of beauty."

"She bears so close a resemblance to her mother that every look she gives me rends my soul with agony, for it ever brings to my memory the bitterness of my loss. Take her, Sir Richard, cherish her kindly, for she has a gentle spirit, and a harsh look or word pains her young heart terribly. You will bring her to see me at times, and my heart will gladden when I think that she will have a friend who will supply the place of a parent when I am sleeping beneath these cold stones."

"I will be a father to her," I exclaimed earnestly,

"such an one as you could most fondly desire, or the Holy Mother withdraw her grace from me."

"The monk was energetic in his thanks, and on parting embraced his child passionately. She wept bitterly, and clung to him as though it would break her heart to be separated, but a few words from him, telling her that it would make him happy by her quitting him to live with me, appeased her grief; at least the little thing strove hard to suppress it on learning that it made him unhappy to see her cry, and she tried to smile and quit him with a cheerful countenance. All the while her little heart was bursting with sorrow; and when we had quitted the convent, and I had placed her before me upon my horse, she leaned her head upon my bosom weeping and sobbing most bitterly. I strove to appease her, and by the time we had reached home, with kind words I had succeeded in soothing her considerably. For a few days she pined and fretted, and would withdraw herself from all to wander up and down the castle alone. Our boy, Herbert, however, soon proved an effectual consolator. They were ever together, from the time they rose in the morning until they laid down wearied at eve to slumber, and dream of such sweet things as only pure and innocent minds are capable of. As they grew up from infancy, from children to boy and girlhood, we saw the change which had come over them. We could easily see, that in the world there was no object whom Herbert loved so tenderly as Lilas, and that she would rather die than lose his love. We could see with what fervour, with what full deep passionate ardour, each gazed upon the other. We heard with emotion the trembling tone of their rich voices, as each might speak some kind thing of the other. We knew they loved each other with a pure devotion, which nothing could surpass, or scarce equal; and I said to my dear wife,—"These young hearts have never known sorrow; there is no need they should while we can prevent it. To Herbert the earth owns no equivalent to Lilas, with Lilas that feeling is reciprocal, and if we should part them we can make no compensation for the agony they must endure. What is it in our brief life, to you or I, dear Godreda," I continued, "that Lilas is but the daughter of a Saxon yeoman? He is a Saxon, and that is in his favour; but what if he be a yeoman, he was honest, and is now a rigid devotee. We know his child, whom, God knows, I love as if she wert my own. We know that she is gentle and good, and is, in all things, all we could wish her, and will make our boy happy, for she will be faithful and affectionate; and so, dear Godreda, what say ye? shall we not unite their hands as they are already united in hearts?" My kind wife smiled, and laid her hand upon mine affectionately, and said I had anticipated her, and that the sweet children's happiness superseded every other consideration; and so we betrothed them. In the course of time my father died, and then she was left to my sole care; the time we had arranged that should see them wedded drew near, when a Norman knight, who had a small estate in Lancashire, paid a visit to the Abbot of St. Mary's, a near relative. As well as I can conjecture, the Norman felt a desire to possess my estates; and learning from the abbot that I had a young and lovely female under my guardianship, to whom, when married, it was expected that I should give a large portion of my property, he had the insolence to ride over from the abbey, demand an interview, which was readily granted, and, upon the pretence of viewing the castle, he gained admittance to our family circle. The sight of Lilas inflamed him, and, I believe, my pleasant estates much more, if I may judge by the

terms in which he eulogised it; he wound up his praises by making Lilas an ostentatious offer of his hand: it was, however, without hesitation, firmly but respectfully declined; he, nothing abashed, renewed the offer with insulting terms, presuming upon some interest he held at court; but this time he was peremptorily rejected, and an intimation given him that his presence was irksome, and would be looked upon as an unwarrantable intrusion. He paid another visit; he left the castle in a towering rage, vowing vengeance in horrible terms. We laughed at his threats, but soon learned they were not to be lightly treated. One morning a boy, the son of a serf upon my estate, came in tremendous heat to tell us that the Norman had carried off Lilas by force. He said he encountered him and a squire about four miles from the castle; they had stopped in consequence of some disarrangement in the horse's gear, and had called upon him to assist them. He knew Lilas at once, and guessed something was wrong by seeing her weeping bitterly, and wringing her hands in the greatest anguish. He contrived to fix a pebble in the fore-foot of the horse which the Norman rode, and then nearly to sever the girth of the saddle without being discovered. He then dashed off, pretending to hear the note of a horn summoning him, and never stopped until he arrived at the castle. Herbert was stunned by the intelligence: she had not been missed—she frequently wandered about the grounds alone, while Herbert was engaged in exercising manly sports, and her absence was not therefore noticed. Herbert saddled his favourite steed, was astride, and off in pursuit in an incredibly short space of time. The acts of the boy had been of good service; the girth of the saddle gave way, and when that was remedied the horse fell dead lame. The Norman swore tremendously, for their progress was miserably slow; he gored the poor steed with his spurs until he reared, and nearly threw both him and Lilas; suddenly he heard the furious clattering of a horse's feet behind him—he turned and beheld my gallant boy flying along in pursuit; the squire drew across the road to intercept his progress; but his arm, nerved by fury, was doubly strong; he clove the poor wretch at one blow to the saddle, and then dashed at the Norman, who dismounted and prepared to meet his attack. My noble boy flung himself from his reeking steed and dashed at him. The contest was a short one; my boy slew him, and brought home the gentle Lilas in his arms. A short time afterwards the death of the Norman became known, also by whom he was slain, and a party of soldiers were sent to capture my boy, and he was to suffer death. I appealed to King Henry; I used every means to save him I could; I laid a full statement of the facts before him, and appealed to him to deal me—as equally a subject with the Norman—strict justice; but such a number of Normans had been slain by Saxons, that he was resolved to make an example, and the only mitigation I could obtain was a free pardon for my son upon the consideration of a payment by me of an enormous sum. Glad to obtain my boy's life upon any terms, I consented to pay it. I soon sacked my coffers; I called my tenants together; I stated the case, and craved their assistance, and it wrung my heart to see how freely they brought out their little horde and placed it at my disposal. I was still short of the sum by a considerable amount. I sold my plate, everything available, and when that was done I was four hundred golden merks short. The Abbot of St. Mary's, hearing of my emergency, came under the semblance of friendship to me—God help me! I little thought what a bitter enemy he would prove—and offered to lend

me the sum upon a mortgage. He expressed commiseration at my situation; he blamed the cause of all this, his relative, the Norman; and said my son was justified in his conduct, and regretted I had not used his influence at court when I appealed to Henry. I have found since he was my most implacable foe there. He offered to lend me the four hundred golden merks upon the following terms: that I was to yield him the revenues of my estates for the first year, and he was to hold the estates in mortgage, which I was to forfeit if I did not, upon the day twelvemonth, repay him the four hundred merks, and the whole of my year's receipts. In a frantic moment I agreed, overjoyed to get the money anywhere, and now the day of payment falls upon a short time from this, and those ten merks are all I have in the world towards the sum."

"Will not the abbot grant you time!" enquired Robin."

"Not an hour—not a minute," replied the knight, mournfully. "If every fraction of the money is not paid to the time, the whole of my estates become his, and I, with my beloved wife, Herbert, and Lilas, will be thrust forth from our once happy home to starve. For myself I care not, but for those whom I have loved and honoured, whose happiness was my chiefest delight, they who have never until now known aught of misery but by name, must now drain it to the dregs. I have sought help of all I thought could help me; I have prayed for it, I have begged of it of those who once would have licked the dust from my feet, but they have turned from me, all—all; even those whom I have befriended and benefitted have grown cold as stone, and refused me assistance; my doom is fixed; I am a beggar, and have no friend to help me—no, not one."

The knight, as he uttered these last words, in a tone quivering and instinct with misery, buried his face in his hands, and the big tears came trickling through his fingers. Will Scarlet dashed the large drops from his cheeks, and Little John began to think the sun had greater power than usual, or why did his eyes water thus? Robin Hood, after making several essays to clear his throat, said to Little John, in a husky voice—

"Some wine—some wine, my throat's parched." He took a draught, and then resumed. "By our Lady, Sir Richard of the Lee, thy story is a sad one; it makes me almost as sorrowful as thee. Hast thou no friend who would be security for the money?"

"Not one," replied the knight, raising his head. "It is hard for Saxons to find friends among the wealthy."

"Nay! we often meet a friend; aye, and a true one, when we least expect it," observed Robin, in a cheering voice. "Such may be thy case."

"No," returned Sir Richard, shaking his head sorrowfully, "I have no friends but the saints."

"I am afraid, then," said Robin, with a smile, "thy friends are all of a sort. To my thinking the saints are but very so-so sort of friends. Were a man to stick in a mire, I fancy he would have a very long time to stay there if he waited until they helped him out."

"Had I but time, I can repay the money; but have no security to offer but a vow by the Holy Virgin."

"Then, for the love I bear the Holy Mother of God, our dear Lady, who has never deserted me in any strait, thou shalt have it; and if thou dost, sir knight, but reverence, honour, and worship her as I do, search the world through, I would wish no better security than thy simple vow."

"And I will repay thee truly, as I do honour and

adore the blessed Virgin, even with the same extent as thou, so fail she me in my hour of strait if I prove false."

"Enough! Little John, you know where the gold is, fetch hither four hundred golden merks, forest counting. You, Will Scarlet, accompany him, you will there find my store of clothes, measure him out suits of cloth—"

"Hold!" cried Sir Richard of the Lee, "what is all this—I do not comprehend, your bounty is—"

"Nay, interrupt me not; ours is an agreement ratified by Our Lady, and thou art a special messenger in her service; we must do thee all honour. You must excuse me; thy emergency has made thee part with everything, and we would not have thee appear before the grasping abbot in this miserable plight; therefore, Will, measure out three forest yards of each cloth, place now gear upon the grey steed the Bishop of Hereford left behind a twelvemonth since, and add anything else thy thoughtfulness may deem necessary. Away, and be as speedy as may be!"

Little John and Will needed no urging; they were soon at the haunt and fulfilling their tasks.

"Here," cried Little John, "your hands are more nimble than mine, Will; you count the money and I will measure the cloth; my bow will do for an ell wand."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Will, "rather a long one, though!"

"Never mind, we must not consider that in this case," returned Little John, "proceeding to measure; instead of counting the money. Will watched him for a short time, and then burst out into a hearty laugh, indulging in it till his eyes watered and his sides ached.

"By the Holy Mother! by the might of the Holy Mary!" he cried, "but I should like thee to measure me out land. Why, man, thou art with a bow, which thou call'st an ell-wand, and which, at least, is one and a half, measuring out yards, and skipping three foot in every three yards. Ha! ha! ha! By St. Peter! you can afford to give good measure, for it cost little, and is none of thine."

"Do thou be quick and count the money, Will. I know what Robin means by forest-measure, as well as thou shouldst to know what forest counting imports. Were he here he would give better measure than I do."

The money was counted—the cloth measured—the grey steed saddled—and everything which could be of any present service to Sir Richard, was placed upon his back, and then they returned to the spot where they had left Robin and the knight. Robin smiled when he saw the profuse liberality which Little John and Will had exercised, and his heart warmed towards them the more for the kindly feeling which prompted it. Will placed the money in his hands; it was in packages.

"Here are one hundred golden merks in each package," he said.

Robin placed them in the knight's hands.

"Here are five packages!" he exclaimed.

"Tush, man!" answered Robin, "the water has not left thine eyes yet; thy vision is imperfect: and even were there five, we have our own method of counting in this forest, whether we give or take. Put it in thy pouch, and say no more about it."

"When shall my day of payment be?" asked the knight.

"This day twelvemonth, if it will suit thee," returned Robin; "an I live, and nought contrar happens, I will be beneath this oak tree; and if thou seekest me, here shalt thou find me."

"And here will I be, if on earth I be," replied Sir

Richard of the Lee, grasping Robin Hood's hand with the greatest fervour and enthusiasm. Much as I have heard of thee, Robin Hood, and I have heard much of thee, for I have dwelled from boyhood close to the spot where all thy actions have transpired, I have never heard enough to make me form the opinion of thee I shall ever entertain from this moment."

"Entertain what opinion you please, Sir Richard, but favour me by saying nought of it to me. Thou'rt a Saxon, and, therefore, in accordance with the line I have marked out for myself to pursue, hast a right to mine aid; thou art distressed, and there also hast thou a claim upon me. I am what men call an outlaw and a robber—be it so—but I was made one from endeavouring to repay in full an unjust act; if I take from the rich I do no more than the highest and wealthiest in the land—not so bad, for I take not from the poor, they do; I give to the poor, which they do not; I commit no uncalled-for violence; I sanction no act of bloodshed; I love my country and my countrymen, and hate the Norman race, for they are usurpers here, and oppressors with their usurpation. This is the main spring of my actions, and in my act to you to-day I do no more than I have done, and shall continue to do."

"To me you have acted nobly, generously, as a true friend; although I knew ye not until to-day, yet by your conduct have you done more for me than those who have for years called themselves my true friends, who turned coldly from me in my hour of need, that a stranger might afford that succour which their narrowness of heart denied. May God bless you, Robin, here and hereafter! for you have made my heart glad, and those who are now at my castle pining, will on my return offer up prayers with tearful eyes for thy future welfare. At all times, in all places, I shall be proud to boast of my friendship for and with you, and devoutly I pray God the time will come when you shall find my good feelings like unto yours, consist of deeds not words. Farewell, my true friend; this day twelvemonth I will be here."

"Farewell," replied Robin, shaking the proffered hand warmly. "Should any circumstances ever occasion me to ask thy aid, I will call upon thee for it without reserve."

"Should such a time arrive, my earnest desire to grant it will outstrip your freedom in asking. Farewell; God keep you!"

"The Holy Mother keep thee," returned Robin.

With a glowing heart, streaming eyes, and waving his hand, Richard of the Lee mounted upon the grey horse, and leading his own as a sumpter horse, loaded with Robin's gifts, he took his way down the long green glades, and was soon lost among the thickly spreading trees.

"There goes a glad heart," said Little John, replacing his bonnet on his head, after having waved it as Sir Richard departed; "you have made his heart right glad, I trow."

"I think and hope so," ejaculated Robin, gazing after Sir Richard.

"I am sure so," cried Will Scarlet, rubbing his hands with great enjoyment.

CHAPTER II.

"The oak,
Expanding its immeasurable arms,
Embraces the light beech: the pyramids
Of the tall cedar over-arching, frame
Most solemn domes within; and far below,
Like clouds suspended in an emerald sky,
The ash and the acacia floating hang,
Tremulous and pale.

The woven leaves
Make net-work of the dark blue light of day,
And the night's noontide clearness, mutable
As shapes in the weird clouds; soft mossy lawns
Beneath these canopies extend their swells,
Fragrant with perfumed herbs and eyed with blooms
Minute yet beautiful.

Through the dell
Silence and twilight here, twin sisters, keep
Their noonday watch, and sail among the shades
Like vaporous shapes half seen."

ALASTOR—SHELLEY.

"Come, kill a venison then," said Robin Hood,
'Come, kill me a good fat deer;
The Bishop of Hereford is to dine with me to-day,
And he shall pay well for his cheer.'

Robin Hood took the bishop by the hand,
And caused the music to play;
He made the bishop dance in his boots,
And glad he could so get away."

ROBIN HOOD BALLAD.

ABOUT a month or six weeks subsequent to the event just related, the speedy restoration to convalescence of both Marian and Maude enabled them to remove, upon a visit, to Barnsdale Hall, until they should be strong enough to resume their previous mode of life by returning to dwell in the green wood. Robin Hood, who wished always to be as near his beloved Marian as circumstances would permit, took a portion of his band with him, and with some little labour soon made a haunt in Barnsdale wood, almost as comfortable as the one he had left behind him in Sherwood. Will Scarlet vowed it was quite—at least, what it wanted in actual comfort was made up by its pleasant and convenient proximity to Barnsdale Hall, where stayed his dear little wife. There were also two other persons who were glad of the change, influenced by reasons similar to those affecting Robin and Will; these persons were Little John and Much Cuckle, the miller's son (who, by-the-by, upon all occasions preferred dropping his surname, and being called by his nickname of Much, his Christian name being really Midge). These two worthies, as we have said, had also their private reasons for receiving a satisfaction at the change, and were not long in exhibiting proofs to that effect. It somehow occurred frequently, after the change had been made, that when Little John's services were required by Robin Hood, he was missing; and when Much was called to seek him out, it was discovered that he also was absent. This occurred frequently enough to induce Robin to inquire the cause, and it appeared that Winifred Gamwell possessed a very great desire to ramble through the wood. Now, as she was naturally of a very timid disposition, she was afraid to wander alone, and she had therefore taken the opportunity of her cousin, Little John, being at hand, to accept his services in showing her the beauties of Barnsdale wood. Her sister Barbara, also possessing a curiosity great as her own, possessing also the same timidity of character, availed herself of the escort to gratify her desire to see all the pretty recesses in the old forest; but Little John, thinking with great wisdom and most commendable prudence,

that one female was quite enough at a time to take charge of, very gladly accepted of the kind, and disinterested offer which Much made, to take Barbara off his hands, and show her whatever was worthy of sight in the long, green glades, in the alleys, coverts, and recesses, the curiously twisted trunks and gnarled arms of the enormous oaks, the tall, slim, graceful stems and branches of the beech, the widely spreading elm, the dark larch, and tall pine, the wild but many-hued plants and flowers and grasses, which adorned and studded the extensive forest of Barnsdale;—all these he proffered to show her, and to point out the different birds who woke up the sweet echoes of the wood ever and anon with their

"Profuse strains of unpremeditated art,"

and to exhibit proofs of his skill with the bow, and perhaps with his tongue—but that he said nothing about, whatever he might have purposed. His offer was cheerfully taken, and produced the highest satisfaction in all the parties concerned. Among the trees, through the shadowy places and secluded spots, they wandered; but by some strange forgetfulness, there was little said about the forest things; they found quite enough to talk about without referring to them, and by some still stranger fatality, they always by accident took different paths, and never met again until they were near the Hall. They would laugh when they joined company, and each accuse the other of separating purposely, and each stoutly denied the impeachment; and when they returned home, there were plenty of questions asked them whether they had enjoyed their walk, and a speculation that they must have done so under the circumstances, and all pleasant things said which might raise a smile, unallied to any pain, albeit there were many blushes accompanying their smiles.

One evening—a clear, calm, warm evening, a little party left Barnsdale Hall for a quiet walk: the party consisted of Marian and Maude, who were venturing, for the first time since their interesting illness, to wander in the evening air, leaning upon the arms of their respective husbands; Winifred and Barbara Gamwell, and, of course, Little John and Much. They had strolled some distance, indulging in pleasant converse, when Marian observed—

"There is something in the look of the tall trees, the green leaves, and the fragrant scent of the sweet flowers, which is borne by the soft wind playing on my face, that makes me long to be again dwelling in the midst of them."

"Is it such very pleasant living, this passing your days in a forest?" inquired Barbara.

"You may judge of it by my desire to return to it," replied Marian.

"I should think it must be very pleasant too, for if Sherwood surpasses this wood, as Much says it does, it must be very delightful indeed, and very well worth living in."

"And you think this wood very pleasant?" asked Robin, affecting an air of casual inquiry.

"Oh, very much so indeed," cried Barbara, eagerly.

"There are some beautiful spots in it."

"Which do you think the most beautiful?" he inquired.

"Oh! I hardly know; there are so many charming places. But there is one place which I saw, that I think surpasses all the rest, and I am sure that there is nothing in Sherwood that can excel it."

"Ay?" said Robin, pretending surprise; "that must be a pretty place, indeed, for I can assure you that Sherwood abounds in dells and glades of surpassing beauty."

"Oh, yes! I have no doubt of it, but nothing better than this, I know; it is a kind of small dell, formed by sloping ground on all sides, the topmost rises being studded with trees of all descriptions, making a variety of shades of green, perfectly marvellous; and the grass which covers the ground is so beautifully even, that it looks like a large green mantle spread all over, without a wrinkle on its surface; and then there is such a quantity of flowers all among the trees, and down by the banks of a little stream which runs through the bottom of the dell, that it is enough to enchant any one; and such a quietness is there, broken only by the melody of the birds, the rustling of the leaves, or the rippling of that little clear cool sparkling strip of water, as it gushes out from a bed of flowers, and winds its way to other places. I never was in such a beautiful place before, and never passed such delightful moments as I did in that sweet place."

"Why, Barbara, where is this? I never saw it," exclaimed Winifred, innocently.

"Oh, oh!" cried Robin, quickly, "were you not together?"

"No," said Winifred, "not then—that is, we missed each other—we always—that is, very often—sometimes, I mean, we used in the crooked paths to get separated by accident; it was quite by accident, I can assure you."

"To be sure it was—no one doubts it, therefore neither you nor Barbara need blush to that scarlet extent," said Robin, laughing to see the sudden confusion into which the two sisters were thrown, "You see, neither Little John nor Much are blushing, therefore why should you? What do you say, Much—you separated quite by accident, of course?"

"Oh, yes," replied Much; "and finding Barbara was pleased with quiet and pleasant spots, I led her to the little dell she speaks of; I discovered it in hunting down a deer which I had struck with an arrow."

"You must have pointed out its delights very clearly, or Barbara, unoccupied by other thoughts, must have had a quick eye for its numerous beauties, to enable her to give me such a glowing description of its charms. Pray, Barbara, was there not something more charming still—something which you have left untold?"

"Something more charming still!" echoed Barbara, quite aware of Robin's meaning, but assuming perfect unconsciousness; "what do you mean?"

"Do you not think so, Much, eh? Was there not something more charming still in this pretty spot, which Barbara has left undescribed?" asked Robin, bending a look upon Much which made him turn his eyes every way to avoid meeting it.

"Barbara was there," replied he, working his fingers about and essaying a smile, which was rather a failure.

"So she told me," returned Robin, "with many thanks for your information; but perhaps you can tell me whether two young persons, a youth and maiden, ever sought this place, no mortal near, save themselves, and whether, when they had talked of the green-leaved trees, of the fair gentle flowers, of the little piece of murmuring water, of the birds, of the skies, and whatever else which could give quiet joy to gaze upon, they seated themselves upon the grass by that same little stream, and then, whether the youth looked into the soft eyes of the maiden, until her lids gradually covered them, and her looks were turned upon the little flower he had given her, which she was busily engaged in destroying, without being conscious that her long, trembling fingers held a

blossom or aught beside in their tender grasp; and after a short, but a thought-thronging silence, a few words faint and low, and yet rich in tone, were breathed by the youth, and if the maiden raised her eyes to answer in a monosyllable, and drop them again, and then, whether the youth forced his hand out timidly and fearfully to take the maiden's, and whether the instant he touched the tip of her fingers, he did not feel a thrill, like an electrical shock, rush up his arm, and take possession of his elbow, while a sensation of pleasing pain pervaded his heart, his chest, and throat, and whether there was not a surprise, greater than this sensation, to find the fingers not withdrawn; when this endearing little fact was discovered—as like lightning it would be—whether he did not grow bolder, and obtained the whole of the small hand in his own, and feel the pressure which he gave returned as slightly as the impression the footstep of a butterfly makes upon the thin leaf of a delicate blossom,—yet it was a pressure, slight as was its nature, and sufficient to tell the youth, whose heart was beating audibly, that his presumption was not offensive; and then, possibly, you may remember whether that youth, holding the maiden's right hand in his, insinuated his left round the slim waist, so invitingly near, and so conveniently situated for a resting-place, and whether she noticed the act more than by feeling a quicker but more pleasant pulsation, and a strange determined obstinate tendency in her right shoulder to find a leaning-place, and none being near but his beating bosom, how she found that better than none at all; and how all these little things again produced a quivering silence, which at last was broken by a few sighs from hearts overflowing with deep joy, and then came there not a quantity of impassioned but low-toned words from the youth, informing the maiden that the wide earth held nothing which by any comparison could ever be one fraction so dear to him as was she; that he would very much rather be the victim of the most dismal fate than lose her love; that, in fact, he said everything he could say, and much more than he was conscious of saying—and the maiden believed him, telling him so by dropping her head upon his shoulder, and weeping as if some dire calamity had occurred, or her heart was fit to break; and when all this had subsided, they perhaps left the little dell, and perhaps the maiden might meet with her sister by accident, and she might have been similarly engaged—there is no knowing—and then they might get safe home after all, and if a hint relative to what had transpired might be dropped, they might express the greatest surprise, and wonder what it could mean. Pray can you tell me, Barbara, whether two young persons ever did this?"

"It is an impertinent question, dear Barbara," said Marian, "and were I you, I would not answer it."

"Perhaps you will do as much, Much," laughed Robin, "or have you done as much?"

"You ask strange questions," replied Much, with an embarrassed air, and attributing something of the powers of a conjuror to Robin, in describing so accurately a scene which had really occurred between him and Barbara, and for the moment his mind misgave him that she had told it perhaps to Marian, and the latter to Robin; he looked at Barbara, but her face was of such a brilliant red, that he at once dropped the surmise, and from something of an angry expression which the young damsel tintured a glance she favoured him with, the thought struck him she might imagine he had told Robin. This thought perplexed him, and added to his embarrassment, from which he was not at all relieved, upon hearing Will Scarlet exclaim—

"By my faith! Much, it looks very like truth; what Robin says, for you look very strange about the eyes and mouth, and stammer and stutter as if you now it is not so very hot to-night that in a slow walk the heat should put such a colour into your features, therefore it must be something else; and I think that



had to talk pleasantly to a bishop or the High Sheriff; it must be as Robin says. By the mass! Barby, of Nottingham; and as for my sister Barby there, but if I am called Will Scarlet, for my red she looks as if her skin were made of scarlet cloth; hair, you ought to be called Barby Scarlet, for

your red face. Eh, Maude—don't you think so?"

"I should like to pull your red hair well, Master Will," said Barbara, in somewhat of a vexed tone.

"And so you might, Barby, if it was on any one else's head, but while it is on mine I have an objection," returned Will, with a laugh.

"And so you will not tell me," said Robin, "whether you know of two persons who have acted as I have described?"

"If you have any desire to know, I will try and find out for you," offered Little John, innocently; "only I cannot understand what can be your motive."

"You must not do any such thing," whispered Winifred, pulling his arm.

"Perhaps it was you and some young lady?" cried Will Scarlet, with a loud laugh.

"Oh, no," replied Little John, "that is not very likely. In truth, while Robin spoke, I laughed to myself, and thought it was not possible for any two persons to act so—I won't exactly say—foolishly—"

"No, you had better not," said Maude, with a smile. "No, not perhaps foolishly, but oddly," concluded Little John, quite satisfied he had taken the proper view of the case.

"Ah!" cried Will, "you know nothing about it, I can see. Holy Mother! why, when I was abroad, separated from home and Maude, many a night have I stretched myself upon the wet ground, and dreamed that I was seated with her in some green, shady, leafy place, just as Robin described, and said and acted exactly like what Robin told you. Oh! I have, and so have you. Have'nt you, Maude? Ah, I'd wager my right hand you have, though you shake your head as much as to say no. Ah, Little John, you know nothing about it, not a bit; but how should you?"

"How should I?" echoed Little John, interrogatively.

"Yes," returned Will. "How should you? you never were in love!"

"I beg your pardon," returned the literal Little John, "I have, for a—I don't know how many years, and am now as much as ever I was in my life."

"Oh, ha! ha! ha!" shouted Will. "Capital, capital—Little John in love—ha! ha! ha!"

"And why not Little John in love?" exclaimed he, good naturedly. "I hope there's no harm, or nothing out of nature, in my being in love?"

"Oh no," replied Will, still laughing heartily, "oh no, I am glad to hear it, I like every one to be in love; but St. Paul! who is the lady? I should like to know that."

"Why, who should it be, but Winifred, your sister. I've loved her ever since she has been a child, and I am sure as much as you do Maude, or Much Barbara, if he'd own it."

There was a general laugh at this, and every body congratulated Winifred. She bore the banter very well, and laughed as merrily at Little John's open confession as the rest; and when it had subsided, the attack upon Much was renewed.

"Aha!" cried Robin, "you see, Much, truth will show itself sooner or later. I was pretty near right in my description of the little scene in the dell, eh?"

"Who told you about it? How did you come to know anything about it? Some one must have told you, or you could not have entered into so minute a description."

"No one told me anything about it—it was a shrewd guess," said Robin; "and, with respect to the faithfulness of my account, the truth is, I was inveigled into a scene of that sort once myself, by Marian."

"I inveigle you!" said Marian; "it was the reverse:

and if I had known then how you would have treated me after marriage—"

"Well?" said Barbara, eagerly.

"I should have got married much sooner, dear Barby," she concluded.

"There, Barbara, I hope you got what you wished," said Robin; "and after that I think you had better acknowledge you love Much very much, and Much will do the same."

"Aye, that he will!" said Much, suddenly bursting forth in a fit of enthusiasm; "I love this little girl with all my heart and soul, and more than that. Her eyes are to me as the stars on a dark night are to foresters when they see them over the tree tops after having lost their way, and nothing but those bright worlds to guide them; her voice is sweeter to me than the music of all the birds in every forest in the world together. I would sooner be in her gentle company than in the merriest meeting I ever saw on May-day, or in the green wood. I would rather have a kind word or a loving look from her, than the best yew bow or oaken or crab-tree staff ever made; to be with her is pleasanter than to be anywhere—ah! even heaven, if she were not there too. I do love her, body and soul, heart and hand: and rather than do anything to pain or harm her, I'd walk to the Sheriff of Nottingham and ask him to hang me, or embrace a bishop, destroy myself, or do anything that I have a horror of. I love the dear little girl, bless her! and hope to show her by my conduct that I do truly love and honour her, the Holy Mother be my witness!" concluded Much, dashing a tear from his eyelid, which his enthusiasm had brought there.

"Hurrah! honestly and nobly said, Much," cried Will, and then turning to Barbara, who was convulsively twisting her fingers, and looking tremblingly at Much, said—"Why don't you rush into his arms, Barby? By the Mass, if I was a young lass, and a handsome smart fellow said as much of me before my face, or behind my back, why I'd jump into his arms and hug him round the neck till I nearly choked him. Wouldn't you, Maude? to be sure you would!"

"Oh, but I don't know that I should," observed Maude, quickly.

"Oh yes you would—I know I should, and if I would I know you would. Barby's foolish; she'll most likely never have such another chance."

"I am of Will's opinion," exclaimed Robin, with rather a wicked smile; "Marian would do it, and I don't see why Barbara should not."

However, Marian denied that she would, and the question was left open, but Barbara, in a timid voice, said—

"I believe that Much does—does love me; and I am very much obliged to him for the kind things he has said of me, and can only say in return that I—"

"Love him quite as much, most likely more, than he does you," interrupted Will, speaking rapidly. Why what a while you take to say so—it never took me any time to tell Maude I was in love with her; did it, Maude?"

"Most decidedly not."

"To be sure not: very well, then why don't you both embrace? Take her, Much; there, Barbara, you will find Much make a good husband, for he is a honest good Saxon, and as true as steel; and you, Much, will find my little sister Barby as dear a little creature as I find Maude, bless her little heart; though she is my sister, yet I will say a better hearted little lass, a kinder or more affectionate soul, never lived, in all the world, than she."

"I believe it; I know it; I am sure of it!" cried Much, in another fit of enthusiasm, following Will's

advice, and catching Barbara in his arms, clasped her warmly and earnestly to his heart.

Their walk that evening extended not much further, and the return to Barnsdale Hall was no jot less pleasant than their departure from it had been an hour or so before, and when they were all assembled in the Hall, the old people were made acquainted with their daughters' choice by both Little John and Much, requesting them to bestow their hands upon them. Will Scarlet smoothed the way for them by telling his father the whole affair, and doing his best to prove to him that it was the very best thing that could have happened. So hearty and earnest was he in his efforts to do this, that he left Little John and Much little to say, and took the words out of his father's mouth, in giving a free consent to any arrangement which would add to his children's happiness. The consent of the parents accompanied the willing consent of the girls, and a day being fixed for the wedding, they retired to rest that night with light hearts and gleeful thoughts.

In the morning Robin Hood, Little John, Will Scarlet, and Much, were again in the glades of Barnsdale Wood, surrounded by a hundred merrie men. While they were enjoying their morning's repast, one of the merrie men came to Robin Hood and said—

"Noble master, I have good news for you and all us merrie men."

"Well, George-a-Green, let us have thy news, in order that we may be as glad as thou lookest," answered Robin.

"I have learned that the Bishop of Hereford comes this way with twenty followers to-day," said he.

"Aha! this is merry news," replied Robin, with glee. "At what time dost thou expect him?"

"When the sun is upon the turn, if he comes at all," replied George-a-Green.

"How got you your information?" interrogated Robin.

"One of the merrie men has just, within an hour or so, returned from a visit he has been paying some relatives in Derbyshire: he passed through Sheffield, on his way hither—there he learnt the Bishop was about to visit the Abbot of St. Mary's, and he posted hither with the news, knowing how welcome it would be."

"And right welcome it is: we will proceed to act upon it," cried Robin. "Will Scarlet, do you take a party of twenty men, and watch the path which passes close by your father's hall; do you, Little John, take the northern way with a like number of merrie men; you, Much, take the eastern with twenty, and I will take the high road. We must not let my lord bishop escape. We must feast him handsomely, as becomes his station, and he will pay accordingly. George-a-Green, single out a sturdy buck and a fine fat deer for my lord the bishop's dainty eating, and see that it is done quickly."

Little John, Will Scarlet, and Much gathered their sixty men, and each departed with his complement to the route assigned him. They had not long been gone, when, according to Robin's directions, George-a-Green, with the assistance of four or six of the men, carried the buck and deer they had slain to a spot Robin had desired them to bring it; and then, getting some shepherds' frocks—for the band kept in their store all sorts of disguises—Robin attired himself in one, and dressed six of his men in the remainder. Poles were erected from which to suspend the spitted buck and deer, a fire was kindled under each, the wooden spit was set revolving, and they awaited by the wayside the bishop's coming.

About the time the informer had stated, when the

sun was contending with the fire which should have the strongest power in roasting the buck and deer, Robin observed the bishop and his retinue advancing. Immediately he perceived their approach, he exclaimed—

"Here comes the prize. Good master bishop, I thank you for your company, and if I do not to-day astonish you more, or as much, as I did in Linton Abbey, why I'll turn bishop myself! Now, my merrie men, pace round the venison, and be busily basting as his lordship advances. My life on't, so soon as his nose finds out our occupation, we shall have him here full trot."

The men did as Robin had commanded, and it seemed as if Robin had prognosticated correctly; for no sooner did the bishop come within nose-shot, than he pricked his steed into a gallop, and, closely followed by his retainers, quickly reached the spot where Robin and his men were employed, and continued their employment without scarce noticing him or his followers.

"Why, what is all this? what is the matter?" cried the bishop to Robin, who honoured the ecclesiastic with a stare, but speaking not, continued his employment in the most industrious manner.

"Do you hear me, knave?" roared the bishop, enraged at the indifference with which he was regarded. "Dost thou hear me, base serf? What is the meaning of this roasting? For whom is this ado?"

"Anan!" uttered Robin, staring at the bishop with an expression of the most exquisite vacancy.

"Fool!" cried the bishop, hotly, "for whom have you killed the king's deer?"

"For whom? why for ourselves, to be sure," returned Robin, with a laugh.

"For yourselves, fool! what mean you? it cannot be that you are cooking this profusion of meat for yourselves only!"

"Oh, yes, it is though!"

"Why, what are ye? to whose estate do ye belong?"

"We are simple shepherds; we keep sheep all the year, and to day we had a mind to make merry, to be joyful and happy; so we resolved to begin by eating some of the king's fattest deer. Now, that's the truth."

"Indeed! By whose permission have you slain the deer?"

"Anan?"

"Ass! Who gave you leave to kill the deer?"

"Oh! who gave us leave? Nobody but our own will."

"And you expect to eat a part of what you are now cooking?"

"Of a surety. Perhaps you'd like to take a mouthful with us?"

"You will find yourselves wofully mistaken, my fine fellows; the king shall know how his deer is slaughtered—he shall know of your doings, my jolly shepherds, never fear. I suppose you know it is death to kill ven'son without the especial leave and licence of the king; because, if you do not, you shall be taught: so prepare at once to come with me to a prison, and from thence to a gibbet."

"A gibbet!"

"Ay! a gallows fifty feet high at least."

"But I don't feel disposed to go."

"I have no doubt you do not; but you and your tribe shall go, whether you feel disposed or no; and we shall see, then, whether you will be so ready to grin as you are now. Come, idiots, cease your work, and haste with me, for I have little time to waste in idle talking with thee or such as thee."

"Pardon, mighty bishop, pardon if we have done wrong it is from ignorance: we will honestly confess this, if you will but pardon us."

"Oh, ho! you change your senseless grinning now, do ye? I thought as much. Pardon you, eh? Not if I can help it. You shall before the king, and we shall see if he'll pardon you."

"We have wives and children, lord bishop; you will be merciful to us for their sakes; you will spare and pardon us!"

"Will I? Wives and children! How dare such wretches as you have wives and children? Talk to me of your wives and children to mitigate my wrath, too! Infamous hussies are they, I dare swear; and thy offsprings imps of wickedness and sin, only waiting to attain thy age to be more infamous than thou art. Pardon thee! By the inflexible Thomas à Becket, what is there in my looks that should make thee think I would be merciful to thee?"

"Nothing, I acknowledge, my lord bishop. You look the hard-hearted, flinty-souled, unforgiving old villain you are. But it is not to you I appeal, it is to your habiliments—your office; it does not become your cloth, your position, as the shepherd over us sheep, to take so many lives to satisfy a paltry effort of consequence, or feeling of un-Christian wrath. I know your rocky nature, my Lord Bishop—I am well acquainted with your iron, unrelenting, savage disposition, therefore I did not appeal to you, but to the charity which thy order is supposed to dispense."

"Now, the holy Job grant me patience! you audacious rebel, sacrilegious wretch, vile catiff! darest thou rail at me, the Lord's anointed and sanctified servant? Thou shalt swing high for this insolence, without a hope of redemption—thou shalt, churl! Seize him and his fellows!" roared the bishop to his followers; "If they offer to resist, cut them down without mercy!"

"You had better recall your words, my lord bishop, and stop with me to dine."

"No words!" shouted the bishop, in a frantic rage, "seize them, or hew them down!"

"Keep off!" cried Robin, in a voice of thunder, as the men hastily approached to obey the bishop's orders. "Keep off! I charge ye, as you value your own lives. Bishop, beware! Draw off your men, or by'r Lady! you shall repent it an' you do not."

"Down with the base slaves!" bellowed the bishop, at the top of his voice, in a state of the most un-Christian-like wrath. "Down with them! slay, and spare not!"

The bishop's men rushed at Robin and his merrie men to put their lord's wishes into execution, but the merrie men forming themselves into a little circle, their backs to each other, and with crooks for weapons, presented every way a formidable little front, not easily broken; while Robin placed his back against a tree, and dealt the first man who made at him such a blow with his crook, that he struck him nearly senseless to the ground. He then drew his bugle and blew three loud blasts; in an instant there was six and thirty merrie men appeared from the the coverts and thickets around, where they had been disposed ere the bishop's approach; and a few minutes scarce elapsed ere Little John, Will Scarlet, and Much, appeared with the merrie men under their command. The aspect of affairs was not more suddenly than wonderfully changed; the bishop's men were speedily disarmed, and he himself placed in the situation of a prisoner; his mind misgave him upon seeing the merrie men clothed in Lincoln green, and Robin, doffing his shepherd's cloak, appear in a scarlet tunic.

"Now, my lord bishop, whose turn is it now to sue

for pardon?" said Robin, addressing him with a stern look.

"Thou would'st not raise thy hand impiously against a servant of the holy church!" said the bishop, with a vast amount of fear that he would.

"Not a true servant, I would not, assuredly; but thou art not one, and I shall have therefore no compunction in quickly disposing of thee. Thou rememberest me, my lord bishop? in fact, I am sure thou dost, by the efforts thou hast made with the king to cause my capture and those who live with me. Look in my face, lord bishop—thou knowest me?"

"I do! I do!" groaned the bishop. "Thou'rt Robin Hood! If I had dreamed thou hadst been in my path, I would have—I would have—"

"Well, sir bishop, what would you have done?"

"Increased the number of my retinue to treble the amount of thy followers, and slain thee," meant the bishop, but said, "I would have gone some other way."

"It would have availed you nought," replied Robin; "we knew of your approach, and every route was guarded. Come, my lord bishop, you refused me and my companions mercy, would have slain us like dogs; prepare for a forester's retaliation. Little John, what shall we do with him?"

"I would not be too hard with him for the sake of the habit he wears," replied Little John, quietly.

"No—no, good forester, you counsel well; remember the sacrilege, Robin Hood, which you commit in attacking or harming a minister of the Holy Word," interrupted the bishop in a tone of anxious appeal.

"No," continued Little John, "I'd not torture him, but cut off his head at a blow, and let me have the pleasure of digging his grave."

"What!" faintly articulated the bishop, aghast at the advice.

"Cut off thy head," said Robin, enjoying the fright and horror which the bishop's countenance expressed.

"He counsels well, my lord bishop; come, prepare."

"Pardon—pardon, I implore thee—spare my life, I entreat, I beg of you, I am not prepared to die: it will take a very long time for me to prepare; and you know, according to the dictates of our holy religion, it is wicked for us to die unprepared," ejaculated the bishop, clasping his hands in an agony of earnest entreaty.

"Oh, ho! you change your arrogant tone now, do ye? I thought as much—pardon you, eh? Not if I can help it. You shall before your Maker, and see if he will pardon you," exclaimed Robin, closely parodying the language the bishop had used to him previously. "Little John, see that everything is duly prepared; we will at once to the trysting tree," he continued, addressing his worthy follower, who nodded his head in acquiescence. "Now, my lord bishop, thy hand," he concluded, turning to the fear-stricken churchman, "we will on to the judgment seat."

"Have mercy!" cried the bishop, "I cannot die—I vow, if you will spare me this once, I will never, in any way, seek to molest thee or thy followers again."

"We will to the trysting tree, and there decide," observed Robin, with the most imperturbable gravity.

"On the side of mercy and charity, I hope and trust," suggested the bishop.

"We shall see," quietly remarked our hero, almost dragging the reluctant bishop in the direction he wished.

When they had reached the tree, Robin made him sit down by his side upon the roots, and under the widely spreading branches of an extensive oak, which was situated in the centre of a wide glade, and surrounded, at some distance from it, by every variety of

tall forest trees, which threw their long shadows across it, accompanied by long strips of sunlight, which forced their way through openings here and there, making the grass look like velvet embroidered with golden figures of fanciful forms; the deep shades of the trees presented an appearance of calm quiet, while the gushing melody of an unseen stream, which wound near the spot, gave an air of refreshing coolness almost delicious. The bishop was in no frame to admire the scene, however beautiful it might have been; his fears for the safety of his life preponderated over every other sensation, and he watched every turn of Robin's countenance with a persevering scrutiny, which nearly overpowered all the latter's efforts to look serious; motioning to one of the men attending, he bade him bring some water.

"You will like to wash the dust from your eyes," he observed to the bishop, "in order that you may see my decision more clearly?"

"Anything you please," said the bishop, fawningly.

"And I suppose can make a good dinner previous to the adjudication?"

"Whatever you think best," ejaculated the bishop.

"You shall have your dessert, and desert after it."

"As you desire."

"You are very courteous and considerate, my Lord Bishop of Hereford."

"You are pleased to flatter me," returned the ecclesiastic, hazarding a smile of a very doubtful expression.

"I am glad you think so; but I must tell you I am not much used to do it, and particularly to members of your order. However, we will settle that question after we have satisfied our appetites—here comes our dinner."

The bishop, glad of anything which prolonged the time ere Robin came to a decision to inflict a punishment upon him, was pleased to observe the ground soon spread with eatables of a most tempting nature to a hungry stomach. Now, he had eaten but slightly that morning, and the sight of the venison, cooked in various ways, accompanied by auxiliary esculents, made his mouth water rarely. The smell was very savoury, and the appearance very beautiful to behold, and soon a craving appetite got the better of his apprehensions. He licked his chops and smacked his lips, anticipating his dinner with the fondest expectations; and when, after having performed his ablutions, he sat down to the dinner by Robin's desire, he quickly made the venison pasties, collops, &c., disappear, exhibiting the greatest relish for his repast. The food was washed down with bumpers of ale, old and strong; after that with good wine. The bishop was plied, by Robin, with cup after cup, and by the time fruit was being swallowed to settle the meat, the bishop began to grow extremely jovial. He roared that Robin was a fine fellow—a rare choice blade, and that it was monstrous pleasant to have a good meal and a stiff cup of wine in the green wood. The quantity of wine he had swallowed soon placed his fears of death in a state of blissful oblivion, and, the fumes mounting to his head, he became uncommonly jolly.

"Why, my roaring blade, my sturdy roisterer, you keep good wine here—very good: it makes me warm all over, particularly my face!" he shouted. There was much truth in what he stated of the wine's effects upon him; his face waxed very flush, and his forehead and nose had assumed a very high state of crimson polish.

"Those who dine with me never quarrel with what I give them; if ever we quarrel, it is when the reverse is about to take place," observed Robin, significantly.

"Very true," replied the bishop, not understanding a word. "It's—a hic—as you say. More wine—hic! it runs through all my veins like fire. Ha! ha! ha!—you're merrie people here!"

"Yes, we are called the merrie men."

"Eh? ah! oh yes, to be sure—hic—ha! ha! ha! what a many of you there are, and how they keep jumping about!"

At the moment Robin turned his head towards his men, impressed with an idea that it was as the bishop had stated; but he quickly ascertained that it was the optics of the reverend father which were dancing, and not his men, who, few in number, the rest being with the bishop's retainers at dinner, were most of them in reclining attitudes. He laughed and exclaimed,—

"They are nimble at the sport. You don't drink. They dance well, eh, lord bishop?"

"That do they—wass heil. Oh! this wine is rare stuff. Hoy, fellow, fill my cup again!" he cried to old Lincoln, who still followed Robin with the same affectionate devotion he had when he was a child. He was old, turned of seventy, and, though his head was whitened by time, his eye was still bright, he still bore himself erect, and walked with a firm step. He approached and obeyed the bishop's desire, and, while he did so, the eye of the churchman, who was waxing exceedingly drunk, lighted on him, and he laughed inwardly in a convulsive manner for a short time. When he recovered his breath he exclaimed,—

"Why, forester, thou hast been very foolish sleeping on the damp grass, ha—hic—you see it is very bad."

"Very bad!" echoed Robin. "What makes thee say that?"

"What, eh? ha! ha!—hic—don't you see—his head is turned mouldy, ha! ha! ha!" cried the bishop, pointing to Lincoln's white hair, and laughing until Robin thought he would have been suffocated. Our hero could not help laughing also, but Lincoln did not, and speculated upon the propriety of trying if his quarter-staff would not make the bishop's few tufts of hair rather crimson.

"It is pretty amusement for a holy father of the Church," he ejaculated, rather chafedly, "to jest upon the white hairs God has honoured an old man with. By'r dear Lady, my lord the bishop would not laugh so merrily if my staff was to change the colour of his hair somewhat."

"Nay, Lincoln," said Robin, in an under tone, "never heed him; let not the unconsidered words of a drunken man ruffle thee. There, away with thee, and wash down the sore saying with a cup of wine."

"Let me see," muttered the bishop. "Ha! where was I—hic—a—oh! Ah! you're a merry soul, Robin—eh, Robin What's-your-name—hic—eh, I say, my jolly yeoman—eh, where's the wine? Oh—hic—give it me. Why, a hic—you sinful dog, you're a—hic—very drunk—it's too early to be drunk, you villain—eh, I'm in a strange place, and you're all strange people here—you keep running round me, and keep bobbing about in a manner quite marvellous; and your trees, too, hic—they are holding hands and running round, or dancing round, or whisking round, or something—I don't care which, but I wish you'd stop them, it makes me—hic—giddy to see them."

"So I would, but they have a knack of not minding what I say. Come, you had better join in the dance with them, and that will cure thy giddiness."

"Dance! eh, hic—that's very good—hic! Why, I haven't danced for years—hic—never since I was—hic—I was, let me see—hic—ah! I was going to St. Mary's Abbey, and I shall never get there if I stop here."

"Very likely; but we will have a merry bout of it before you go. Come, dance, my jolly bishop; here is plenty of room for thee. Come, George-a-Green, lead his holiness out."

"I can't dance in my riding boots," hiccuped the bishop.

"You don't know what you can do till you try, reverend father," said George-a-Green, taking hold of the bishop's hand, and lifting him up with a sudden jerk.

"I—I'll tell you what I know, though," ejaculated his holiness, with very doubtful perspicuity of speech. "I know that you are an irreverent rascal to drag me up this—hic—in this rough way—and, my fine fellow, it's very well for you I am in a good humour, or I'd cuff you soundly. I say, Robin, you're all drunk; not one of you can stand steady, and—hic—what makes the ground wave up and down so, as if we were on the sea—eh? Let's go to our couches, for it must be late; the curfew's been ringing in my ears these two hours. I say, you've been greasing the grass. Look, how you all reel about—hic—I must say, though, it is very slippery. Let us have a song."

"A dance first," cried Robin, and then blew a blast on his horn. The summons was obeyed by the assembling of the merrie men, bringing the bishop's retainers in the midst of them, so excessively intoxicated they could scarcely stand. "Now," continued he, when all his men had arrived, "let the retainers of the bishop form a ring round their chief, and dance about him."

"I think they are all too drunk," said Little John, looking with disgust upon them.

"Then let one or two of the people mix with them to keep them up, and when my lord bishop is sober, and remembers what has occurred, he will be ready to eat his head for having thus degraded himself."

Little John gave the necessary orders, and soon the fellows were all whirling madly round the bishop, who, excited by their laughter, and the rapidity with which their heads flew past him, commenced hallooing, jumping, and dancing, until he measured his length upon the ground, and one of the merrie men, who was with the retainers, and was assisting to whirl these fellows at a tremendous speed, suddenly quitted his hold, and his companions were spread in an instant all over the ground, scattered here and there like swan-shot discharged from a gun, many of them relapsing into a state of insensibility, from excessive drink. This was thought to be the case with the bishop, but, on Robin's approaching, he found him in a convulsion of laughter, his face perfectly scarlet, and his sides shaking violently. He gave him a good shake, and lifted him to his feet.

"You seem to enjoy yourself, my holy and reverend father," said he, as he stood him up, finding some difficulty to prop up so unwieldy, helpless a lump of humanity—if such a term can properly be applied to one who was almost on a level with a brute.

"Enjoy myself? of course," he mumbled, "it was all the fault of the ground—I could not help it; it would come up and take me down with it. Let's have a song;—

St. Dunstan one morning he sat in his cell,

Heigh, eo, deo, daeg!

All alone!

When a pair of bright eyes looked plump, he could tell,

Heigh, eo, deo, daeg!

In his own!

He was reading the Word, but never looked up,

Heigh, eo, deo, daeg!

To the eyes!

For he knew that the devil—

"No, no, that's not it, 'For he knew—for he knew'—ah! I forget it; come, Mr. What-is-your-name, I want to go."

"When your lordship has paid your bill, you are free to depart," said Robin.

"Paid my bill—hic—paid my bill! I didn't know I was at a hostel; I thought I was—so I am—this is a wood, and no hostel."

"Yes, bishop, it is; I am the hostel-keeper, and these you see around you are my waiters."

"What, all?"

"Yes, every one, and I charge according to the size of my hostel, the number of my waiters, and the length of time my guests favour me with their company."

"Oh! I've been here some time, and the cost will be wondrous high, so call in the reckoning."

"Little John here is my cashier—he will tell you all."

"Well, Little Jo—Little—little! why, you are the son of a forest tree—you little! Oh! well, my small cashier, what is to pay?"

"Where keep you your gold?" demanded Little John, composedly.

"What is that to thee, ill-mannered hound—hic—insolent knave—hic!"

"I would save you the trouble of counting it."

"Trouble of counting it—hic—do you think I'm drunk, eh?—hic—no, I'll count it all myself, all—it is in my portmanteau in my cloak; fetch it me, I'll show you how to count it."

Little John went and got the cloak, and from a pocket in the lining drew a small leathern case weighing very heavy; he opened it, and counted out three hundred broad pieces of gold. His heart gladdened at the sight, for it was equal to its metallic value, in revenge; the greater the sum the greater would be the rage of the bishop when he discovered his loss. Little John returned to Robin Hood and the bishop, and said—

"There is enough gold to pay the reckoning, a goodly sum—so goodly that, little as I know the bishop to love me or any one but himself, I feel disposed to be charitably inclined to him for bringing such a sum with him."

"I am glad to find my Lord Bishop of Hereford did not forget his purse," exclaimed Robin, slapping him on the shoulder.

"St. Mary's Abbey, directly," muttered the drunken spiritual leader, exhibiting a great inclination to fall asleep.

"Ho, there! the bishop's horse!" cried Little John.

One of the merrie men appeared leading the animal decked all over with branches of trees and bunches of flowers; while the men forming his retinue, appeared with their dresses reversed and put on in all fashions, some of their faces blackened with charcoal, some reddened with ochre, and all looking in the most grotesque condition possible; many of them were so tipsy as to be incapable of keeping the saddle, and these were fastened on to their horses' backs, many with their faces to the horse's tail. When they were all ready to depart, the bishop was hoisted on to his steed with some little difficulty, owing to his state of utter helplessness; to prevent the chances of a severe fall, he was also bound to his steed, and no sooner was it accomplished than his own garments, as well as the trappings of the horse, were profusely decorated with sprigs and flowers, making him appear to be allied, by the closest ties of consanguinity, to that annual specimen of animal vegetation, 'Jack i' the Green.' A party of the merrie men, by Robin's orders, led them on their way to St. Mary's Abbey;

when they were within a short distance of it, they lashed the horses of the bishop and his retinue into a gallop, and sent them at full speed to the gates of the abbey. When they drew up, and it was known in the abbey that the right reverend father in God the Lord Bishop of Hereford had arrived, the haughty abbot, accompanied by a long train of ghostly fathers, came out to greet him. Their astonishment and horror may be conceived, upon seeing the woful plight of the prelate and his followers; nor was it in any degree lessened by seeing a man, habited in the garb of a retainer, but who was one of the merrie men disguised, advance, and hearing him say—

"Most august and reverend father, Robin Hood sends you these presents greeting."

The bishop was soon released from his unsaintly situation, and carried to a couch, upon which he was laid, in order that he might sleep off the effects of his deep potations; and in the morning when he awoke, with a throbbing, beating agony in his head, and a sickly stomach, he was made acquainted minutely with the unseemly condition in which he and his attendants arrived. His rage knew no bounds; he ejaculated the most fearful anathemas upon Robin and his followers; he stamped, tore his hair, at least as much as he could get from the small tufts which he called by that name, and fairly danced with passion. He swore he would have a bitter revenge, and called upon the abbot to assist him with men, horses, and money—a call which the abbot at once complied with; and a few days subsequent to the occurrences just narrated, my lord bishop had girded on his sword, and at the head of a goodly company of fifty picked men, he set out from St. Mary's Abbey, to capture Robin Hood and hang him, as soon as he was in his power. Not only was he bitterly galled to think of the treatment he had endured, the vile indignity which had been put upon him, but he chafed to think of the loss of his three hundred golden merks, and resolved was he to have revenge to the uttermost. Now, it so happened that Robin Hood was making his way unattended to St. Mary's Abbey, for the purpose of inquiring after the bishop's health, in the name of his late entertainer, accompanied by a request, that should he be passing in that direction again, he would take the trysting tree in his way. There was also another motive, which was his principal object for pursuing this route; it was to pay a visit to the castle of Sir Richard of the Lee, and ascertain what success he had met with in his negotiations with St. Mary's abbot. A turning of the path, as he sauntered leisurely along, showed him the bishop and his company advancing. At a glance he recognised them, and instantly guessed the nature of their expedition. He was placed in rather an awkward predicament; he was at too great a distance to summon his followers in time to save his own life, unless there was a great effusion of blood—an occurrence he invariably endeavoured to avoid; and if he retreated, he could only lead the bishop and his men into the wood in pursuit, and then, to get them all in his power, many lives would necessarily be lost. The bishop and his people were advancing quickly; he had no time to spare, something must be decided upon, and that quickly, if he wished to effect a mastery over them by stratagem rather than force.

"My lord bishop," he muttered, "has Christian charity enough, if I stand here thinking until he comes up, to relieve me from all wordly cares and griefs, pains and pleasures; but I am very well satisfied with the world as yet, and should be loath to leave it; so with your leave, Master Bishop, I'll stay

in it a little longer; let me see—ha! by the Holy Mother, they recognise me."

As he said this, a voice cried loudly and clearly, "Robin Hood, traitor! surrender!"

But he had no such thought, and turning him about, he espied at a short distance a cottage; starting off, he ran at the top of his speed towards it. Upon reaching it, he found the door partly open, he entered swiftly, and instantly barricaded it on the inside.

"God-a-mercy!" cried an old wife, seated at her spindle, "who are you—what's all this?—Ave Maria!—spare an old woman!"

"Never fear, good mother," returned Robin; "it is I who have to beg thee to save my life."

"Who art thou?" demanded the old dame.

"Why dost thou ask that? it cannot serve thee to know," replied Robin.

"But it may thee; it may be for thy good I ask, my son," exclaimed the ancient damsel.

"I have no time to bandy words, good mother. I am an outlaw, whom men call Robin Hood—yonder comes the Bishop of Hereford, with a host of followers; he dined with me in the green wood a few days since, and now comes to repay me for his entertainment by swinging me from the first tree, if he can catch me."

"If thou art Robin Hood, the bold and gentle—and thy voice tells me thou art he," said the old woman, in an earnest voice, "then will I serve thee unto the utmost—even unto death; for can I ever forget, my noble youth, that I was laid upon the ground of this hut stretched in sickness, a lone widow, no soul near but my own, no eye on me save the Lord's. I was dying with cold and want; you came in by chance and found me thus; you raised me up, and spoke kindly, and treated me tenderly and fondly, as if I had been thine own mother, instead of a stranger; and by thee I was fed, and clothed, and restored to health. May the Holy Mother bless thee, now and for ever, for it! And when I asked those who brought me food and raiment from thee, who thou wert, they said thy name was Robin Hood, bold and fearful to thy foes, but gentle and kind and good to those who need thy aid and succour. So, kind youth, an' it cost me my life, if thou wilt tell me how I can save thine, I will cheerfully lay down my old bones to do it."

"I do not require so much of thee, good mother, as that; it is to save life I seek thy aid; else not an inch had I budged for the bishop, had his retinue been twice its number. Here come my foes."

The sound of horses' footsteps in rapid approach saluted their ears: his pursuers arrived, and commenced a series of thundering blows upon the door, calling upon the inmates to open or they would break it down.

"Let them knock; the door will hold them out, never fear," said Robin, encouragingly.

"They will murder us," ejaculated the old woman, in alarm.

"Not without some trouble," returned Robin; "but I have no desire, I confess, for many reasons, to put them to that trouble; and as an unequal force is only to be overcome by stratagem, we must exert our wits to defeat the intentions of those without. You tell me you are disposed to assist me, and I honestly believe you are; you may do so successfully and effectually, if you will closely follow my instructions."

"I will do everything you wish me, to the best of my poor ability," exclaimed the woman.

"Then you must lend me your character, and take mine," said Robin.

"Anan?"

"We must change clothes," repeated Robin.

"Change clothes!" reiterated the woman, "that will be of no use; they will easily discover a weak old woman, though habited in thy garments, is not the bold Robin Hood."

"Not if you follow my directions," returned Robin. I will disguise you so effectually, that unless you speak, they will not know the difference between us. All you have to do is to feign intoxication, and leave the rest to me. Now, old lady, you need no more mind my presence, than if I were your own son; and as we have no time to lose, let us make the exchange at once."

The old woman assented with a smile, and their garments were speedily at each other's disposal. Robin soon dressed himself in the old woman's grey coat and head-gear, and then assisted to make the old lady's toilet. She got on his chausses, his green tunic and buskins, and he put on her belts and weapons in the green wood fashion; he reddened her cheeks with ochre, made her a beard and moustaches of his own hair, which he cut off for that purpose, and made adhere to her chin with some of the resinous gum exuding from a pine log. He blackened her grey hair with charred wood and grease, and placed his cap jauntily on the side of her head. The dress seemed to impart new life to the old woman, for she held herself more erect, and trod with a firmer step than she had done for many a day. When her toilet was completed, she arranged those parts of Robin's disguise, which he, from ignorance of the method of wearing, had left disordered; and when they were both quite ready, and he had given her copious directions how to act, he prepared to admit the foe.

The bishop and his party, be it understood, had never, all this while, ceased their clamorous demands for admittance, and had appealed earnestly but vainly to their staffs, to obtain it for them. Several ineffectual efforts in different fashions had been made to force the door, but none succeeded.

One of the retainers volunteered to batter it in with his horse's heels—an offer which was accepted—and he backed his steed to the door; then, holding his head hard, he spurred him. Up went the horse's heels with a terrific clatter, against the door; a second time he essayed it, but a fellow-soldier, thinking probably to infuse fresh vigour into the kicks of the horse, who had been taught this trick, gave him a sudden prick on the haunches with his spear, and produced a result totally unexpected, and decidedly opposite to the one intended; for the animal plunged instantly forward, then flung up his hind-quarters with a sudden jerk, which had the effect of unhorsing his rider like a shot, making him perform a rapid somersault.

His evolution was attended with a disastrous result, for his heels came in violent contact with the head of the bishop, who had ridden close to him, to see the consequences ensuing from this man, or horse-cœuvre, and one of his spurs catching in the skin of the doughty prelate's forehead, tore it from there obliquely down to the side of his chin. The pain of this tear—it made quite a gutter—independent of the blow his skull received, so exasperated the bishop, that on finding the man thrown across his saddle, he upraised a sort of golden mace, illustrative of his dignified station, and returned the compliment by inflicting a tremendous hit upon the head of the prostrate soldier, which made it sound like a blow on a drum, and rendered the man at once insensible.

Smarting with pain and rage, he flung the body to the ground, and galloping up to the door, inflicted a

number of blows with his mace upon it, with such rapidity and persevering vigour, that his men could not but admire his strength of arm.

While in the full performance of this feat, his passion not being half expended, the door suddenly opened; he missed his blow; the mace would, not having a resistance, describe a circle until it was stopped by the chest of his reverence's horse, who, immediately upon his receiving this frightful whack, commenced an instantaneous series of plunges, of so violent a nature, that the bishop had not the trouble of dismounting, but was shot into the centre of the cottage-floor, with a force which shook every joint in his body as if it would dislocate it. He was instantly raised, almost stunned and breathless, to his feet, by his people; and the confusion this incident created, did much to prevent the artifice being discovered which Robin was playing upon them. As soon as he could speak, his reverence commanded the supposed Robin to be seized, bound, and forced on horseback. Robin, in his character of the old woman, mimicking her tremulous voice, pretended an interference, but was rudely thrust aside, and the fictitious Robin having been bound, was placed upon a horse.

Sick, full of pain, and nearly blind from his heavy fall, the bishop again mounted his steed, which had been recovered after galloping a short distance, and quieted, and commanded his people to make for the wood, and proceed through it until they reached the trysting tree, there and then to hang up, unshriven, his prisoner as an example, a terror, and a warning to all outlaws, existing or might exist, present and to come, not to emulate his deeds. As soon as they were all well away, Robin also made for the wood, and by a series of short ways known almost only to himself, he was soon close by the trysting tree. As he entered an open glade, he saw at a distance Little John, Will Scarlet, and Much, and he, though at some considerable way off, heard Little John say, his voice sounding clearly in the quiet air—

"Who comes yonder over the lee? she looks like an old witch. Marry and by'r Lady, I hope she has come to cast no spell upon the merrie men, my noble master, or the green wood; an' I thought so, I would try an arrow at her."

"You couldn't hit her if you were," laughed Will.

"Not hit her!" echoed Little John. "Why not?"

"If she is a witch, she'd laugh all your efforts to scorn," replied Will; "she'd be like the dogs of the Curtal Friar of Fountain's Abbey—catch your arrows as fast as you shot them."

"The Curtal Friar—who is he?" demanded Little John.

"Have you never heard of him in these parts?" asked Will, with some astonishment.

"Never," replied Little John.

"Oh, then, I'll tell you; he is—"

"For certes!" cried Much, interrupting Will, as he was about to commence his story, "but this old dame looks marvellously like a witch; she does not walk like another woman, and she looks stouter and differently to what old women generally look. By the Mass, Little John, if you don't try an arrow on her, I will; I don't like the looks of old hags such as her. Will you try, or shall I?"

"As you please. I have as little love for such people as reptiles or wood vermin of any sort, and would no more mind bringing one down than the other. I'll bend a bow on her if you wilt," answered Little John, with a desire to make himself agreeable; whether the supposed witch thought so, is another affair.

"Hold your hand!" cried Will, interposing, "don't

be too hasty; she wears petticoats, and I would not harm anything or anyone that did so, if I could help it; besides, you don't know she's a witch, only from

tructive; besides, you know how strict Robin keeps the rule that no female shall be molested or meet with harm wherever he and the merrie men congre-



her looks; many a rough outside covers a good and pleasant inside, and the old dame may be a good-hearted Christian, albeit she does not look very at-

gate: so wait till she comes up before you do aught to injure her."

"By the holy apostles but she must be a witch;

look there, Will, did you ever see a woman as tall as that, or stride i' that fashion?" cried Little John, pointing to Robin, who, in his haste to join his companions, had dropped the stooping gait and halting walk he had assumed, and now strode towards them as fast as he could walk.

"A witch! a witch!" shouted Much, following Little John's example in bending a bow, and aiming an arrow at Robin. "By the Holy Mother, she comes not here to play any of her wicked and devilish pranks."

"Hold thy hand!" cried the imaginary witch, at the top of his voice. "I am Robin Hood! Do you not know me?" and he pulled off his head-gear, displaying his well-known face, to the surprise of his followers: he was soon at their side. "I must have been changed indeed for you not to have known me," he continued.

"You looked so ugly," returned Will, with a laugh. "What made you don such a disguise as that?"

"I fell in with my Lord Bishop of Hereford, who has a party of men, between fifty and sixty in number, as near as I can judge, with him, for the purpose of capturing me. I came suddenly upon them, was recognised, and a cottage, inhabited by an old woman, being near, I made my way for it. I reached it, disclosed my name and situation to her, and, by my request, she changed dress with me, even while the bishop and his followers were battering at the door. When we had arranged our disguises, I opened the door, the suddenness of which, I believe, caused his reverence's horse to fling him, and he arrived on his back near the middle of the room. He was assisted to rise, and, without investigating or questioning my representative, he ordered her to be seized, bound, mounted on horseback, and borne to the trysting tree, to be hung from one of the branches. Now we have not a moment to lose. Much, get me instantly a suit, that I may doff these women's garments. Little John, take as many of the merrie men as you can gather immediately, and to the trysting tree at once. Will, you gather such of the men who are not within immediate call as speedily as you can, and join us there. Away, all of you!"

His orders were instantly obeyed, and in a few minutes Much returned with a suit of forest habiliments, which Robin quickly changed for those of the old dame's. He then repaired to the trysting tree, where he found Little John posted with a body of at least sixty archers. He arranged them in such a way that they effectually commanded the entrance to the glade, and all parts of the glade itself. They were hidden, in order that the bishop and his people might be completely in Robin's power, without a chance of helping themselves; and when they were suffered to depart, it should be upon terms highly advantageous to Robin and his men. A short time were they posted in their coverts when the sound of horse's footsteps met their ears, and told them his reverence was approaching; and when he had passed through the avenue leading to the glade, and all his men likewise, he was startled by the sound of a bugle, and the sudden appearance of a stream of men commanding the entrance, and taking up their places in all the tenable positions the spot afforded. A cold shudder passed through the bishop's frame as he looked on this terrible array of foresters, and noticing among them one habited in a scarlet tunic, to whose words the bowmen paid the most implicit attention, he turned to the false Robin, his prisoner, and in a voice which anticipations and misgivings of a most disagreeable nature made exceeding faint, demanded—

"Who is that, yonder, who is commanding those outlaws?" He expected the answer, for he was certain he recognised the form.

"Marry, my lord bishop, I should think it could be no other than he whom men call Robin Hood."

"I thought so," groaned the bishop; "I thought it was he. Who, then, art thou, wretch?"

"That can be of no consequence to thee. O thou wise in thine own conceit! thou man of blood and unmercifulness! thou who seltest Christian charity to him only who can pay thee best! what can it be to thee who I am? There stands he whom thou seekest to slay. Take him, if thou canst!"

"Who art thou?" demanded the bishop, chafing very much, "that I may know thee hereafter?"

"If Robin Hood does thee justice, thou wilt know none but Satan hereafter; and were it not that I shall add to thy rage and discomfiture by answering thy question, thou shouldst not know. I am a woman, bold bishop; and thou hast expended all thy valour, and that of thy followers, in capturing a poor weak old woman, as thou shalt presently see."

"The curse of Satan upon thee, thou old hag! Have I been deceived thus?" cried the bishop, gnashing his teeth.

"Aye, thy merciless errand hath turned upon thyself!" exclaimed the old lady, with persevering morality. "Hadst thou followed Robin Hood's good example—given to the poor what thou hast extorted!"

"Peace, hag!" roared the bishop. "I want none of thy cant. Ho, there, men! through the glade with ye! Fight through these outlaws! Cut thy path through them, thou gallant hearts!"

But the gallant hearts would have found it an easier task to be commanded to do this than to accomplish it, for at a signal from Robin, his men bent their bows and drew their arrows to the head, ready for instant discharge; and such was the repute of the terrible truth of their aim, that all the bishop's men instinctively shrunk in their saddles as they observed this movement on the part of the foresters. At this moment, too, Will Scarlet arrived with the remainder of the merrie men, and so completely commanded the avenue which formed the entrance to the glade, that it was easily seen it would be quite madness to attempt to force a passage through them, and, therefore, his reverence's followers, at a call from Robin, laid down their arms.

"Woe is me! woe is me!" exclaimed the bishop, wringing his hands; "that I should ever have seen this day."

"Welcome, my Lord Bishop of Hereford," cried Robin Hood, advancing to him, "welcome to the green wood again. Hast thou liked thine entertainment a few days ago so well, that thou hast come again to prove my hospitality?"

The bishop groaned in reply; he could not articulate a word. The recollection of his degradation on that day was productive of rage and torment, and the probability that this day would see, if not his death, a similar outrage upon his clerical character, made his spirit quail within him.

"How is it, my lord bishop, thou dost not seem so jovial as thou wert when we parted? What ails thee? Art thou not glad to be again in my society?" continued Robin, after waiting for an answer.

"I cannot say I am," ejaculated the bishop, mournfully. "The position in which I am placed renders such a feeling impossible. You must know, by my armed followers, the reason of my being here, and, I expect, you will retaliate accordingly. I have only this to say, that if thou dost this time spare me, and let

me and my followers pass unhurt, I will not, on any future occasion, under any circumstances, seek thy destruction, or that of those connected with thee; and I do not see but thou shouldst the more readily agree to this, as it will save thy soul from bearing an awful weight of sin, as thou wouldst, in slaying me, murder a high priest of the Holy Church."

"It has never been my province to shed blood—all my actions prove it; and any assertion to the contrary, my lord bishop, is false. Nevertheless, it would be but justice that thou, who has sought my life for so long a period unrelentingly, even after partaking of my hospitality, should, when again in my power, be retaliated upon to the extent of pain thou wouldst have inflicted upon me."

"I don't see that," mildly remonstrated the bishop.

"I am afraid I do," returned Robin.

"No," said the bishop, "our positions in society are so different. You are an outlaw, out of the pale of the law, against whom every loyal man should turn his hand. I am in the pale of the law, subject to all its benefits; I am, too, almost above it, being one of the high dignitaries of the Holy Church. In pursuing you, I did but fulfil, however painful to my feelings—"

"Hum!" coughed Will Scarlet, rather loudly.

"I say, however painful to my feelings," continued the bishop, regardless of the interruption, "the duty of a good and true subject, and no other. You ought to consider this, and let it weigh in my favour accordingly."

"Look you, bishop," returned Robin Hood, sternly, "I know by what standard to measure your loyalty—I know how far you sacrifice personal interest for public weal; and were I to suffer that knowledge to influence my conduct to thee one jot, the next minute to this should see thee dangling to and fro from one of the limbs of the tree beneath whose broad boughs you stand; but, looking at your position in society, and knowing the good it is in your power to do unto others, I am inclined to waive the right which a strict observance of our forest law places in my grasp, and spare thee"—

"Noble forester!" interrupted the bishop.

"Upon certain conditions, to which, if you subscribe, I swear by the Holy Mother that you and your followers shall pass free."

"Name them," muttered the bishop, in a tone of misgiving, an indefinable dread of an exaction of almost impossibilities passing through his mind, "name them," he ejaculated faintly, "and if I can subscribe I will."

"If you do not subscribe to them, you shall most assuredly, in less than an hour from this time, depart to the next world full swing; and unless you have a fancy for immediately trying the warmth of the climate you must ultimately visit, I have little doubt but you will agree to my conditions."

"Pray proceed with them," groaned the prelate.

"Firstly, you at once give over lying, and swear to impose upon thyself a most rigid penance for every lie you utter," commenced Robin.

"Agreed," returned the Bishop readily, not caring whether he kept it or not.

"Secondly, you establish an alms-giving day to the poor of your diocese—the alms to come from your private property."

"I have very little private property," urged the bishop.

"To see how firmly the habit of lying grafts itself on those who have accustomed themselves to use it!" said Robin. "I did not ask thee for a lie, but to agree to the condition. I am quite satisfied as to thy

power of doing it, and will insure the fulfilment of thy consent, in swearing thee by an oath of so sacred a character that even thou durst not break it—do you consent to this condition, my lord bishop? I have very little time to waste in argument; you must say yes or no, and according to your reply so shall I act. Now, yes or no?"

"Why—a—yes—I will give what I can spare," answered the bishop, hesitatingly, letting the words fall from him as if he was losing in each a treasure.

"I shall not trust to your estimate of what you can spare, but name the amount which you shall dispense weekly to the most needy and wretched your diocese affords."

"You cannot do that; you do not know what I can afford; you don't know the calls upon my money. I know only how much I can devote of my income to such an unlooked-for purpose," energetically cried the bishop.

But Robin proceeded to name a sum which the bishop vowed and protested he could not afford; and as he still persisted in such a declaration, Little John was directed to bring a twisted thong of deer hide, capable of bearing a weight as great as the bishops. Now, as he had a strong belief when he saw it that it would be strong enough to bear him, and as he had no very earnest desire to test its suspensory capabilities, he declared the argument conclusive, and gave his consent, very reluctantly it is true, but still he gave it. There was an outsider which Robin affixed to it—a kind of codicil, which was, that the bishop, independent of this alms-day, should at all times be charitable to the poor, be kind and good, fulfil sincerely and truly the functions of his sacred character, ministering to the wants of the wretched in body and spirit, by such consolation and sympathy as the religion afforded, and with whose dictates he was bound to comply; visiting the weary couch of the sick, listening attentively and tenderly to the sad histories of the miserable and wicked, cheering them with the mild doctrines of the Holy Word, and easing the anguish of their spirits by gentle words of balm and hope; to forswear also the vile and infamous practices carried on by those of his order, to a horrible extent, under the cloak of religion, of tempting young and innocent maidens and young wives to sin—practices daily productive of misery and wretchedness, of blightings and heart breakings to all concerned, save those who had produced it. With some little restiveness the bishop conceded to this condition, and Robin swore him by a most fearful oath, which the bishop, accustomed as he was to coin and administer vows of a tremendously binding nature, shuddered as he took; but he inwardly resolved that he would take the first opportunity of getting absolved from it by the Pope; it was a compulsory oath, and, therefore he did not choose to consider quite binding. When, however, he had taken it, Robin exclaimed—

"Well, bishop, that is done—you have subscribed to that; you must now swear that you will not on any occasion seek to injure me or those connected with me at any time, or under any circumstances."

"I have already promised it," he answered.

"But you must swear it!"

"I do, by St. Paul!"

"That will not do; swear by our Holy Lady to forfeit all hopes of worldly enjoyment, and all escape from the fangs of his majesty, the foul fiend, in the next world!"

"I do swear it."

"Very well, my lord bishop, you are now free to depart."

"Many thanks; I am very glad to hear you say

so—right glad am I. Bid my men to mount, and let us away!"

"Will you not stay and take some refreshment?"

"No, no, none—not any; I am anxious to be gone," cried the bishop, quickly, fearing a repetition of the previous entertainment he experienced at Robin's hands.

"You had better have a pasty; you are a fasting, man?"

"Not a bit."

"A stoup of wine will cheer you!"

"Not a drop."

"Will you neither eat nor drink with me?"

"I am neither an hungered nor athirst; I have no appetite. Pray let me be gone. You told me I was free to depart; you will not therefore detain me, after giving me a promise to suffer my free departure?"

"As you please; I seek not to detain you. Little John, his lordship wishes to depart."

"Certainly, noble master, since you permit it," said Little John, advancing; "and for my part, I like his lordship's company so little, that I will not seek to detain him a moment longer than necessary; therefore, master bishop, you will perhaps settle at once?"

"Settle!" echoed the bishop, in a low tone of surprised enquiry; "what do you mean by settle?"

"Does your lordship forget that you are at our hostel; and though you have taken no refreshment, your people will, and your horses have already; you cannot expect to occupy our premises, and not to pay for so doing; besides, though our noble chief permits you to depart free, we must have a largess for your people, who are our prisoners. Do you understand?"

"I do," moaned the bishop; "take what you will, and let me depart quickly."

"Is the portmanteau in the same place as usual?" asked Little John, with a laugh.

"It is there," said the bishop, pointing to a small leathern case affixed to the saddle-bow of his steed.

"It feels heavier than the last did," said Little John, unfastening it and lifting it from its place.

"There's more in it," said the bishop, quietly, making desperate efforts at an air of resignation.

"I am very glad to hear it," replied Little John; "how much more?"

"Two hundred golden merks more."

"Two hundred! ah! why then, here is five hundred golden merks?"

"Even that sum. But you will not rob me of it all?" appealed the bishop, with a look, in which the question, whether it was not better to be hanged than submit to all this quietly, appeared to be strongly debated; but the desire to live had it, and making a strong gulp, he tried to be resigned to his fate.

"Rob you of it!" cried little John, scornfully. "You do not understand the distinction between robbing and taking property from a man which is not his, in order to restore it to its proper owners. You have wrung this money by the vilest species of robbery—taking it under false pretences—from those who cannot spare it, and we take it from you to give it back unto them; therefore your vile charge is a base lie!"

"That's forest philosophy," laughed Robin.

"Its legality is questionable, though," muttered the bishop.

"That may be," said Robin; "there are many abstract laws of justice and right, which those framed by men incited by self-interest make illegal; but we are not governed by your laws, we keep to the good old primitive notion of right and wrong, and do our best to fulfil its dictates. The point respecting the money is one on which we are more than particular, so I

think you had better pay it, and look as agreeable as you can over it."

"I cannot help myself; take what you will, and let me go."

"There is one more request which I have to make," said Little John, looking at Robin Hood for approbation; "it is that as our spiritual director is not with us at Barnsdale, and we have been for some time without the benefit of his religious aid, you, my Lord Bishop of Hereford, sing us a Mass."

"Gross impiety! profane request! I would rather die than comply with it!" said the bishop, energetically.

"It is your duty to aid us in offering up our worship at all times," said Robin, quietly but firmly; "Little John says truly; we have not heard Mass for some time, and an opportunity like the present should not be thrown away. Come, my lord bishop, prepare to oblige us, for we will hear a Mass before you go."

"Not from me. It would be a mockery so monstrous, a sin so mortal, a wickedness so tremendous, that I should expect to be stricken dead by the lightnings of the Almighty's wrath," cried the bishop angrily.

"My lord bishop," said Robin, sternly and gravely, "judge not of us by those whose stations are high and mighty in the land: we reverence humbly and respectfully the religion, which is the guide in all our acts; too deeply, too sincerely do we worship, to make a mockery, or think of making one, of aught so holy. Believe me, within the walls of your vast cathedral you will find none who will be more earnest or devoted auditors than myself and those around you, who are my followers. Come, my lord bishop, let me lead you to the altar, for we have one in this green wood; and believe me, while the Mass is proceeding, you will not be interrupted by anything profane or irreverent."

"May I believe you?" said the bishop, doubtfully.

"I am not given to lying at any time," answered he bitterly, "especially upon religious matters; follow me."

He led the way to an enclosed spot, a short distance from the glade, and there upraised, in the centre of a kind of dell, was erected an altar of earth; it was dressed after the fashion of those in the chapels, abbeys, and cathedrals; and everything upon it, and connected with it, was so well arranged, that his reverence could not but wonder at it, and commenced the Mass with much less repugnance than he had before expressed. It was a touching sight to see in that small dell an hundred and fifty men kneeling, bareheaded, reverently to hear the Holy Word, without uttering word or sound, save when it was their duty to make a response, and to see the bishop, assisted by some of the younger members of the band, and his own people, before that forest altar of grassed earth and small flowers, performing the ceremonies of the Mass with all the fervour, and less of the ostentation which he exhibited in his splendid cathedral. In no way was he disturbed while it proceeded, and when it concluded, he received the thanks of the merrie men, heartily but honestly expressed. They showed their gratification in taking most of the bishop's retainers to the glade where stood the trysting tree, and in a very short space of time placing before them venison, dressed in all fashions, with plenty of ale to wash it down. In a few words Robin desired Much to see a repast spread for the bishop, while he kept him in conversation. The prelate was so astonished by the strict attention and quiet, but earnest devotion the merrie men exhibited during mass, that he could not help asking a variety of questions relative to their

method of living in the green wood. Robin gave him a diffuse account, and during it gradually led him to the trysting tree, the scene of his former merriment. Here he found his men eating with all the vigour a good appetite could produce, and quaffing with strong evidence of much thirst. The sight of their joviality fired him; he instantly experienced the gnawing of a fine appetite himself, and licked his lips with sympathy, as he saw a fellow make a full quart of ale disappear down his capacious gullet.

"Your men are well employed," observed Robin, pointing out a knot of the most voraciously inclined he could clap his eye upon. "I am just about to eat a little," he continued, "and you had better share what is spread there with me."

"I had better not," said the bishop, with a faint effort of resistance, remembering what had transpired beneath that tree; "I had better not, albeit I feel rather hungry"—he meant famished.

"Never stay thy appetite," observed Robin, with an air of seriousness, "it is bad for thy health. Come, sit thee down with me, and eat thy fill; and when thou hast done that you can depart instantly, and I swear to thee it shall be unconditional and without molestation."

"Well, I suppose I must," exclaimed the bishop, rubbing his hands, his mouth watering, and preparing to sit down beneath the trysting tree, where plenty of esculents were laid. With something like a wicked spirit of tantalization, Robin laid his hand upon his arm and stopped him.

"There is no compulsion," said he; "you are not compelled. If you dislike to sit down and partake of that rich venison pasty, moistened with some choice wine, pray abstain; it is worse to force the appetite than to check it."

"Oh, but my appetite is very good—and—you say it is bad for the health to fast too long; therefore, since it is here, and I feel so well disposed to eat, it is perhaps better that I should," argued the bishop, now almost as afraid that he should lose his dinner, as he had previously been that he would be compelled to eat one.

"Well, then, in the Holy Mary's name, sit down and eat thy fill," exclaimed Robin.

No further pressing did the bishop need: down he squatted at once, and commenced, as if it was exactly that day six months since he had tasted anything, drinking proportionably. Robin was as profuse in his liberality as heretofore, and he plied the jovial ecclesiastic with so much food and wine, that he found it uncomfortable to move, and wished heartily that the skin of his portly stomach had patent elastic expansive powers, which would enable it to distend to any extent required; but as that did not happen to be the nature of his skin, and to prevent the danger of what is vulgarly termed bursting, he thought it prudent to leave off eating—drinking he could not—he was naturally addicted to it; long indulgence had made it necessary to him, and the flavour of the wine Robin placed before him was so peculiarly good, that it was impossible to forego the pleasure of imbibing a very large quantity of it. It is not perhaps an extraordinary fact, that the fumes of wine will mount to the brain, and the more one drinks, the greater the chance of one's getting incontestibly drunk; this law applied to the Bishop of Hereford; for after an hour's indulgence in deep potations, he was quite as much intoxicated as on the previous occasion, and behaved quite as extravagantly. When Robin thought the scene had been acted long enough, he ordered the merrie men to see the bishop's retainers mounted, and his reverence, who lay laugh-

ing, and trying vainly to articulate sentences, in a state of helpless drunkenness, to be placed upon his horse, and bound to it, with his back to its head, and his face to the tail, which was given him to hold instead of the reins.

"Ha ha!—hic! ho!" he muttered, almost unintelligibly, as he received the tail. "I did—hic! I didn't know—hic! I was—stand still, sir—how the beast prances—hic! and turns round, and round, and round, and—hic! I didn't know—hic! I was so near the mane—hic! I've mixed 'em all up together, reins and all—hic! What makes him hold his head down so—hic! heigh! hold up your head, you brute. How he plunges; no matter, good bye, you—hic! you jolly rogues—hic! you funny fellows—hic—hurrah!"

The lash was applied to the steed, and away he galloped with the bishop, who hallooed and swore he was "backing," and called on them to stop. He was followed by his men, who raised three cheers for Robin and his merrie men; and drunk with liquor and excitement, almost to madness, galloped on, shouting, roaring, whooping, and swearing, until they reached the Abbey of St. Mary's again; and the Lord Bishop of Hereford was once more consigned to the arms of the abbots and the monks, in a worse plight than before, to wake the next morning eaten with rage, shame, and mortification.

CHAPTER III.

"Now labyrinths, which but themselves can pierce,
Methinks conducts them to some pleasant ground;
Where welcome hills shut out the universe,
And pines their lawny walk encompassed round.
There, if a pause delicious converse found,
'Twas but when o'er each heart the idea stole,
(Perchance awhile in joy's oblivion drown'd)
'That come what may while life's glad pulses roll,
Indissolubly thus should soul be knit to soul."

CAMPBELL.

"For Robin Hood disguised himself,
And from the wood is gone.

"Like to a friar Robin Hood,
Was accoutred in array;
With hood, gown, beads, and crucifix,
He passed upon the way.

"He had not gone past miles two or three,
But it was his chance to espy
Two lusty priests."

Robin Hood's Golden Prize.

"The sheriff he saddled his good palfrey,
And took three hundred pounds in gold;
And away he went with bold Robin Hood,
His horned beasts to behold.

"Then Robin he brought him through the wood,
And set him on his dapple grey;
O have me commended to your wife at home.
So Robin went laughing away.

Robin Hood and the Butchers.

"Says John, if I must a-begging go,
I'll have a palmer's weed;
With a staff and coat, and bags of all sorts,
The better then shall I speed.

"Then he got out of the beggar's cloak
Three hundred pounds in gold;
Good fortune had I, said Little John,
Such a sight for to behold.

"But found he in the beggar's bag,
Three hundred pounds and three."

Little John and the Four Beggars.

"**W**ONDER how my Lord Bishop of Hereford finds his head this morning?" said Will Scarlet, as he, accompanied by Little John and Much, was proceeding, after

fulfilling their morning duties, with them to Barnsdale Hall, to make arrangements for the two weddings about to take place.

"It must ache sadly," returned Much; "though, judging by the quantity he takes, and comparatively the light effect it takes upon him, I should imagine he is well used to it, and probably rises without being any the worse for it."

"I don't know what you call light effect, Much," said Will Scarlet, laughing, "but for a light effect, I never saw a man more drunk."

"Truly; but you never saw a man drink so much without becoming utterly insensible; therefore, I think it must be from long use," argued Much.

"It is long use," chimed in Little John; "they are all of a sort, those churchmen; guzzling, gorging, rapacious, evil-minded, uncharitable rogues."

"You like them as little as Robin Hood," said Much. "Why does he bear them such an inveterate hatred?"

"He has good cause," replied Little John; "he is kept out of name, title, wealth, and honour, through one of them; and he is for ever hearing some evil report concerning their grasping, avaricious wickedness."

"And does he serve them all thus, when he gets them in his power?" he asked.

"Aye, without exception; he will even go out of his way to get them in his power," returned Little John.

"How do you mean go out of his way?" inquired Much.

"Why, I'll tell you a story about him, and that will explain my meaning," replied Little John. "He ascertained one morning that a couple of black friars were conveying a large sum of money to their convent, and were to pass through a part of Sherwood forest; directly he knew of this—our funds were rather low at the time—he resolved to get it from them, without troubling any of the band to assist him, or making any fuss at all about it. Well, he disguised himself in a habit of Tuck's, hood, gown, beads, crucifix, and all, and started forth to meet them. He had not got very far before he espied two lusty priests, mounted on mettlesome nags, come riding along at rather a brisk pace; he placed himself in the road way, and when they reached him, he caught the bridles of both nags, and said in as piteous, whining, and miserable a tone as he could assume, and as he thought the character demanded, he said—

"*Benedicite*, holy brethren! How happy am I to have fallen in with thee; how fortunate; how much I have to be thankful for!"

"Why speak you thus?" demanded one of the friars.

"Because," replied Robin, "I know you will take pity upon me—that you will spare me a moiety of your provisions, for I am starving."

"We have none," said he who had spoken before, and attempting, as soon as he found it was a begging petition, to spur the nag into a trot, but Robin held them firmly.

"Then spare me a groat to buy some with," he said, "for I am weary and fasting. I have wandered about all yesterday and this morning without so much as a cup to drink or a bit of bread to eat; therefore, good brothers, for our dear Lady's sake, spare me a groat."

"Out upon thee! let go my bridle, fool; begone! we want none of thy cant, we know what it means."

"Yes," said the other friar, "we want none of thy cant, we know what it means; let go the bridle."

"But will you not spare me a groat?" asked Robin, still keeping the bridles firmly in his hand.

"I have not a penny, by our Holy Dame, if I felt inclined to give it," said the first friar.

"You look not as if you were without money—well mounted, well attired, and happy faces," urged Robin.

"Oh yes, but we have been robbed this morning," replied the friar; "could save nothing—we have not a penny left."

"Yes," cried the other, "we have been robbed, and have not a penny left. Leave go the bridle, beggar."

"I am very much afraid," said Robin Hood, "that you are telling me a very great lie."

"A lie!" said the first friar, who was a fat, burly old fellow; "graceless dog! what mean you by that?"

"Simply what I say," replied Robin, "that you're telling a lie. I do not believe that you were robbed, neither do I believe that you have no money about you; and as there is nothing like being satisfied on such points, before you go from hence I will just see whether it is so or no."

"With that he left go of the bridles and laid his hand upon the saddle-bag of the fat friar; but he put spurs to his horse and went off at a good speed, followed closely by his brother friar. Robin, however, was too nimble for them, and overtook them, and very quickly unhorsed them both. They were in a horrible state of fright—their teeth chattered, and their eyes rolled about dreadfully.

"Good mendicant, spare us!" gasped the fat friar; "have pity on us! We have neither money nor provisions to bestow upon thee. Thou canst not have what we have not to give thee."

"No," cried the other, a poor lean devil, "have pity on us! We cannot give thee what we have not."

"I do not require it of thee," replied Robin. "You say ye have no money—I have no money: well, suppose we all three kneel down and pray until we get some. Our dear lady has never failed me in my hour of need, and I do not think she will now. I prayed to her just before I met with you, so I am sure I shall meet with relief through you; therefore, if we all kneel down, I have no doubt we shall get some speedily."

"The two friars refused to kneel at first, until awed by Robin's menaces, and more by his saying that if they refused to do so he should believe that they had money, but refused to give him any; and if he thought that for a moment, he would act in a way that would make them wish they had freely rendered up to him whatever they might have had about them. They could not exactly gainsay what he said, so down they knelt alongside of Robin, who set them the example.

"What, all three," interrogated Will Scarlet, "kneeling down to pray for money?"

"Yes," replied Little John, "praying away as hard as they could."

"Ha, ha, ha! what a sight it must have been," laughed Will; "it must have beat the Bishop of Hereford's dance in his boots."

"Well, they prayed away hard and fast," continued Little John, "Robin keeping them at it."

"Send us, oh send us money," they cried, "to serve us in our need!" but no money came. Their voices were miserably mournful, and they drew out prayer after prayer until Robin fairly laughed, as he declares, until his eyes ran down with water. A short prayer served him, and he stood over them flourishing a quarter-staff, asking them occasionally if they had got any money, and on receiving a negative reply, he commenced singing a ballad. They wrung their hands, they wept, they tore their hair, and appeared to be overwhelmed with grief; still to Robin's repeated

questions if any money had come they cried no, and begged hard and earnestly of him to let them go, but he was deaf to their entreaties.

"'The Holy Mother never fails me,' he said; 'if I have none now I shall by-and-bye, so go on and pray more heartily than ever.'

"They groaned and whined at last in such a miserable manner that Robin grew tired of it; and so, after they had been on their knees near an hour, he said to them—

"'Now, my dear brethren, let us see what money heaven hath sent us.'

"'Not a penny,' cried the fat friar.

"'Not a penny!' quoth Robin; 'how know I that? My good brothers, can you tell if I have money or no, although I say I have none?'

"'No,' replied the friar.

"'No, to be sure,' he said, 'unless you search me: therefore, how know I whether heaven has sent you any money until I search you?'

"They both groaned in concert, and with one voice exclaimed they had not a penny.

"'We shall see,' replied Robin. 'Whatever money heaven has sent us we will share, unless we have either of us told the other a lie, and had money when we said we had not. You are sure that neither of you have any money?'

"'Quite sure,' they cried together.

"'Very well: now search and tell me if you have.'

"They did so: they put their hands into their pockets, but could not find any.

"'Now one more prayer to our Lady,' said Robin Hood, 'and then to business.'

"'Awed by his staff, they consented; and again they put up an earnest prayer adapted to the purpose; and when they had concluded, Robin said to the fat friar—

"'We'll search each other one by one. I will begin with you, my bonny father.'

"After some little resistance they were both searched by him, horses and all, and he managed to find five hundred pieces of gold.

"'Hast thou none, mendicant?' exclaimed the friar, when Robin had got all their store.

"'None but what thou seest here,' he returned, pointing to the money he had taken from them; 'if you doubt it you are free to search me.'

"This they declined to do, with the best grace their fear would let them; but the fat friar asked him if he was going to share the gold he had.

"'Do you believe it came direct from Heaven, since I have been with you?' he asked, gazing at him sternly. The frightened monk looked dumbfounded, he had not a word to say; his silence continuing, Robin said—

"'You lied to me; you had the money when you vowed and protested that you had it not; you have forfeited, therefore, all right to it, but I will be more charitable to you than you were to me—I will give you fifty pieces each, because you prayed so heartily and earnestly, and fairly earned it.'

"'You are very good,' moaned the friar, sighing and letting the large tears trickle down his cheeks in agony at the loss of his money. 'Now, I suppose, we may go?'

"'Not yet,' said Robin Hood, 'you must stay with me a little while. I wish to swear you upon this holy grass of Sherwood to observe certain conditions, and I would have you do it before witnesses.'

"'Who art thou?' inquired the friar, in an almost inaudible tone.

"'That you shall know speedily,' replied Robin, stripping off his friar's gown, beads, and crucifix, and

flinging them over one of the nag's backs, and gathering up the money; he also put that in a saddle-bag, and led the way deeper into the forest. I don't believe he had got far when he met with me and George-a-Green. We had killed a buck, which we had run down, and were resting after our labour. As he came up, Robin pointed to me, and said to the monk—

"'These are my two witnesses, before whom you must swear your oath.'

"'Who are these, Robin Hood?' I asked. You should have seen the start they gave when I mentioned his name. The fat fellow began telling his beads, and the lean one stared over the nag's head at Robin, as if he was looking upon the devil himself. If we had been going to hang, drown, quarter, roast, and eat them, they could not have looked more fear-stricken than when they discovered that our leader had them in his power; they expected nothing less than death, and they repeated their *ave Marias*, paternosters, and credos, as fast as their tongues could wag, kicking up as great a clack as if two women were together by the ears, pulling and clawing. Robin, however, stopped their din, and made them down on their knees, and swear to the same oath administered to the Bishop of Hereford yesterday, that they should tell no lies, tempt no women to sin, and be charitable to the poor. I think if he had proposed to them to go and pull the Pope's nose, and bite his great toe off, they would have sworn to have done it, so readily did they swear to do whatever he proposed; and when he told them they were free to go, it was a merry sight to see them leap into the saddle, and gallop away as fast as their two nags could carry them. We had a hearty laugh over it, and the story served to amuse the band for some time."

"It was a merrie affair, truly," said Much, when Little John had concluded. "Robin Hood must have managed his disguise very well, for the friars not to have detected him at first; but I suppose they did have a misgiving from their fear of him?"

"No, I think not," returned Little John, musingly. "They are such a thievish set, they rob so much, that I suppose whenever they meet accidentally, the strongest robs the other; that I am sure must have been the cause of their fear, not because they suspected Robin was not a monk—he is wondrously expert in disguises, as you might have seen by his aping the old woman. I could tell you a hundred freaks of his where he has disguised himself, and never been discovered until he discovered himself. That was a famous trick he played Baron Fitz Alwine's deputy, when he acted as high sheriff during the baron's absence."

"Yes," laughed Much, "that got noised abroad in style; everybody laughed at the sheriff, and applauded Robin Hood for his daring, his good nature, and the successful manner in which he deceived the sheriff."

"What was that?" asked Will Scarlet, "I never heard of that."

"What?" cried Little John, "not about Robin disguising himself as a butcher?"

"As a butcher!" exclaimed Will, in surprise; "no, certainly, I have heard nothing about that."

"Oh, then, I'll tell you," replied Little John. "About four years since meat was very scarce, and the butchers sold it very dearly; the consequence was that the poor people were unable to buy it, and they were all nearly starving; the butchers kept up their prices, and nobody but the rich people could buy, and the butchers began to make good round sums by their cattle. Well, this came to Robin's ears,

for he knows instantly of the wants and sufferings of the poor around, and he resolved to try and remedy the evil. One market morning a butcher was proceeding through Sherwood, upon the back of a fine blood mare, taking a very large drove of horned cattle to market. Robin met him; made a bargain; purchased his stock, mare and all, and made him lend him his dress, and we were ordered to keep him in our custody until Robin returned; and so he started on to the market, disguised as a butcher, upon the mare, and driving his cattle before him. Upon reflection, he expected that as he intended to sell the meat after a fashion of his own, that the butchers might unite, cause a disturbance, and frustrate all his efforts to benefit the poor. It so happened that the deputy sheriff kept a large hostel, where all the butchers put up at when they came to Nottingham, saving those who dwelt in the town. Well, the better to prevent anything of this nature, after driving the cattle into the market-place, he singled out the fattest of the herd and drove it up to the sheriff's hostel. The sheriff was standing at the door when he arrived, and fell into a fit of admiration on seeing the bullock Robin was driving, and expressed it in round terms. Robin then told him that he was but a young butcher, that he had the largest drove in the market, and begged his acceptance of that beast; at the same time asked his assistance, as sheriff, if the butchers should attempt to prevent him selling his cattle. The sheriff joyfully accepted the present; vowed he'd hang every butcher that dared to interfere with him; swore he was a fine young fellow, and would make the best and handsomest butcher that ever sold meat. Robin gaining his point thus, returned to the market-place, and when the sale commenced, a crowd of poor people came round to see if meat was lowered in price, but they found it was as dear as ever, until Robin Hood, on finding the prices, offered as much meat for a penny as the butchers did for three. This soon became known over the town, and he sold his meat so fast he hardly knew how to take the money. To those who appeared rich, or well able to afford to purchase meat at the butcher's prices, he would not sell an ounce, but to those to whom money was a great object, he sold it freely; and when the butchers began to grow outrageous, to find that he was selling all his meat and their's was not moving off at all, and began to abuse him, he made his price still lower, and sold for a penny as much as they asked five for; but when it got known that he would not sell to the rich and only to the poor, they began to think better of him, and thought him some prodigal who was selling off his cattle in a freakish fit of benevolence; and they found, too, their trade was not injured, for those only who could not afford to buy of them, bought of Robin; they, therefore, ceased their abusive language, and actually when very poor people came to them, although they would not sell themselves, they directed them to Robin, who would, and also gave away a quantity to the very poorest. His motives soon got known, and he was hailed and cheered on all sides; the butchers themselves at last sought his acquaintance, and after conferring together, one of their number stepped up to him and said—

"Jolly friend and brother—your conduct has been strange to-day, but your motive is good; and, therefore, though our trade may be injured by you, yet, in consideration of your intention, we cannot but applaud your 'haviour'; so my brethren think, as we are all of a trade, we cannot do better than to dine together up at the sheriff's to-day."

"With all my heart!" said Robin, merrily. "Accursed be he who would refuse an invitation so

frankly, so honestly, and kindly accorded. I'll go with ye, my brethren true, as soon, and as fast as you list." The butchers cheered him for so cordially accepting their invitation, and they prepared to go up to the sheriff's house to spend a jovial afternoon."

"You know all the incidents uncommonly well," interrupted Much; "I never heard half so much before. Were you there?"

"To be sure I was, although Robin commanded me to stay behind, yet I was not going to let him risk his life without being near at hand; so I tried my hand at a disguise, and when I got near him he knew me in a moment, and shook his head angrily at me for breaking his orders; but when I told him why I had come, he smiled in that pleasant, good-natured way he has, and squeezing my hand, thanked me, and bade me never to mind his harsh words, and to take care of myself. I mixed with the crowd, and so saw everything that took place."

"I should have liked so much to have been with you," said Will Scarlet, his eyes sparkling at the mere anticipation of such a thing.

"Ah! you would, Will," remarked Little John; "it was a rare day, I can assure you."

"Well, go on, let us hear it all," cried Will, anxiously.

"You shall, every bit of it," replied Little John, and continued his story. "When we reached the sheriff's house we went into the hall, and sat down to a good dinner. Robin was placed at the head of the table, and nothing would do but they would have him say grace. He was in one of his merry humours, so he cried out—'You shall have a grace. God bless us all here. The Holy Mother bless the meat we are about to eat, and the cup of sack we shall take after it, provided it is good enough to nourish our blood,—and so ends my grace.' The butchers laughed, and fell to at their dinner in right good earnest; and when they had all finished, the wine went flowing round, Robin exhorting them to drink and be merry, vowing that whatever the cost of the reckoning might be, he would pay for it all. The butchers were delighted; they drank and sung and enjoyed themselves in the highest degree; roaring, shouting, laughing, and drinking, until they began to have a doubt what relationship they bore their father. The sheriff, in the height of their jollity, came in, and they made him sit down and drink with them. He began asking about Robin, seeing that he was king of the feast."

"He is a mad blade! a rare blade! a choice spirit!" cried the butchers. The sheriff turned to me, seeing me more sober than the others, and began to question me.

"This must be some prodigal," he said, "who, having sold houses, lands, and cattle, means to spend all the money thus easily gained."

"It is very likely," I said, scarce knowing what to reply.

"Perhaps he has still something to dispose of, and might be induced to sell whatever he has very cheaply."

"Very likely," I answered, "you had better ask him."

"He went close up to Robin, and, after lauding his liberality, praising him for the noble way in which he spent his money, equal to the wealthiest cavalier, he asked him if he had any horned cattle to dispose of, persuading him that it was beneath the blood of a noble youth like him to keep cattle. Robin laughed within himself as he heard and detected the cunning proposition, and said he had between five hundred and a thousand, which he would dispose of for five hundred golden marks."

" 'I will give you three hundred,' said the sheriff, 'if I like them; if not, it is no bargain.' if you will sell them me. Consider, my gallant youth, three hundred golden merks are better in thy purse than a thousand head of cattle in thy pastures.

" 'It is no bargain yet,' said Robin, laughing. 'As



butchers are charging now, they are worth a merk or two merks a head—such as mine, at least.' Come, shall we say three hundred?' urged the sheriff.

" 'It is too little,' persisted Robin Hood, laughing slyly at me.

"Not to a liberal heart like thine," continued the sheriff, growing more urgent. "Come, it is a bargain; say yes. There, that's right. Where are they, that I may see them at once."

"At once?" said Robin, in surprise.

"Aye," he replied, "if it is not very far, we can ride over and conclude our bargain on the spot. I will take the money with me, and if I like the cattle—which I am sure I shall—I will pay you then and there, and you can come back and finish the night with your friends."

"Oh, it is not far," said Robin, laughing to see how completely the sheriff in trying to buy the cattle was selling himself. "A short ride from here I have several hundred acres of land, and you may see some of my horned cattle grazing on them."

"Not far from here!" echoed the sheriff; "several hundred acres of land—why where can it be?"

"Hush!" whispered Robin; "it would not be so well to mention it here, for private reasons—you understand, eh?"

"Oh—yes perfectly," nodded the sheriff, with a knowing wink; "friends, family?—oh, I know."

"Yes," replied Robin, with affected mystery; "it is just across the forest—I am ready, if you are."

"Oh! quite," said the sheriff, eagerly; "I will order our steeds to be saddled directly, and we will away, without delay. You can easily tell your friends here that we shall return."

"Oh, certainly," replied Robin. The sheriff went to get his money, and see that the steeds were saddled, and, by Robin's wish, I hastened to the wood to get the merrie men, whom I had, in case of an emergency, placed within ear-shot of the bugle, in readiness to receive the sheriff, who was coming to behold Robin Hood's horned cattle. I had not been long gone, as Robin has since told me, when the sheriff called him into his private apartment, and told him the steeds were saddled, and that he had now but to get the money, and they would then start. He bade him sit down a moment or two, and introduced him to his young wife, a pretty lively little lass, and Robin passed the moments of his absence very agreeably, I suppose, for when the sheriff came back, he caught them kissing. He did not like that at all, but his hope of cheating Robin made him swallow his rancour, and though he looked grave, not to express much anger. He said he was quite ready to depart, and now only waited for Robin, who, with a readiness that I don't understand, bid the little pretty wife good-by, and kissed her again, she nothing loath, before her husband's face. He was much scandalised at this, and after bestowing a furious look upon her, dragged Robin Hood by the arm from the room. They mounted their steeds, and were soon in the forest, Robin leading him through the loneliest places to the spot where we were to meet. He dropped innuendoes, which rather startled the sheriff, for as they rode along, he said—

"These are part of my acres of land."

"Thine! that's impossible," said the sheriff; "this wood and all in it belongs to the king."

"That may be," replied Robin; "but I make it mine."

"Thine! How?" inquired the sheriff, with astonishment.

"Oh! you shall see anon," replied Robin.

"This is a lonely, dreary place," said the sheriff, "and grievously infested with outlaws. God keep us from falling in with that desperate villain, Robin Hood! he would speedily strip us of all we possess, and send us home penniless."

"We shall see whether he will or no, for it is most like that you will fall in with him," said Robin, with

a laugh that the sheriff did not seem to approve: altogether he was growing uneasy.

"I wish your estate laid some other way," he said, "or that there was some other way of approaching it."

"There are many ways of approaching it," replied Robin, "but I tell you we are upon it now. This is a part of several hundred acres which I call mine."

"Which you call yours! What do you mean by calling yours? Is it yours only?" inquired the sheriff, anxiously.

"What should I mean by calling, but that I call it mine? You call your wife yours," said Robin, with a laugh.

"And so she is mine," returned the sheriff, with a disagreeable doubt pervading the tone of his voice.

"And yours only; and so are these mine, and mine only," replied Robin.

"Pray what is your name?" asked the sheriff, growing more uneasy than ever.

"That you shall know anon also," said Robin, with a chuckle which the sheriff did not like.

Immediately subsequent to this, an extensive herd of deer passed quickly by at a short distance from them.

"There! there! look, Master Sheriff!" cried Robin Hood; "there are at least a hundred of my fat horned cattle! They are fair and fat to see—how like you them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Will Scarlet, interrupting Little John; "I guessed as much. Ho, ho, ho! a rare trick, truly."

"Ay," continued Little John, "and so the sheriff thought; for he turned at once to Robin and said—'I wish I had not come—I don't like this place—I wish I were gone away from it.'"

"Why?" asked Robin, slapping him on the shoulder. "It is a goodly dwelling-place, I can tell thee, and besides, am I not with thee?"

"That's exactly it. To tell thee the plain truth, good fellow, I do not exactly like thy company," exclaimed the sheriff, scarce knowing, from anxiety and apprehension, what he said.

"Not like my company!" responded Robin. "Beset me, there are not many who say that; but thou art one of the few who do, and I suppose art difficult to please. Nevertheless, thou shalt not go away without having the choice of meeting with some one who may please thee—so thou shalt have a choice."

"With that he put his foot to his mouth, and blew the summons; and we, who had dogged their steps for some distance, were at his side ere he had blown the third peal.

"What is your will, noble master?" I exclaimed, upon reaching him; "pray tell me, and it shall be done."

"As you always say," interrupted Will Scarlet, with a laugh.

"And as I ought to say," observed Little John, goodnaturedly.

"Why," he replied; "I have brought the High Sheriff of Nottingham to look at some of my horned cattle, and to take a stick for supper with me; see that he is treated as becomes my guest and his rank."

"He shall have the best our hostel affords," I responded, "for I know that he will pay well for what he has."

"Pay!" ejaculated the sheriff; "what do you mean by pay?"

"How full of questions you are, Master Sheriff," remarked Robin. "Let me answer you now the questions I deferred a short time ago. You asked me my name—it is Robin Hood."

"I thought so," murmured the sheriff.

"And now you may guess how I make these acres

of land mine. With respect to what we mean by pay, we keep open and free entertainment to the poor; to those who can afford to pay for their entertainment we give nothing, and make them pay for what they have."

"What are your charges?" asked the sheriff, moaningly.

"We have no charges—we affix no prices; we take every coin our rich guest has. You have three hundred, and that is what your entertainment will cost you; therefore I would advise you to eat as much as you can, and drink as much as you can, in order that you may not pay your money without having anything in return for it."

"But, although we placed a good meal before him, the sheriff had no appetite. He tasted but little, but drank considerably—I suppose to keep his courage up. He gave up his three hundred golden marks with the best grace he could assume; and expressing a great desire to go, he was mounted carefully on his horse, and conducted to the borders of the forest. As he quitted us, Robin bade him good night, and desired him to commend him to his wife at home; at which the sheriff made no reply, but thumped his forehead with his fist as he rode away. So ended Robin Hood's adventure with the butchers and the Sheriff of Nottingham."

"That must have been rare fun," said Will Scarlet, when Little John had concluded his story. "I should liked to have seen it all. Did Robin well affect the butcher?"

"As far as dress went; but there was something in his manner betokening gentle blood, which he could not disguise, and it was detected by the fraternity. That was the reason why they believed he was a prodigal. But his person was so well disguised, that unless you had known him to have the disguise, you could not have told it was Robin Hood who confronted you when he stood before you. Many in Nottingham, who knew him in his natural character well, did not recognise him in his assumed one."

"I should like to try my hand at a disguise vastly," cried Will. "I think I could do it very well; at least that is my opinion. Did you ever try, Little John?"

"Yes," he answered, "I once had a trial at it, by Robin's desire."

"And how did you succeed?" asked Will, with an air of interest.

"Oh, pretty well, for that matter," said Little John. "It arose from a strange circumstance. Robin took it in his head one morning, as he was going to visit Halbert Clare and his pretty wife, Grace, that he would disguise himself as a Norman cavalier, and pay the Sheriff of Nottingham a visit—this was after he had the affair with him as a butcher—and accordingly he went. Well, he spent the greater part of the day there in mirth and jollity; flirted with the sheriff's wife, until the poor devil was ready to gnaw his fingers to the bone, or beat his mother; and when he thought he had staid long enough, he came away, whispering in the sheriff's ear many thanks for his handsome entertainment to Robin Hood. Before the man could recover his surprise, he was away in full speed for the wood. He told me all the incidents that transpired, and we had much laughter over them. I expressed my surprise at his being able so to alter his natural character, as to be able to deceive those who had been in his company before long enough to know his face and form well; and I repeated that we all had our certain abilities, which we shone in; one man was more expert at one weapon than another; and, again, that one had some gift which the other did not possess, and so on; and that, I believed, was

the reason why he was so happy in what he undertook, for I did not believe he would try anything that he thought he could not accomplish. He laughed, and said I was partly right, but not quite; for that if a man tried hard to attain an art for which, perhaps, he might not have a natural ability, yet he believed that earnest perseverance would go far to make up the deficiency which nature had failed to supply; and, to see what could be done by one who had made no essay in an attempt of the nature I had been praising his effort in, he resolved that I should disguise myself, and seek an adventure. The choice of a disguise was left to myself, and, having heard that a rich Norman had died in the neighbourhood of Nottingham, and, in consequence, alms were to be given to the poor, and a grand interment to take place, I determined to make that place my scene of action, and therefore disguised myself as a mendicant palmer. I had an old hat with a cockle-shell, a staff, a palmer's coat, and a bag for my bread, another for my cheese, and one for any money I might be fortunate enough to get. I made my dress look as wretched and forlorn as I could, and I set out with a light heart and a merrie cheer from the merrie men. In my way I passed several beggars, with their empty scrips, wending their way to the place for which I was bound. I watched their actions narrowly, and tried to imitate them—I fancy with tolerable success; for albeit some of the miserable rogues stared very hard at me, they did not seem to take me for other than I appeared. I walked on, and after passing several, I met with no more for some distance. At length I overtook four stout fellows. One seemed blind, another lame, and the other two had nothing ailing them but dirtiness and filthy rags. I overtook them. Here's brave company, I thought; I may perhaps gain something from these fellows, so I will accost them, and see how much of their trade I can learn in a few questions.

"Good morrow, brethren!" I exclaimed. "I am fortunate in meeting with you; which way do you go?"

"You will, perhaps, be good enough to tell me. I hope it is my way, for I want company sadly; I have walked for some time alone."

"This way," grunted one of the fellows, in a gruff voice and a rude manner, and all of them stared at me as if they had seen a turret of Linton Abbey taking a walk in the forest after breakfast. I had heard the abbey bell tolling dolefully, and not liking the looks or 'haviour of these ragged rips, I said, in a tone of voice not a whit more pleasant than his who had addressed me—"What is here to do that I see so many of our tattered fraternity stumping in this direction, eh? Why are the bells ringing in this miserable manner? Is there a dog to be hung for stealing a dinner his master refused to give him? Is there a bull dead through having caught a cold in his horns? Is there a Norman found honest, a churchman discovered to be good and virtuous, a rich man charitable, or one of your vagabond brothers set in the stocks?"

"No!" said one of them to me, with a sneer, "there is a Norman dead near here, and things to be distributed to such as us who need them—perhaps a scrap of cheese, ten crumbs of bread, or the eighteenth part of the seventh of a penny—perhaps not so much. Will you like to come and share it with us?"

"Anything but your friendship, or your virtues," I answered. "Of the first, it might get my neck into danger; and the second, you have not an atom to spare, having so little for yourselves."

"You try hard to be witty this morning, you greasy pole," cried the lustiest among them, a big fellow, armed with a stout staff, "but we do not feel

disposed to be the subjects of your scurvy jests. Now let me tell you something which is meant in earnest: we have many brethren in London, in Coventry, in Berwick, in Dover, and in all parts of this country; I have been with them all in all their resorts, but I never clapped my eyes upon so crooked, so ill-favoured, ungainly, cut-throat-looking a cur as thou; thy company disgraces us; so take that crack of the crown, loon, and keep thee back from us." With that he let at me a blow upon the skull with such a twang you might have heard it at the trysting tree, a good three miles from hence.

"That was rather *too* hard, more than you could bear *quietly*, of course," laughed Will Scarlet.

"Yes," returned Little John, smiling, "I don't like to boast of my capabilities, but there are few, I know, who can compete with me at the quarter-staff. The rogue made me angry, he hit me very hard; but I twirled his staff from his grasp at one blow, and fell upon him so soundly, that he laid down and roared for mercy, which I granted him when my arm ached."

"What must his sides have done!" exclaimed Much. "I know the weight of your staff, having felt it."

"Why, I fancy he laid very uneasily for some time after," said Little John. "When I was satisfied with him, I determined not to let the others off easily, for I had a mighty shrewd guess that those two gentry who appeared blind and lame were only feigning those afflictions. 'Now, you filthy dogs,' I cried, 'I shall not keep me back from ye, but I'll have a bout all round with ye; since ye are so full of blows and foul words, ye shall have your fill of them.' But none of them would oppose me single-handed, therefore I vowed they should all four; and as they were all armed, there was no unfair play in it. I laid about me stoutly; you would have laughed heartily, Will, if you had seen the blind man open his eyes, and stare at me when I gave him a knock, and the leap the lame man performed, on aiming a blow at his shins. I got before them—I kept them together, as a drover does his cattle—and never were four rogues more stoutly handled than were these four beggars. As I gave one a whack over his leg, his wallet fell from his side with the skip he gave, and out rolled a quantity of gold pieces. 'Oh, ho!' cried I, 'this alters the face of things. Now, rascals, unless you each give up every penny you have, you shall be beaten by me to a jelly,' and I worked hard to fulfil my promise. The knaves roared for mercy, and none granted I, until they swore to comply with my demand. When I left off, they were all so sore, they could scarce lift a limb, and I found no difficulty in clearing their garments of their gold—though, beshrew me, it was a filthy task; however, I filled my bag with their merks, and left them to pursue their way as best they might. I returned to Robin Hood, thinking my adventure in a disguise quite sufficient to be satisfied with; and when I neared the trysting tree, I saw Robin Hood and the merrie men practising with the bow at willow-wands. As soon as he observed me, he called out, 'What, Little John, so soon returned—what success? Have you failed, or have you no heart to proceed? Out with your news!'

"I have no news but good news," I replied. 'I have found this disguise as fortunate to me, as you yours with the Sheriff of Nottingham.'

"Fortunate!" echoed he. 'Why, how have you sped with your beggar's trade? I long to hear and see some proofs of your success.'

"You shall," said I, exposing my wallet. 'Here are six hundred and three golden merks, which I have taken from members of the begging tribe.'

"Robin instantly looked serious. 'What mean you! taken mail from the poor beggars! Little John, I hope it is not so?' I then up and told him the whole affair, and how I was sure these were rascals by trade, who robbed and stole whenever they had a chance; and though having plenty of money, would beg and moan to obtain alms, which ought more justly to be applied to those who needed it. I compared them to the priests who wrung the hard-earned money from the poor, for your poor people give more to their poorer brethren than the rich, because they can sympathise with their poverty, and your rich people cannot understand it; and as we levied contributions upon the priests, because they were extortioners from the poor, so, upon the same principle, I told him I took the merks from these rogues, who were extortioners by trade."

"And what said he?" asked Will, eagerly.

"Why, he laughed at my view of the matter, and said it was a good one; he told me he should call me the forest philosopher, for I found a reason and an argument to defend all my acts. I told him we should all be able to do so, for it was not proper or manly in a man to do anything he could not defend; he said I was right: and we had a right jovial afternoon after it, none of us the less pleased that such an addition had been made to our funds."

"I see, Little John, you have tried your hand at most things," said Will Scarlet.

"At a great many," replied he, "and have no reason to be ashamed of my success."

"And now you are about to try one more," laughed Will, "and that's matrimony; I hope you will be as successful in that as you have in all other things."

"I hope I shall," returned Little John, earnestly, "and I have not a doubt of it."

As these words passed his lips they reached Barnsdale-hall and entered the house together.

CHAPTER IV.

VIO.—"You are fair.

My lord and master loves you; oh, such love
Could be but recompensed, though you were crowned
The nonpareil of beauty!

OLI.—How does he love me?

VIO.—With adorations."

SHAKESPEARE.

"A course of small quiet attentions, not so pointed as to alarm, nor so vague as to be misunderstood, with now and then a look of kindness, and little or nothing said upon it, leaves nature for your mistress, and she fashions it to her own mind"—STEWART.

"Over the light blue hills,
There came a noise of revellers:

* * * * *
Like to a moving vintage down they came,
Crowned with green leaves and faces all on flame;
All madly dancing through the pleasant valley."

JOHN KEATS.

WILL SCARLET had taken upon himself to name the wedding day, when the consent of his parents was obtained to the marriage of Little John and Winifred, Much and Barbara; and opposed to anything in the shape of delay, he had at first named the second day from the one upon which the soft confessions were made, for the agreeable ceremony to take place; he was, however, instantly overruled by the ladies, who protested that no one could get decently married at so short a notice. Will contended that half an hour, or less, would have sufficed him, if opportunity had served, to marry Maude, and he did not see why they should not be contented with two days; he said he hated to be put

off in any way when there was no actual necessity for it, but a mere regard for appearances; he had been a sufferer by delays, and it was his advice that whatever was wished done, particularly marriage, the best and surest way to accomplish it was to do it directly it was in our power; and that if we lost the chance through our own false delicacy, we deserved all the pain and disappointment we were most likely to experience. His reasoning, however, failed to convince the ladies.

There was an established opinion, a rule which they resolved not to break through, and they stoutly maintained their side of the question. Will was very energetic, but he found himself compelled to give way; he named the next day. "Too soon," was the reply, and he grew very inquisitive to know what they could possibly want with more than three days. They did not exactly know themselves, and therefore could not very easily give him a satisfactory reply; but they gave him a woman's reason for it—"they wanted more time, because—they did;" and to all the "whys" he put to them, that was the "because" he received in answer. Finding it was no use to stand out, he named the fourth day; it would not do; the fifth was almost as bad; then came the sixth, and then the seventh; beyond this he vowed he would not go. The ladies claimed at least a fortnight, and he stoutly resisted it; said it was unnatural—it was against all reason, that a couple who loved each other should wish to wait a fortnight, when they might be married on the morrow; there was something so preposterous in it that he would not consent to it, or even believe that they wished him to do so.

Upon this point he was inflexible, they could not change him; he resolved to name the day, and he determined that it should not extend to a fortnight; after a great deal of arguing, he at length agreed to defer it to the tenth day. Seven of them had already elapsed, when he, Little John, and Much arrived at the Hall, for the purpose of completing the arrangements; for they intended having a merry day, to compensate for the disappointment which the people around experienced upon the day Will was to have been married there to Maude. Accordingly everything which was to have taken place upon that day, it was intended should be done on the coming wedding day, with such additions as might materially contribute to the gratification of all who were to be present and partakers of the festivity. Every available part of the grounds fronting and at the back of the Hall, was used to make arenas, &c., for the various pastimes and sports, and nothing was forgotten which could by any possible contingency add to the thorough and unalloyed enjoyment of the happy day. Will was the most active of the active; he had something to do with everything that was done; he was here, there, and everywhere; had it been his own marriage, he could not have worked with more untiring perseverance than he did. He was unwearied in his exertions to dispose everything so that the day should pass off delightfully. While in the midst of his labours, a thought suddenly struck him; he clapped his hands delightedly together, and gave way to a fit of laughter that seemed likely to make a blood vessel give way. He recovered his breath only to burst into a succession of these paroxysms, until Robin Hood, who was with him, almost grew alarmed; he shook him, and asked him in a serious tone of voice, what induced him to laugh thus violently.

"I'll wager my boy's head to the butt of a spear, you'll never guess," he said, when he recovered his breath.

"It must be something highly amusing, something

particularly diverting, to make you laugh in this extraordinary fashion!" exclaimed Robin Hood.

"It is diverting, and so you will say when you hear it," replied Will, indulging in another fit; and when he gained a little wind, the tears still trickling down his cheeks from the effects of his excessive mirth, he continued—"You know that my six brothers are all the same sort of quiet, steady foresters, honest, hearty, and sincere, but nothing about them approaching tender blandishments—"

"Well?" said Robin Hood, smiling.

"Well!" exclaimed Will, "I have an idea which will create us a great deal of fun; I have considerable influence with them, and I'll persuade them to marry—"

"To do what?" cried Robin, with astonishment.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Will. "I guessed how surprised you'd be. Yes! I'll go and collect them all together, and persuade them to get married on the same day that Barby and Winny are. Oh! it will be glorious sport, because they will have, of course, to make love before they can get wedded. You must woo before you marry, and I'll go about with them love-making! Ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho! how I shall enjoy it!"

"The thing's impossible," observed Robin, laughing heartily at Will's strange idea. "Your brothers are too sedate, too phlegmatic, to marry; and, besides, even if you persuaded them, there is only three days to woo and wed in."

"So much the better—the shorter the better! Ha! ha! ha! only fancy Gregory—steady, dull-headed, straightforward Gregory—making love! Oh, it's delicious! How came I never to think of it before? Come along, Robin; there is no time to lose. We will seek them out, get them altogether, and I will harangue them."

"Nay, marriage is somewhat too serious a thing to jest upon Will," said Robin; "particularly as, after the jest is carried out, there's no possibility of setting it aside. If there should be anything occur to make any of your brothers unhappy, after being married through your persuasion, your jest will become rather an earnest affair."

"Oh, I'll take care of that; I'll look out their wives for them, and I'll warrant me I suit them so well, there will be no grumbling afterwards. To start with, I know a pretty little body who is very fond of my brother Herbert; she told me as much, and from what I have seen and know of her, I am sure she will make him a very good wife."

"Has he seen her?" inquired Robin.

"To be sure he has, often; but, poor simple fellow, he knows nothing about it; has no idea that she is a jot fonder of him than me. I have hinted it several times to him, but he does not understand anything about it. I know a lass, too, who will just suit Egbert, and Maude was speaking of somebody who would be the very wife for Harold; so I have good ground to proceed upon, you see;" and Will, as he said this, rubbed his hands with every appearance of unmixed delight.

"That makes only three of your number; who are the other three to have?" observed Robin.

"Oh, I can't exactly say yet; but I shall find them three young girls who will suit them, depend on't," persisted Will.

"But when you have found the three young girls who will suit them," argued Robin, "how know you whether your three brothers will suit them?"

"Oh, you need not fear that," cried Will, "they are three stout-built, well-made, good-looking fellows, for they are not unlike me; and if they are not quite such sprightly lads as young lasses like, still they

present something too desirable in their appearance for a reasonable—that is, I mean for any willing girl to refuse accepting them as husbands."

"You are very sanguine," remarked Robin. "Do you really expect to persuade them to marry? do you seriously imagine your literal brothers can be induced, upon the representations of a brother so much their younger, to make so entire a change in their mode of life?"

"You shall see whether I have not good cause to be sanguine, in a very few minutes, if you will come with me," uttered Will, nodding his head confidently. "Let me see; first, I'll just arrange about the addition of the marrying couples, in order to prevent any confusion, and while I think of it, for in the hurry of doing so many things it may slip my memory."

"But, Will, you know it is the custom in the forest to kill the deer before you cook it, and cook it before you eat it," exclaimed Robin: "it is of little use counting gains until you have got them. Suppose you were to see what success you will meet with in your persuasions, before you make preparations for the wedding?"

"Oh, it makes no difference to me," said Will, complacently.

"No," returned Robin, "but it might make all the difference to your brothers, if they did not feel disposed to accede to your wishes; quiet, inoffensive, and good-natured as they are, they might not exactly feel agreeably in being laughed at."

"Lord bless you! they would laugh at it as much as anybody," cried Will, with a perfect satisfaction that he knew their sentiments almost better than they did themselves. "They would think it a capital joke, and so it would be; but to satisfy your scruples, I'll be guided by your wish, and pop the question to them before I pop it to the ladies, and after them pop it to the fathers and mothers—ah, there goes Herbert across the lawn. Hilloh, Herbert! heigh! here, lad!"

"What want ye, Willy?" said Herbert, stopping.

"Where's Egbert, Harold, Rupert, Stephen, and Hereward?" he asked.

"Practising with the bow at a fluttering string on a willow wand," he replied. "Hereward has been shooting better to-day than I ever knew him to do. Come and join us, Willy."

"Not now, Herbert, for I have something more important to do," answered Will; "but do you just run to them all, and bring them here to me; I have something very particular to say to them; be quick."

"What, all of them?" interrogated Herbert.

"Every one of them; I will wait here for them. Away with thee, Herbert, there is little time to spare," said Will, laying his hand upon his brother's shoulder to urge him.

"I am gone, Willy," said Herbert, running off; and soon they heard him calling his brothers at the top of his voice, and shortly he returned with them; they came laughing up to the spot, and when they arrived, the eldest ejaculated—

"What's this, Willy, so particular you have to say to us? What fawn's antlers have you found?"

"I leave all such discoveries to you, Gregory," returned Will, with a laugh.

"Hist!" said Hereward, "he is going to tell us that a shaft tapering from middle to pile and feather, is your only arrow to shoot in the wind's eye with, at a short distance."

"And so it is," said Will, "with a steady hand."

"If you want to hit wide of your mark, by all means," said Robin, quietly; "but for a short distance, and with a wind, I have always found a shaft tapering from the feather make the truest aim."

"Very well, never mind," returned Will, "we have argued the question many times, but I don't think you competent to decide."

"Not Robin Hood?" cried the brothers, with one accord, and instantly burst into a laugh.

"No!" cried Will, energetically, "for he would hit a mark at a hundred yards if he had a willow wand for a bow, and a quarter-staff for a shaft; he hits his mark with any arrow; it's only your novice who discovers which is the arrow he shoots best with, and under what circumstances it can be most favourably used. But I did not want you here to talk such a matter as this over with you; it is something which concerns your future welfare and happiness, which induces me to address you."

"Then let's have it, Will, at once," said Gregory, "for I want to get back to the shooting."

"Well then, lads, you all love and honour our father, don't ye?" commenced Will.

"Who dare gainsay it?" said Gregory.

"Nobody that I know of," replied Will; "or I'd lend them my staff over their ears if they did. Well, that point's settled. He has always done everything which became a man proud of his honour, and a true Saxon."

"To be sure," cried Egbert. "Why, Will, has any one been speaking foully against him, belying him? By the Mass, if they have, and you point them out, it shall go hard but they are paid with interest for it."

"Oh, if you intend to interrupt me in this way, it will take the whole day to say all I have got to tell you," said Will; "hear me out before you make any reply. Nod when you mean yes, and shake your head when you mean no, and then I shall stand some chance of being listened to attentively, and without interruption. Now, here goes again. Our father has done everything worthy of imitation; has he not? That's right. So has our mother? That's right. They have lived happily together; our father has made our mother happy, and hasn't she made him happy? I should rather think she had. Very well, then, they being married, they have contributed to each other's happiness; have they not? To be sure they have; and if they had not married, we should not have been here; that's pretty clear, I think, eh? We have been very happy, considering; haven't we? Well, then, we ought to be very much obliged to them for being married, bringing us into the world, and being the cause of our having received that happiness; you agree to that? Very well, then, as they set you such a good example, don't you think, lads, that the best thing you can do is to get married?"

"Married!" exclaimed the brothers, with the most undisguised astonishment.

"Aye," returned Will, "married. You can't be better employed at any time, than just the little moment you are putting on the ring, nor happier than afterwards, when you know you have a dear little creature who loves you, and is always doing something to please you and make you comfortable. Look at I and Maude, you rogues; don't you envy us? of course you do, every minute of the day. Look at Robin and Marian, and even Little John—there's an example for you! he is going to get married, ha, ha, ha! can you have any scruple after that? if he did not think it was not only pleasant, but right and proper, you wouldn't catch him at it; and there's Much, too, in a fever of anxiety and excitement for the ceremony to take place, for fear something might turn up, as in my case, to prevent it. Do you want more proofs? if so, I can furnish you them. There's Hal, and his wife Grace, at Nottingham; there's Allan Clare of

the Dale, and his beautiful lady; think of them and then wonder what the deuce you have been about all this while never to have got married; then be ashamed that you have not tried to make some tender, delicate little woman happy. It is every man's duty to try and make women happy; they are gentle, tender things, with nobody to look after their wants and welfare but us, and the only way to do so properly is to marry, and then you have always one you can cherish; that's my view of it, and there isn't one of you can say you ought not to be married, is there? You need not be so long shaking your heads, you can't say that you ought not to be married? To be sure not; very well, then, I say you ought to be married, and Friar Tuck says the Holy Book tells us we ought; therefore, you have nothing to do but get married at once—so don't say you won't, because you must. Do you hear? I say you must."

"Must!" said Hereward, "there's no must about it; it may be all very well, and very nice, but though it ought to be done, it doesn't follow that a man wants a wife, because he ought to have one. I don't want a wife."

"Don't you? but I know a very pretty little girl that wants a husband. Now, Hereward, a man ought to be married, if it's only to fulfil his duty of making some woman happy. Well, you don't love any particular woman?"

"Yes I do," interrupted Hereward, with a serious look.

"You do! who?" asked Will, with some little surprise.

"Why, mother," returned Hereward, with a look as much as to say, 'I would not advise any one to say I don't.'

"Pshaw!" cried Will, laughing, "of course you reverence, venerate, and love mother; I know that; but that is not the love I mean. The love I mean is a feeling which—it's a sensation that comes all over you—a strange, thrilling, heart-bumping liking for a female who is—a—not your mother; but oh! she is to you better than all things in the world—nothing can equal her."

"What, not that leash of hounds of Robin's, or his bow, which carries a north country mile and an inch?" asked Gregory, with a chuckle that said very plainly, that beats her out and out.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Robin. "Bravo, Gregory, that's a well-levelled shaft. I say, Will, what do you say to that?"

"Why, as he does not exactly know what love is," exclaimed Will, quite staggered at Gregory's remark, "I see it is of no use to explain what love is to him; he must find it out, and he will when he gets married."

"Ay! but I'm not going to get married," said Gregory.

"Aint you," responded Will, quickly, "you'll see whether you are not, my boy. Look ye, Gregory, can you say a man ought not to get married?"

"Why, no," said Gregory, hesitatingly.

"Ought he to live only for himself?" asked Will, confidently anticipating the reply; but Gregory did not answer, as if he suspected that his reply would be made use of. Will, with an affectation of indignant astonishment, continued, "Why, you will never tell me, Gregory, you think that a man ought to be so infamously selfish as to wish to live for himself?"

"No, certainly not; but—"

"Very well; then he ought to get married; can any of you deny that conclusion?" asked Will, triumphantly. The brothers shook their heads. "To be sure not," he proceeded, "so you will follow our

good examples and get married, and, as some atonement for having lived single so long, you must be married on the same day Barby and Winifred are."

"What, three days hence!" said Egbert, "there isn't time, Willy; where are the wives to come from?"

"There's plenty of time," replied Will, "and I'll find re wives who shall please ye all."

"But I'm not going to get married," persisted Gregory.

"Why, you can't retract," said Will, earnestly, "you acknowledged a man ought to be married."

"Yes, but we don't always feel inclined to do what we ought; I don't feel inclined to be married," said Gregory.

"I did'n't believe any brother of mine was so selfish," uttered Will, as if hurt at the discovery.

"Oh, never mind, Gregory," said Rupert, persuasively. He was one who was contented with everything, took everything as it came, was quiet-tempered, and agreeable to whatever was proposed to him, provided there was nothing mean or dishonourable in the proposition. "Let Will have his own way. If he'll find me a wife, I'll have her; it is of no use making a bother about it; he has set his heart on it, you can see."

"Oh yes," observed Stephen, "I dare say it is as Will says, we ought to be married, and we may as well be so when Barby is married as at any other time."

"I've no objection," chimed in Harold.

"I suppose I must," said Gregory. "You are a devil, Will; you will have your own way; you always would from a baby, and always did."

"And I hope I shall now," returned Will, laughing; "some day you will be thanking me for having it now."

"We shall see," replied Gregory; "if I am to be married to oblige you, I hope you will get me a nice little wife to oblige me."

"You shall all have good ones, pretty and pleasing," said Will, "or I am no judge of a pretty girl."

"I can save you the trouble," remarked Herbert, quietly, "I have got mine."

"Got yours! Herbert," echoed Will, surprisedly, "how, when, who?"

"Annas Maydew is mine; we had agreed to be married when my sisters were," he answered.

"Why, you sly villain," cried Will, slapping him on the shoulder, "I was hinting to you the other day about her, and you did not say anything to me of this."

"We had not decided then."

"Well, but when I spoke of her, you said nothing to me."

"What should I say? You told me she was very pretty, and very lively, and a good little girl, and would make a good wife. I knew all that, and I said yes. You told me you thought she was fond of me, and that she would have me if I asked her, and several things more. Well, I knew them all, and so did you; therefore I had nothing to say, of course."

"Oh, but I should have found plenty to have said if I had known all this as you did," said Will. "I fancied there was something of the sort, for I noticed Annas watching him when he was not looking at her, and smiling so pleasantly, and blushing so when he spoke to her, that I asked her if she did not like him, and she said yes; but I never for a moment thought he had been love-making, and so never asked if he had. I then proceeded to tell him, thinking I was doing him a service; but he answered me so indifferently, I concluded it was a hopeless case, little imagining my gentleman had been all this while

pleading his cause with the young lady. Bravo, Herbert, I admire your spirit and taste. I say, we are the two youngest of the family, and beat the rest hollow."

"Not so fast, Willy," said Harold, "you did not anticipate me in your marriage proposition, for I had already made up my mind to be married; indeed I had promised Maude I would."

"Oh, you had, eh?" ejaculated Will, "then Maude has not only looked you out a wife, but got you to promise to marry her."

"Yes," replied Harold, "and now I come to think on't, it must be very pleasant living with a sweet little wife, and I am very glad I consented."

"Well," said Gregory, "since you are all bent on matrimony, I am glad I have consented, for when there's a chase I don't like to be out of the hunt. So Will, hurrah for a wife, boy! a good one and true."

"And you all consent to be married on the same day as our sisters?" asked Will, with sparkling eyes.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Hurrah!" cried Will, flinging up his cap.

"Hurrah!" cried the brothers, laughing with great glee.

"I say, Robin," cried Will, "you have the credit of loving the women most truly."

"And so I do," replied he.

"Well, but don't you think I love them as much as you?" inquired Will, looking steadfastly at him.

"I hope you do," he returned, smiling, "for then they have a fast friend in you."

"Now, Will, don't forget us who have not found our own wives," said Egbert, "but be quick and bring us together, because I dare say the girls will like to say something to us before we marry."

"There is no doubt of that," uttered Will; "come along with me. I have a choice one for you, Egbert, already in my eye; and I think I know three others who will suit Gregory, Rupert, and Stephen."

"Don't let mine be too old, Will, or too fat," suggested Rupert.

"I'll hit your taste, I warrant me," replied Will. "Come along, lads, it won't take us long to run over to the village, and then I'll introduce you; and those who can't make love for themselves, I'll do it for them."

"It is a pity you can't marry them for us," said Egbert, "you seem so pleased about it."

"Not half so pleased," rejoined Will, "as you will be after you are married. Come along. I say, Robin, I told you I should be successful; you see I might have made my arrangements—those old proverbs are fudge, all that about cooking meat before you eat it, I don't believe a word of it. Now for the love making, ha! ha! ha!"

And taking the arm of his brother Gregory, for fear he might recede, he led the way, as merry and as happy as any one could well be, to a little village which was but a short distance from Barnsdale Hall. Leaving Robin to return to the house and communicate the intended addition of six couples to the marriage already about to take place, the brothers went along very jovially, and soon reached the village. Herbert disengaged himself from the party, and was speedily by the side of his ladye love; Harold, as soon as opportunity served, followed his example; and the four disengaged brothers grew anxious after that to be engaged as early as it could be accomplished. Accordingly, as the nearest lady Will had speculated upon for one of his brothers was the one destined for Egbert, he stopped there; and the lady being at home, he introduced his brother to her: she was a smiling, pleasing-faced lass, whose kind nature shone out in

her looks and words. Will became very eloquent on behalf of his brother, and she honestly confessed she perfectly agreed with him; he then eloquently enlarged upon the good qualities of his brother, quite raising an interest in her for him, and persuading her she could not do better than be married to him, and that if she consented, the sooner she fulfilled her promise the better. After exercising all the persuasive language he was master of, the lady, with a very great deal of blushing at the abrupt declaration made to her, gave every hope that the wishes of Will should be realised, and so he left Egbert to finish what he had so well begun. When they got out of the house, Stephen said—

"I say, Will, I wish I could talk like you."

"So you might, if you were to try; nothing is so easy as to talk pleasantly to a female," observed Will; "it matters not what you say, you have only to speak in a kind tone, and look as kindly as you speak, and you are sure to please them."

"Is that all?" remarked Stephen. "Well, I think I can do that. But I say, Will, is the lady you've looked out for me as pleasant looking as Egbert's?"

"What is your taste?" asked Will, preparing, with the air of a connoisseur, to direct it, if he expressed an ignorance of what it should consist.

"Oh," said Stephen, "I am not very particular, something like Maude will do."

"Like Maude?" echoed Will, thunderstruck at the coolness with which Stephen made the remark; "something like Maude will do!" he reiterated, "I should think it would; a right modest remark, truly. Why, Stephen, there is not another like her in the world."

"Isn't there? Oh, I did not know that—how should I?" returned he, simply; "I have never travelled like you have, so I am not likely to know; only if you know any one of her sort now, I should like it better."

"No, nor I don't know any of her sort," he replied, half affronted at his brother's presumption. It was, however, but for a moment; he burst out into a laugh, and said, "I know better now what will please you, and will try if I can't satisfy you. You remember Minny Meadows, don't you?"

"Yes," said Stephen, thoughtfully, "a young girl with long dark hair and bright black eyes, used to laugh at me and pinch me, because she said I was so sleepy and dull. Oh, yes, I remember her. I liked her a little—I don't know why; only she was a lively little girl, always merry. I recollect once, when we were alone, she asked me if I had ever kissed a girl in my life."

"And what said you?" asked Will, laughing.

"I told her to be sure I had—I had kissed both my sisters. She laughed at me, and asked if I had kissed no other female, and I said, 'Yes, my mother.'"

"Your mother—pshaw!" cried Will. "Well, what else said she?"

"Oh, she laughed more than ever, and asked if I had kissed any one else. I told her no; and she wanted to know if I didn't wish to try. I said no, not particularly —"

"And didn't you kiss her?" asked Will, in unaffected surprise.

"Kiss her!" echoed Stephen. "No, to be sure not; never thought of such a thing. When I said that, she laughed in my face, and was very merry."

"Didn't she say anything?" asked Will.

"No, nothing; but I think she called me a fool, and ran laughing away," concluded Stephen.

"So I should think," said Will. "Well, she is the lady I have marked out for your wife. Will she do?"

"Oh, very well—very nicely," said Stephen, rubbing his hands. "But what shall I say to her when we are alone?"

"Oh, all sorts of kind things," returned Will.

"Who would take me for the youngest brother of seven?" asked Will, mirthfully, "if they saw me teaching you all how to make love?"

"Ha! but you were always after the young girls,



"Yes, but which is the best sort?" interrogated Stephen. "Tell me something to begin with; then I can go on, perhaps, pretty well."

Master Will," said Rupert. "Besides, Robin Hood taught you, and there's nobody knows how to please a woman like him."

"Well, but what shall I say?" inquired Stephen, impatiently. "Tell me, else you will forget it."

"Why, when you get alone with her, tell her you want to have a few lessons in kissing," said Will; "give her one, and ask her whether she does not think you will make a good pupil. My life on't, you will find plenty to talk about afterwards."

"Oh! but I don't like," said Stephen, fancying Will was advising rather too bold a step for one who was quite a novice in the art.

"Don't like!" reiterated Will, scornfully; "beehrew me, Stephen, an' I did not know you to be a stout woodsman, I should think you no better than a great girl dressed up."

"But suppose she shouldn't like it, and be offended?" asked Stephen.

"Why kiss her again, and tell her you will try and do it better until you please her," argued Will; "offended, too! as if kissing a girl could offend her. I never heard of any one yet who did not like kissing, provided the kiss was not given by one you couldn't fancy, and then, of course, that alters the case; but rest assured, Stephen, Minny would never have asked you that question if she had not fancied you: so you need not be afraid."

Stephen promised to pluck up heart and woo this Minny Meadows like a man, and Rupert wanted to know whether he couldn't stop with him to see how he did it, in order that when it came to his turn he might know how to go about it; but Will put a decided negative upon that request, and tried to explain how two were company and three none. Rupert did not exactly understand it, but was content to take Will's reasoning as law, and before the subject was finished they entered the cottage where dwelt Minny Meadows. Will, who was as busy as a bee on a blossom, and who doated upon his occupation, looked round for Minny as he entered. She was at home and alone.

"Ah, my pretty Minny, I am glad to find you. I wanted to see you very particularly," said he, approaching and taking her hand.

"I am glad I am so fortunate in being at home to meet you," she replied, dropping a curtesy.

"Yes," replied Will, "and I am not the only one who wants to see you particularly. My brother Stephen wants to say something to you of great importance."

"He does!" answered Minny, blushing up to the eyes suddenly. "What can he want to say to me particularly?"

"I want to have," said Stephen, quickly, with a face as pale as death, and a beating heart—"I want to have a few lessons —"

"Hush!" said Will, laughing. "Don't be in such a confounded hurry, man. He will tell you presently, Minny, what he wants; in the meantime let me tell you what I want. You have heard my sisters are going to be married in three days' time?"

"Oh, yes, and that you are going to have rare doings at the Hall," returned Minny.

"Exactly, and we wish you very particularly to be there—mind, very particularly," said Will.

"Thank you. I hope to come, certainly. I shall like very much to come; all the village will be there, I hear."

"All the lads and lasses will be there, and I hope there will be a good many married upon that day. You will bring your sweetheart, Minny, and —"

"No, no," interrupted Stephen, "no, you forget, Will —"

"No, I do not," said Will, interrupting in his turn. "Just hold your tongue a minute or two; I

had no idea you would have been so anxious. You will bring your sweetheart, Minny?"

"I haven't one to bring," she said, with a smile.

"Do you mean that, Minny?" asked Will, looking at her earnestly.

"Yes I do, indeed," she replied, blushing, and affecting a laugh; "I have not one I like well enough to call him a sweetheart."

"Oh," said Will, "I fancied you would have come with your sweetheart, and taking advantage of the ceremony being performed, have got married."

"Oh no," cried she, laughingly, "I have not one, I assure you, or there is no knowing what I might have done."

"Then I'll be your sweetheart," cried Stephen, with a sudden exertion of spirit, looking, with inflated nostrils, almost in a rage rather than affectionate.

"Bravo!" cried Will, slapping him on the shoulder, "well said, Stephen! try again."

"Yes," said Stephen, "I will, Minny, I'll be your sweetheart; and I'll come and fetch you to the Hall; and we'll be married at the same time my sisters are."

"Bravely said, Stephen!" exclaimed Will, "bravely said! There, Minny, there's an offer. Now let me tell you, that I will answer, by my honour, that he is sincere and in earnest. You tell me you are not engaged, and there is nothing so particularly ill-looking in Stephen that you should refuse him on that point, so you had better accept him; and as when you have made your mind up, there is no use in waiting a long time before you wed, why, I see nothing to prevent you marrying when Barby and Winny do. What do you say?"

"Oh, dear me! you have taken me by surprise; I am so totally unprepared I don't know what to say," murmured Minny, looking terribly confused.

"Say you'll have me," said Stephen, gathering courage from Will's applause, "I like you, Minny—I really do like you. I told you, Will, I did—didn't I?"

"That he did," said Will, putting in a good word or two for him.

"Yes," continued Stephen, "and I told him too, Minny, that you one day asked me if I had ever kissed—"

"Oh, he told me almost as much as I dare say he will tell you while we are away," hastily interrupted Will. "Come, Rupert and Gregory, let us begone; there is a great deal to do yet. We shall be sure to see you at the Hall, Minny?"

"Oh, yes, I shall be sure to come," said the maiden, delightedly.

"And in your wedding dress. Maude is coming into the village this evening; she has a great deal of taste, and I'll recommend her to you," said Will, pressing Minny's hands. She held down her head, and Will continued, "If you don't persuade her, Stephen, to be a bride that morning, then you are no Gamwell."

"I'll try for it," said Stephen, coming out wonderfully, "for I'll talk in a kind tone to you, Minny, and I'll look at you kindly, and I'll kiss—I mean I'll squeeze your lips—no, I mean your hands—and perhaps I shall please you, and then you will like me?"

"I can't say," said Minny, looking archly at him.

"Well, I shall leave him to try and persuade you to love him, and that's better than liking," said Will, smiling; and taking his two brothers by the arm. "Adieu, my pretty sister Minny, that will be," he cried; "don't be too hard to be persuaded; he means kindly and lovingly, if he has not got the tongue to say so. Good-bye." So saying, he and his two brothers quitted the house.

"Now then," said Gregory, "where are our two wives?"

"Why, they live close here," replied Will; "they are two cousins, Mabel and Editha Flowerfeld."

"Oh, I know them well enough," said Gregory.

"So do I," exclaimed Rupert.

"So you ought, for they are two pretty girls," returned Will, "and you ought to know them a great deal better than I, who only came to Barnsdale scarce a year and a half ago; yet I would wager my best bow to a broken shaft, I know all in the village better than any of you."

"That's very likely, you are such a fellow to skip about, and laugh and talk," returned Gregory, "we are none of us like you."

"No," said Will, "if you were, I should not have to come about with you love-making."

"Oh," answered Gregory, "this will be easier work than I thought for; I have often spoken to these two girls, and very nice girls they are—"

Oh, you think that?" said Will.

"Yes," replied Gregory, "and I shan't mind asking Editha to marry me."

"Very true," observed Will, "but you must take care how you do it; it won't do to bolt it out plump, because the chances are ten to one but you are refused."

"Well, what should I say? I don't understand what else I could say—I want her to marry me, and I say to her. Will you marry me? I can't say more or less," said the literal Gregory.

"That's all very well, but you must lead the conversation to it," exclaimed Will.

"How do you mean lead the conversation to it?" inquired Gregory.

"Do you remember I asked Minny Meadows to bring her sweetheart to the Hall?" said Will.

"Yes," answered Gregory, "and she said she hadn't got one."

"Very well," returned Will, "and that gave an opportunity for Stephen to make her an offer."

"So it did!" ejaculated Rupert; "well, that's very strange; I shouldn't have thought of that."

"Ah! I see," exclaimed Gregory, thoughtfully, "getting a wife is like taking a deer, you must lay up for it if you wish to get it, for if you come plump on it suddenly, whisk! it's away, and it will be some time before you have another chance at it."

"True," replied Will; "bear that in mind, and you'll do. A woman is like a deer: she may be approached successfully with caution; but startle her by any abruptness, she flies off, and the odds are great that you do not get near her again in a hurry."

"Well," exclaimed Gregory, with determination, "I have laid up many a time for deer and been successful almost always; I'll lay up for Editha, and try if I can't be as lucky as heretofore."

"So will I for Mabel," said Rupert. "Come along, Will."

Away they went, and soon reached the Flowerfeld's abode. Editha and Mabel were there; they were lively, high-spirited girls, and quickly there was a great deal of banter and mirth going forward among them, their suitors, and Will. The latter enjoyed, with the greatest possible degree of glee, Gregory's method of laying up for Editha, as he called it. He began by taking advantage of the experience he had received that morning, and asked Editha quietly, whether she meant to bring her sweetheart with her, and she replied she would bring half a dozen. He was aghast at this, gave a long whistle, then turned round to Will and said—

"I say, Will, that's a settler; half a dozen! that won't do, you know, eh? How about that?"

Will laughed, and took up the cudgels in defence of Gregory, who was being belaboured with banter most soundly. He quickly satisfied Editha that one certain beau for an escort was better than half-a-dozen uncertain, and, by the same reasoning, one decided lover was better than a score of doubtful ones; and so clearly established in every point of view that, by accepting Gregory's offer, it was the very best thing possible she could do, that he obtained from her a consent to accompany Gregory to the Hall at all events; and it now only remained for Gregory to put all his persuasive powers into action, and persuade her when there to become his wife. In the warmth of their arguing, Rupert had been unnoticed; and when Will had brought the question to a satisfactory conclusion, he turned his attention to Rupert, to give him a helping hand if necessary, but he found him with the younger sister, Mabel, in a corner, in the very act of kissing her—an act which he disturbed by a very unceremonious and inconsiderate shout.

"Aha! Master Rupert," he cried, "you need no assistance from me. I hope you have prevailed upon Mabel to favour you with her company at the same time Editha accompanies Gregory to the Hall?"

"I—yes—I only was asking Mabel to give me a few lessons in kissing, that was all," said Rupert, with a face like scarlet, and without understanding a word that Will had addressed to him, being horribly confused at being discovered.

"To be sure," answered Will, "and I have little doubt, Mabel, you will find him an apt pupil, one who will improve by practice; you don't answer, Mabel; never mind, I know you think so. Well, good-bye to you all; I am wanted at home, there are a great many things to be done which cannot proceed without my presence, and therefore I must be off. I shall see you all again soon,—good-bye;" and without waiting for a reply off he ran. As he took his way to the Hall, he laughed till his sides ached at the scenes he had just witnessed, and enjoyed the idea of his six brothers being married altogether, four of them, at least, with only three days' courtship; simple men, too, who, passing their lives occupied in the duties of foresters, without having a thought about the fair sex, any farther than regarded the law they were bound to observe, imposed on them by Robin Hood, to respect them when and wherever they met with them; they, totally unused to the soft ways of winning a woman's love, with none but primitive ideas of the relation between man and woman as opposite sexes, with no more than a vague notion that the same style of conduct, the same language which suited their fellow men would not exactly do for the society of females; they, never having a second thought about being married, to be suddenly persuaded to such a step, to do it to time, too, and be successful, with young and comely maidens whom they had rarely seen, and never had any conversation approaching the nature of even flirting; there was something so ridiculous, so improbable, that Will would not have credited it, had he not only been prime mover, but eye witness in the whole transaction.

"Well," he cried, after indulging in a convulsion of laughter at the figure and mysterious movements his sedate brother, Gregory, made in his love essay; "well, we never know what we can do till we try."

Upon reaching the hall, he met Robin and Marian, and Maude, and related to them the occurrences which had just transpired, and they indulged in great merriment over the affair. When the brothers returned, during the evening, at different times, they

were subjected, as they entered, to a volley of smart sayings, congratulations, and bantering queries, which they bore very manfully. There was no disguise about them, and every question asked they answered literally; and, notwithstanding they were such novices, they had one and all been successful in obtaining their respective ladies to consent to bestow their hand upon them, on the eventful day which was to see Little John and Much wed Winifred and Barbara.

The morning of this expected day rose beautifully fine; the sky was one vast expanse of blue, and a delicious cool air played about, tempering the sun's heat delightfully. Saxons flocked down from all parts in the vicinity early in the day, to partake of the festivities prepared for their enjoyment. They came with light hearts, resolved to make the day a merry one; and there was everything provided to keep up such a laudable intension. The marriages were to take place early in the morning. Maude, Marian, and Winifred had been to the village the day previously, and arranged with the six damsels who were to be united to the Gamwells all such things as were necessary to be arranged; and there had been a great deal of talking and settling between the fathers of the damsels and old Sir Guy upon their childrens' union. Be it understood, that when the young ladies gave their consents to their respective swains, they—maugre the short notice—fully determined to keep their word; and it need not be said, that when a young lady has resolved to marry a particular person at his wish and desire, and she has a liking very like love for him, it must be something very extraordinary and very powerful which will keep her from doing it. So, in spite of advice, which it was deemed essential to give, or rather throw away upon them, not to marry so hurriedly, they made up their minds to be married, and were deaf to any words which tended to persuade them to the contrary. When the parents found this to be the case, and there was no time to lose, they visited Sir Guy, who had no thought of controlling the choice of his sons, and made such settlements as were fitting and proper to be made; and accordingly, at the time appointed, a monk from St. Mary's Abbey performed the ceremony, and the eight couple were united to each other, to their own peculiar satisfaction, and to the gratification of all around. They then proceeded to take a share in the sports of the day, and never could a body of people appear happier than did those assembled to celebrate the wedding; and if their thoughts and feelings were laid bare, perhaps never were a body of people happier than they were. After a dinner, laid out in profusion, and eaten with excessive enjoyment, they entered fully into the sports of the day. Villagers and Robin's merrie men, village maidens, and men and women, and boys and girls, all were there, mixed in sports adapted to their capabilities, position, and wishes. Dancing, singing, shooting, quoit-playing, bowls, quarter-staff play, kissing in the ring, and all the sports and pastimes peculiar to the time, were indulged in with a perfect abandonment to pleasure, delightful to behold. Everything which could conduce to happiness was thought of and done; all those who were there seemed to vie with each other which should strive to produce the most comfort and the greatest harmony. As all their energies were directed to one point, that of making the day pass delightfully, they had the satisfaction to find, at the close of the day, that their efforts were crowned with entire success. Nothing occurred to alloy their pleasure, and for many a long day afterwards did those who were at the fête look back with a grateful remembrance to the day on which was celebrated the marriages of the eight Gamwells.

CHAPTER V.

"Why, who art thou, thou bold fellow,
Who rangest so boldly here?
In sooth, to be brief, thou look'st like a thief,
That's come to steal our king's deer.

* * *

"If thou be Robin Hood, bold Arthur replied,
As I now think well thou art,
Then here's my hand, my name's Arthur-a-Bland,
We two will never part.

"But tell me, O! tell me, where is Little John?
Of him I fain would hear;
For we are ally'd, by the mother's side,
And he is my kinsman dear."

ROBIN HOOD AND THE TANNER.

"Where dost thou dwell? quoth Robin Hood;
I pray thee now me tell;
Sad news, I hear, there is abroad,
I fear all is not well.

"What is that news? the tinker said,
Tell me, without delay;
I am a tinker by my trade,
And do live in Banbury.

* * *

"And when they came to Nottingham,
There they took up their inn,
And there they called for ale and wine,
To drink it was no sin.

* * *

"Then Robin's anger did arise—
He fought right manfully,
Until he made the tinker sore,
And almost fit to fly."

ROBIN HOOD AND THE TINKER.

"Bold Robin Hood ranging the forest all round,
The forest all round ranged he;
O there he did meet a gay lady,
She came weeping along the highway.

"Why weep you? why weep you? bold Robin said,
What weep you for?"

* * *

"Then bold Robin Hood for Nottingham goes,
For Nottingham town goes he;
O there did he meet with a poor beggar man,
He came creeping along the highway.

* * *

"O take them! O take them! said the sheriff,
O take them along with thee;
For there's never a man in fair Nottingham,
Can do the like of thee."

ROBIN HOOD RESCUING THE THREE SQUIRES.

THE spring following the events just narrated, saw Robin Hood, with Marian, and all his merrie men again dwelling in the depths of the old forest, Sherwood. His child had died during the winter, at which both he and Marian were much grieved; but his endeavours to restore her to cheerfulness, and the constant calls upon him for action, the frequent requisition for personal exertion, prevented him feeling the loss so strongly as he might have done, had his mind been able to dwell upon it; and the knowledge to their sensible minds that, if it was an evil, it was an irremediable one, tended greatly to restore that cheerfulness of character which, for the sake of those around them, it was necessary they should wear. About this period a vast number of Normans returned from the wars to take possession of estates granted to them by Henry II., for services done by them to him in Normandy. Many of them passed through Sherwood, on their way to their respective destinations, and the consequence was, they had to pay very handsomely for their passage through the wood. Loud complaints were made, but were unheeded by all the authorities dwelling in Nottingham. The truth was, that so many of the merrie men, all Saxon yeomen, were related in some way to the inhabitants of Nottingham, that their in-

fluence was exerted in preventing any harsh measures being put in force against the denizens of the forest, for fear that, were they to consent to any attempt at their expulsion, they might have the melancholy satisfaction of seeing a near relative hung before their door some fine morning. Still, to keep up a show of justice, the reward offered for the capture of Robin Hood was doubled. Any one who offered to try and make him prisoner was—upon a proper representation of their intent, and proofs that they possessed a chance of success, and a determination, if possible, to insure it—furnished with a warrant to that effect, and, if they succeeded, it was to be the certificate that they were duly entitled to the reward promised. Several had undertaken to accomplish the task, but had either joined the band, or been so soundly trounced, that they were in no hurry again to enter the green wood.

One morning, as Robin and Will Scarlet were strolling through the forest, they suddenly encountered Much looking flushed, heated, and out of breath.

"How now, Much?" inquired Robin. "What is the matter with thee? you look plaguily breath-worn. Hast been running hard?"

"No," replied Much, breathing heavily; "I have been having a bout at quarter-staff play with Arthur-a-Bland. Beshrew me, the fellow has the strength of a giant in his arms."

"It is tough work to have a bout with Arthur," returned Robin, "particularly if he should happen to be in earnest."

"You can hardly call it play," said Much. "Although he never loses his temper, he knows very little of the pure science of the art; he conquers by sheer strength."

"What! he made thee cry quarter—eh?" asked Robin.

"If I had not, he would have knocked all the breath out of me; and I verily believe my staff would have gone into a thousand pieces, he strikes so desperately hard," returned Much. "Little John has got him in hand now; but Arthur stands no chance with him. Directly he begins to batter in that terrific manner, Little John sends his staff flying out of his hands, and gives him some tough knocks for not keeping a better hold."

"What induced you to get playing with Arthur-a-Bland?" inquired Robin.

"Why," replied Much, "just to pass away an hour pleasantly, and to try his powers, for he has the reputation among the men of being a sturdy player; besides, it is said he conquered you at the staff, and so I thought I would see if I could stand up to him successfully."

"Beat you at quarter-staff, Robin!" said Will Scarlet, astonished. "No man ever did that, I thought. It is not true that Arthur-a-Bland beat you?"

"I faith," answered Robin, "something after the fashion he served Much did he serve me. The fellow hits just as though he was striking with a bar of iron, instead of an oaken staff."

"But how was this? when was it?" interrogated Will, eagerly.

"Scarce three years since," answered Robin. "One morning I was strolling along through the wood, and encountered bluff Arthur, whom I had never seen before, leaning upon a pike-staff, surveying a herd of deer feeding in the bend, with open mouth and eyes, as if he was looking upon something supernatural. His stalwart frame and look of simplicity struck me as something droll, and I resolved to have some sport with him. I stole close up to him, unseen and un-

heard, and then saluted him with as hearty a thwack between the shoulders as my open hand could give. He started, and, twisting his shoulders about, looked me angrily in the face."

"Why, who art thou that wanders into the forest, as if every foot of it were thine own?" I demanded. "To be brief with thee, thou lookest marvellously like a thief, here on purpose to rob the forest of the King's deer. Now, I would have you learn that I am a keeper of this forest, whose duty it is not to suffer any marauding varlets, like you, to roam about, singling out the fattest deer of the herd, to bring down when an opportunity serves, unlawfully: therefore, I shall send thee back from whence thou comest."

"Will you?" replied Arthur-a-Bland; "I do not think thou canst; wert thou thrice a forest keeper, and had thrice thy number to back thee, thou couldst not make me go, were it my will to stay!"

"I have none to back me," I returned, "nor need I any—I can do it quite easy enough by myself; my sword and bow and arrows are my backers. Troop, man, troop!"

"I care not one straw for thy bow nor thy quiver of arrows," he cried, "if I but give thee a knock with my staff, you will never again use your sword or bow, you forest whelp!"

"Speak civilly, good fellow," I responded, "or it is not unlikely I may give you a thrashing, to teach thee to speak more mannerly."

"Marry, go whip an oak with a reed!" he exclaimed. "Who dost thou think thou art? Do you suppose I care one jot for your big looks? If you wish for a bout, I am your man."

"You have no sword," I observed.

"What want I with a sword? I have this staff; that will serve me and quilt thee," he answered.

"Very well," I replied, "I yield to thy weapon; I have an oaken staff with me, I think about the same length as thine."

"That is right," he said, "come on!" and he brandished his pike-staff over his head.

"Let us measure the staffs," I said, and stood up mine; he brought his to it, and said hastily—

"Never mind measuring the staffs; yours is a little longer than mine; it is no matter."

"Oh yes," I replied, "we will have them the same length, or it will not be fair play;" and I took out my forest knife, and cut them to the same length. While I was doing this he kept calling on me to come on—

"I care not for length of staffs," he cried. "Mine is of good oak, eight foot and a half long, it will knock down an ox, and I fancy it will do the same for thee."

"I had soon completed the operation of shortening my staff; and unbuckling my belt, laying down my bow and quiver, we set to work. I gave him the first blow, and saw the blood come trickling down his forehead—he staggered back almost stunned, and I waited for him to recover a little; when he did, he rattled away with his staff with a power and force I never before had to cope with. I could scarce keep my staff from being beaten, by the sheer weight of his blows, out of my hand. While stepping back to avoid a blow, my foot slipped, I was thrown off my guard; he took advantage of the opportunity, and dealt me the most tremendous blow on the crown I ever received—it knocked me down as if I had been shot by an arrow. I, however, sprung up to my feet again; I was somewhat confused by the blow; I felt the blood from the cut it made seeping through my hair and trickling into my ears. Nevertheless, I fancy I repaid with interest that blow, for I made his

jacket smoke again. Yet he rained his blows with such terrific force, it was almost as much as I could do to defend myself; but when I had a chance I made my hits tell. I think we fought about two hours, making the old wood echo with our blows, going round and round like a couple of wild boars fighting. At length, as there seemed no likelihood of his being tired, and my arms ached to such a degree that I could scarce hold the staff, I thought it little use to continue a sport where nothing was to be gained, not even the satisfaction of defeating a good player, had I won; so I cried out—

“Hold thy hand, hold thy hand! let our quarrel drop here: we may thrash each other to mash without getting any corn, so let's leave off. I make you free of the forest, to come in and depart when you please, for you are a bold fellow.”

“God ha' mercy for nought,” he replied; ‘I bought the right to come with my staff—I may thank that and not thee, for it.’

“It is true,” I replied, ‘thou hast worked hard for it, and so far hast a right to it; but you will have some trouble to defend your right, for by the Holy Mother, if your right depends only on your power of keeping it by the use of your staff, you will soon find that the freedom of the green wood is only to be maintained by a broken pate and sore limbs, and that of such frequent occurrence that a life in town is much to be preferred.’

“Why, look ye, forester, I count my head a hard one, and my limbs as hugely tough,” he said, leaning on his staff, and speaking with seriousness, ‘but you have broken the first, and sorely bruised the last. You are the first that has done so, and I think there are few others who can do as you have done; but if your fellow men play as well as you, why, I will e'en shoulder my staff and turn my face to the town, little as I like a town life.’

“Thou dost not love a town life, then?” I exclaimed, thinking of a sudden that this sturdy fellow would be a desirable acquisition to our little community.

“Love it,” he echoed, ‘does any man love that which makes his heart sick and sorrowful? Marry! it comes wondrous distasteful to me, to be the slave and footstool for every currish Norman to wipe his feet on—to be called slave and dog, churl and serf, with every curl of the lip; to hell with such a spirit as will bear it, say I! My master, a Norman, bestowed a host of vile names upon me this morning; and not content with belabouring me with his foul tongue, he must cuff me—ha! ha! I did not wait for a second blow; this staff was near me, and with it I lent him a knock on the shoulders that scared him out of his wits, and another upon the head, which knocked him down senseless—at least he lay very still. So I shouldered my staff, turned my back to his roof, and was wandering through here when you encountered me.’

“What art thou by trade, and where didst thou dwell until now?” I demanded.

“I am a tanner by trade,” he answered, ‘and have lived here in Nottingham for some years.’

“Well, my bold tanner,” I responded, ‘if thou hast no greater love for thy craft than thou hast for a town, thou wilt forsake it and live with me in the green wood. My name is Robin Hood—I need not say thou hast heard of me.’

“And art thou really Robin Hood, and not a king's forester?” he asked, doubtfully.

“As I am a man, I am he—Robin Hood,” I replied, looking as serious as the poor fellow's anxious and varying countenance would permit me.

“Then I am right glad to hear thee say so,” he

cried, with joy depicted on his features. ‘I came to seek thee, Robin Hood; thou must be he, for none but he could have made me think quarter-staff might be played at too long to be pleasant. I came to seek thee—that is my reason for entering the forest; but when thou told me thou wert a keeper, I believed thee, and thought it as well not to speak of the purport for which I entered the wood. It was to join thee and thy band—there's my hand upon it; and in all your company you will not have a stauncher or truer follower than Arthur-a-Bland, the tanner of Nottingham.’

“I like thy free spirit, Arthur,” I uttered, ‘and I'm pleased to add thee to the number of my merrie men. Our laws are few and simple, but must be observed; in all things else, you will be as free as the air which now plays among the leaves and upon our faces; you will be well clothed, well fed, and, I am satisfied, have no cause to regret the change you have made.’

“I vow my heart leaps within me at the thoughts of being one among thee!” he exclaimed. ‘I shall not be quite a stranger, too, unto all, for Little John is a kinsman of mine, by my mother's side; her brother married Little John's mother, who was sister to Sir Guy Gamwell. I have often wished to be in the green wood with you all, but opportunity never served until now. I shall soon see Little John, I suppose? I faith I long to see him, the bonnie blade.’

“You shall see him at once,” I remarked, and blew a summons to him on my horn; he happened to be near the spot, and speedily made his appearance. Observing the blood trickling down both our faces, he ejaculated, rapidly—

“How now, Robin! what's the matter? tell me quickly; you look as though you had been badly dealt by.”

“That have I,” I returned; ‘here stands the man who has done the deed; a tanner, who has tanned me soundly.’

“If he has, he plays well at quarter-staff,” cried Little John, ‘and I will have a bout with him to see if he can tan my hide as well. Come on, my bonnie tanner.’

“And Little John was ready in an instant with his staff for play, while the tanner, scarce knowing what was meant, raised his staff to oppose him; in another moment they would have been hard at it, but I cried out—

“Hold thy hand, Little John; he is a good yeoman, and hath joined our band. He tells me he is kinsman of thine, and bears the name of Arthur-a-Bland.”

“What, of Nottingham?” inquired Little John.

“The same,” replied Arthur, ‘and though we have never met since we were boys, yet do I remember thee again.’

“I cannot say I do thee,” replied little John, ‘but I have no doubt thou art my kinsman, and so, welcome to the green wood and merrie men who dwell in it.’

“With that they embraced, and after Arthur was installed into the band, we spent a right jovial day I do assure you. That is the whole story of my bout with Arthur-a-Bland,” concluded Robin Hood.

“Well,” ejaculated Much, “you came off better than I could have believed. I got some raps at him, but he kept me so much employed in guarding, that I had no chance of hitting him; it put me somewhat in mind of Little John's extraordinary rapidity, but it wanted the science with it.”

“But,” said Will Scarlet, “I don't deem that beating you at the quarter-staff, Robin, because it appears that Arthur-a-Bland had the worst of it.”

"Deem it what you will," returned Robin, "that is the truth of the matter; but I received the soundest cudgeling from Gaspar-a-Tin."

"You did!" cried Will Scarlet; "when was that? before he joined the band?"

"Yes," replied Robin, "I always tested the courage and strength of a man before he joined the band; I must have no faint hearts among my merrie men. I was on my way to Nottingham one morning, and I overtook Gaspar-a-Tin, who was also on his way to Nottingham. He looked a sturdy, lusty fellow, and one whom I thought would be of good service if I could persuade him to join us; I therefore accosted him in a bantering tone.

"'Good morrow, yeoman,' I said, 'thou art a traveller, I see. There is bad news abroad, I hear, is it truth?"

"'What is the news?' demanded he; 'I have heard of none of any import. I am a tinker by trade; I live in Banbury, and have but just come from thence; I have seen or heard nothing on my road here in the shape of bad news.'

"'The news I have to tell is,' I answered, 'that two tinkers were set in the stocks for drinking.'

"'If that is all your news, it is not worth a groat,' he answered; 'if every one was placed in the stocks for drinking, you would be sure to have a seat there, for you look not as if you disliked good liquor.'

"'Why, I am no enemy to a cup of good wine, I confess,' I exclaimed, 'neither is any one who has a jovial heart; but what brings thee from Banbury here? surely not to follow thy craft only.'

"'Not that only; but there is an outlaw in these parts named Robin Hood, there is a reward of a hundred golden marks offered for him, and I am going to try to take him and get it.'

"'You,' I exclaimed, looking rather surprised at hearing the cool confession of his purpose. 'How do you propose to take him?"

"'I have a warrant from the king,' replied the tinker, 'granted me, properly filled up, which empowers me to seize him, and have the reward.'

"'Indeed! you talk as if it was an easy matter to take him,' I said.

"'I think I shall find it so,' he rejoined; 'I have stout limbs, and as stout a heart, so I think I stand as good a chance as any one else.'

"'Do you know him when you see him?' I inquired.

"'No; I wish I did,' he returned; 'it would make my job all the lighter. Do you know him?"

"'I have seen him,' I rejoined.

"'Then perhaps you can help me in this matter,' he observed; 'I will give you a share of the money if you can point me out where to find him, and assist me to capture him.'

"'Let me see the warrant first,' I said, 'in order that I may know that it is a good and proper one.'

"'No, I am much obliged,' he answered, with a cunning leer, 'I shall trust it in no one's hands but my own. I know that it is a good and proper one, that is enough for me, and I shall show it no one but Robin Hood, and not to him, until I capture him.'

"'Perhaps it is the wisest plan,' I replied, and thinking to make a jest of the fellow, I rejoined, 'He is going to Nottingham, I heard this morning, and if you will come with me there, you shall see him, I pledge you my word.'

"'Agreed,' he responded, 'I take thee at thy word. I have nought else to do but believe thee, and if I find when I am there that thou hast deceived me, why, I will dust thy doublet well for thee.'

"He had a stout crab-tree staff with him, which

he flourished as he said this. I longed to have a bout with him then, but fearing I should lose some good sport, I restrained my inclination, and laughing, told him, if he found I had deceived him, I was willing he should, if he could. Well, accordingly, on we went to Nottingham. When we got there we stopped at the hostel called the Flagon, and I ordered some old ale of a peculiar sort, which the host keeps; the tinker was very thirsty, and drank deeply; the ale was soon gone, and we had some wine, after that more ale, and subsequent to that more wine. The tinker, who had drank nearly all that was placed before him—for not being inclined to drink, I scarce wetted my lips—soon became tipsy, and then boasted to such an extent what he would do, that it was the choicest thing to hear him. He arrived, after capturing me, to taking the whole band, like a flock of sheep, up to London, and becoming, ultimately, through rendering important services, to have the highest post in the kingdom. Just as he was about to marry the King's daughter, he fell asleep. Knowing that I should soon receive a visit from him in the wood, I abstracted the bag which he said contained the warrant, for the purpose of enjoying, when he awoke, his confusion at his loss; but some of the sheriff's people coming in, and fearing too early a discovery of my person by the tinker, I left; but before I went, I discharged the reckoning, and told the host to tell the tinker, when he awoke, that the bill was unpaid, and that if he asked who I was, he was to tell him I was Robin Hood; and if he wished to find me, I should be in the green wood, along with the king's deer.

"'I know your face well, Robin Hood,' said the host; 'I knew it when you first entered, but I will make no more use of my knowledge than you wish me.'

"I thanked him, and left the house. It appears that Gaspar-a-Tin slept long and soundly; but when he awoke he missed me, and immediately afterwards his money. He shouted out for the host.

"'Host,' he cried—'host, I am robbed, ruined, and undone!'

"'Not here, I hope,' replied the host, 'for you have a long bill to pay.'

"'Bill to pay!' reiterated Gaspar, with a groan, 'I have nought to pay it with. I have been robbed. I had a warrant from the King to capture Robin Hood, and the reward would have made a rich man of me. Now I have lost that, and a sum of money beside, out of a bag which hung at my girdle. He who came in with me, too, and promised to point out Robin Hood to me, is gone, and I fear it is he who has taken my money and warrant too.'

"'Why that friend you speak of was Robin Hood,' exclaimed the host, laughing.

"'Robin Hood!' roared the tinker. 'Oh that I had but known that when I had him here! I would have made him my prisoner, or it should have cost me very dearly. However, it is of no use to stay here lamenting; I will away, and seek him out, whatever betides me.'

"'I should like to have the amount of my bill before you go,' suggested the host.

"'How much is it?' demanded Gaspar, with a sigh.

"'Ten shillings,' answered the host, rubbing his hands, and enjoying the tinker's discomfiture.

"'I have no money about me,' he answered, 'but I will leave thee my tools; they are worth more than that sum; and so soon as I have captured Robin Hood, I will return and redeem them.'

"'Well, then,' replied the host, 'if you wish to meet with him quickly, and art not afraid of a few

hard knocks, if you go you will be sure to find him slaying the king's deer."

"It was too late that night to set out in quest of me; but in the morning I was on the track of a deer, when I espied the tinker coming. He soon clapped his eyes upon me, and giving a shout, he ran towards me, brandishing his long staff.

"What knave is this," I called out as he advanced, "who dares intrude on me in this ungainly fashion?"

"No knave," cried the tinker, "and whether either of us have done the other a wrong, my staff shall quickly show you."

"At once he commenced an attack upon me with his staff. I had to jump nimbly out of his reach, until I could draw my sword, which, when I did, I found fully occupied in defending me from his heavy blows; and so slight a weapon, being opposed to such a weighty staff as his, I found of no use; for I did not want to maim him. I, therefore, called out—

"Hold! you have me at unfair odds. Let me, too, have a quarter-staff, and I'll stand up to you as long as I am able, giving you free license to drub me as soundly as you can."

"He granted me my request, and I hastily cut myself one from an oak. It was not so straight or so smooth as I could wish; but it was better than none. We then set to work, and I soon found I knew more about quarter-staff than he did. As I not only drew blood from his head, but I rattled him so severely about the body and legs, I thought once or twice he would fly; for he looked right and left for a clear space; but a succession of hard knocks so excited his rage that he became almost frantic. He struck regardless of all the hits I gave him, and by great strength and ability to bear punishment he began to tire me out. He held the staff with both hands, near the end, and laid about me as if he was cleaving wood or thrashing corn. My arms and wrists, which had supported my staff, and endured for near three hours the whole weight of his tremendous blows, grew nearly powerless, while he seemed to have new strength. He beat down my guard, and although he entangled his staff frequently, at which times I disciplined him severely, still he kept on, until my head, my shoulders, and legs, bore evidence of his strength and perseverance. As in the case of Arthur-a-Bland, there was no honour to be gained in defeating such a player, and in consequence no desire to bear unmoved the fierce blows he dealt me, I leaped out of his reach and called a boon.

"I'll hang thee on a tree first!" he roared, in the height of his passion.

"But I blew three blasts of my horn, and Little John, with the merrie men, were speedily at my side. I had seated myself to recover under a tree, while Gaspar-a-Tin, surprised at the sound of my horn, and the appearance of the merrie men, stood motionless.

"What is the matter?" asked Little John.

"Here's a tinker who hath drubbed me well," I answered.

"Drubbed thee!" replied Little John, laughing, "I should just like to see the blade who could do it, because I would try if he could do the same for me; and with the readiness he ever evinces when there is a chance of having about of quarter-staff, he advanced to the tinker, who now, rather cooled, displayed no very great willingness to comply with the invitation. But I prevented him displaying his abilities, and made the tinker an offer to join the band, upon the same terms and privileges we all enjoyed. He hesitated a little, and then he said—

"Well, I am a lone man, without kindred; I will join thee, and do as ye do."

"The next morning I saw him, and then had a

proof of his great power of enduring punishment, for his body, which I saw, was blue all over with bruises; and, to tell the truth, mine was not much the better. In all my bouts or frays never was I so severely handled as by Gaspar-a-Tin, who has from that time been one of the merrie men."

"It must have been hard work," said Will; "rather harder than agreeable. Little John may say what he pleases, but I prefer the bow and arrow to all the quarter-staffs in the world; both as a sport and a weapon of defence or offence. It is, in my opinion, better to be shot out of the world at once, than beaten out of it by degrees. One pang is better than all the pains of the blows from a quarter-staff."

"In some instances, it is most useful, where the bow is useless; for its use is not affected by an empty quiver," said Robin, "and when you do not absolutely desire to destroy a foe, a sound cudgelling makes him remember you longer than a flesh-wound from an arrow."

"Oh!" said Much, "it is glorious sport when you are opposed to a thorough good player. There's nothing to me equals the quarter-staff."

"It is all very well, by way of varying your sport," contended Will, "but to me there's nothing in the world equals the bow."

"Nor to me!" said Robin, enthusiastically.

Accompanied by Will Scarlet and Much, he strolled on in the direction of Nottingham. They had not proceeded far, when they met a young female weeping bitterly. As soon as Robin saw her, he hastened towards her, and accosted her.

"Why dost thou weep, maiden?" he asked, tenderly.

"I wish to see Robin Hood," said the girl, sobbing.

"Oh! if you have pity, lead me quickly to him."

"I am Robin Hood, maiden," he answered, "teach me how I can serve thee. No one of my company have done thee any wrong?" he cried, a flush mounting to his brow.

"Oh no! oh no!" she replied quickly.

"Then tell me of what consists thy grief?" he exclaimed, pressing her hand encouragingly.

"Three of my brothers, who are of your band, have been seized by the Sheriff of Nottingham," she replied.

"Ah!" ejaculated Robin; "their names, maiden?"

"Adelbert, Edelbert, and Edwin Joyheart," she sobbed.

"Three of my most gallant and gentle hearts, bold and true yeomen," exclaimed Robin. "How came they in his power? it is a few hours since I saw them."

"They entered the town early this morning to see my mother and father; they encountered a party of the sheriff's men dragging a young man to prison for having struck down one of their companions who had grossly insulted his mother; they interfered and rescued him—"

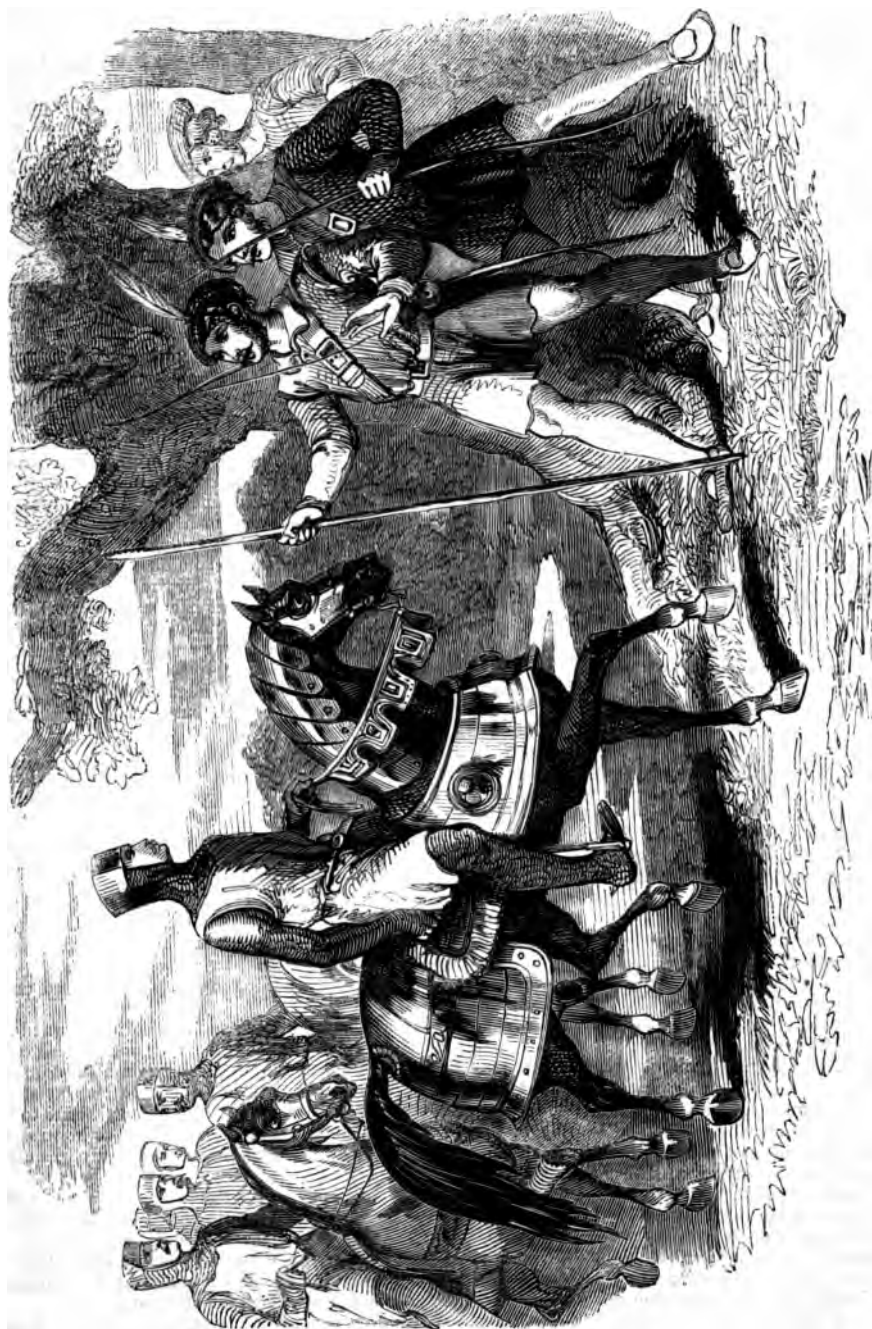
"Or they had been no followers of mine," interrupted Robin.

"And then, after they had driven the sheriff's men away, they came home, but had not been there half an hour when a strong band of the sheriff's men came and took them away; they were recognised as belonging to your band, and they are to be hung immediately; they are now erecting a gallows at the town's foot, upon which my poor brothers are to be hung as soon as it is completed."

"Cheer thee, maiden," said Robin, kindly. "Fear not, they shall be saved; there is not a man in the band who would not peril life and limb in defence of, or to rescue from danger, any one of their number; and I, most of all, would not suffer any of my people to perish without a determined effort to save them, or

in the event of a failure, without visiting their destroyers with a terrible retaliation; therefore, my gentle damsel, return thou and comfort the hearts of

the maiden. "I was told by those who knew you, that you were always ready to succour the distressed—a friend to the unfortunate—and I have proved you



thy sad parents; tell them Robin Hood will save their children, or their deaths shall be bitterly revenged."

"Heaven bless you for your kind words!" uttered

so. But pray be speedy, for they will hasten my brothers' death as much as they can."

"Trust me, maiden, I will be there in time; his

the home, and be as happy as if this had not happened," said Robin, in a cheering voice.

"The Holy Virgin bless and keep thee! thou hast made my heart glad," cried the girl, kissing his hands suddenly and earnestly. Then waving her hand, she turned and fled, and was quickly lost among the thickly clustered trees.

"Hurrah!" cried Will Scarlet, as soon as she had disappeared, "now we shall have something to do—ha, ha! Now, Robin, your commands, and then we will show the Sheriff of Nottingham sport, eh?"

"You and Much hasten to Little John, bid him gather as many of the men as are near at hand and ready for speedy service," said Robin, quickly; "and when that is done, without one second being wasted in its performance, bid him post them as near to the skirts of the forest as he can without detection; and on the instant he hears thy horn, to cut his way to my side, followed by all of you."

"What are you going to do?" asked Will.

"I shall to the town at once, and see what can be done to prolong the time," returned Robin; but whatever is done must be done cautiously, for should the sheriff once learn that I am aware of the position of my men, he will expect a rescue, and probably hang them in the castle, and thus prevent all our efforts to save the Joyhearts; on the other hand, I know that he has boasted should any of our number, especially I, fall into his hands, we shall be hanged on a gallows, in the town, as a warning and terror to all who may feel inclined to follow our example, and ourselves particularly included; he will, therefore, thinking the whole affair accomplished too speedily to reach my ears in time to prevent it, be induced to keep this vault, and endeavour to have them hung openly. It must be our object to do nothing to make him alter this opinion, for upon it rests our sole chance of rescuing the brothers. I will directly to Nottingham, learn all I can, and act accordingly. There is no time to lose—away with you!"

"We are gone!" cried Will. "I am glad of the chance of frustrating the blood-minded wishes of old Baron Fitz Alwine, if it was only for the relentless animosity he still bears his only child the Lady Christabel and her husband Allan-a-Dale. We will be at your call when you need us. Success attend our enterprise!" So saying, accompanied by Much, he hurried away, while Robin hastened in the direction of Nottingham; but when a short distance from the outskirts of the wood, he met a mendicant pilgrim coming from the town, he stopped and accosted him.

"What news from Nottingham, old man?" he inquired; "is there anything stirring there to-day?"

"Ay, marry, is there!" replied the old man; "there's that stirring which will cause weeping and wailing in the town."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Robin; "and what may that be?"

"It is that three of Robin Hood's merry men have been taken, and are to be hung in an hour from this time, without a hope of redemption but at the last day. The Lord have mercy on their souls!"

"The maiden has told me the truth," muttered Robin; "I must be stirring. Ah! a thought strikes me; this beggar's dress will serve me. Old man," he said aloud, "I have taken a whim to wear thy apparel; wilt thou change it with me for the dress I wear?"

"Nay," said the old man; "you jest with me."

"Indeed I do not," returned Robin; "I have taken a fancy to dress as thou art now, and I will give thee mine in exchange for't, with forty shillings to boot, which thou mayst spend in ale, wine, or aught that pleases thee."

"Your dress is good, without rent or tear, and bright and clean, as if 'twere just new; mine is torn, ragged, patched, and dirty," said the old man, with gravity. "It is unnatural that thou shouldst desire to change with me—I'll not believe thee; thou wouldst fool me, youth. Learn from one who is aged, that he who laughs an old man to scorn lives to weep at others' mockery."

"You wrong me, old man—it is my wish to change with thee, and to prove it," cried Robin, producing the money, "here are twenty pieces of gold I give thee, to support thy state when thou hast my dress on."

"Well, well," said the beggar, looking on the gold with something of the avarice of age in his glance, "youth will be humoursome, an' if thy humour doth jump with wearing my apparel, it becometh not me to balk the leap."

"That is well said," replied Robin, proceeding at once to make the exchange. "Thy hose are fashioned, I see, from circumstances," he continued, with a laugh, "and have galled a great many friends of their own nature since they were made, if I may judge by the quantity of pieces of which they are composed."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the old man, "they are like a Norman's conscience, well patched; but thy doublet is like a Saxon's heart, all of one piece of stuff."

"Good; thou say'st well," said Robin, dressing himself in the rags with all the speed he was master of, "and I must also, in commending thy wit, praise thy scorn of luxuries; no man can charge thee with having loved pride, after taking cognizance of thy habiliments; beshrew me! no one would doubt thou wert a filthy mendicant, for thy garments are most holy." With a little more banter of this sort, Robin completed his disguise. "Well," he cried, "a good habit makes a good-looking man. By the Mass!" he muttered, "were Marian to see me in this garb, she would not be so ready to call me her bonnie Robin."

"Am I to have thy weapons also?" demanded the old man.

"No, good father," returned Robin, "I have a greater fancy for them than thy dress: so I shall retain them. And now let me give thee a piece of advice: keep away from the west of this wood, or from following my track; or thou mayst get into trouble. Thou hast thy dress upon thy back, my gold in thy pocket, take my advice and go."

"I thank thee, good youth," replied the old man, "I believe thy advice friendly, and shall follow it. An old man's benison on thee and thine acts, if they are good. A fair good day to you, gentle sir."

"Good day," replied Robin, and hastened on his way.

He unstrung his bow, and carried it as a wand; his sheaf, save a few arrows, he hid under some brushwood, and thus equipped, leaning on a stout quarter-staff, he entered the town. Wending his way at once towards the castle, he found he had little time to lose, for the gallows was completed, and, as he was given to understand, the procession was ready to quit the Castle.

But they were in a great quandary about a hangman, the regular "Jack Ketch" being laid on a sick bed, and quite titiable to launch any one into the eternity on whose verge he was himself. This was soon noised abroad, and it was said the three men could not be hung for want of a hangman.

However, the cavalcade quitted the Castle, bearing the three unfortunate men in the midst of it, and took the road down the town to where the gallows had been erected. The truth of the rumour, which told of the want of a hangman, was made apparent by a

proclamation being made for one who would undertake the office. Robin, who had edged himself in front of the crowd, stepped forward and presented himself to the Baron Fitz Alwine, who looked but little changed since he had last seen him, save that his aspect was a trifle more grim.

"Noble Sheriff, what wilt thou give me if I take upon myself the office?" he said, getting so very close to his lordship, that he retreated several paces, as though he doubted the savouriness of the scent arising from the clothes Robin wore.

"If thou wert to have some suits of clothes," he returned, surveying the beggar's garments with horrible disdain, "it would be what thou most desirest, and, therefore, beggar, six suits will I give thee, and the hangman's fee of thirteen pence, if thou wilt take the hangman's place."

"And how much more wilt thou give me if I hang thee into the bargain," demanded Robin, following the baron up as he kept retreating, until at last he raised his stick and thrust it at Robin's ribs.

"Keep thy distance, beggar," he cried; "thy perfume does not please me; it offends my nostrils exceedingly. Now keep thou there—what said'st thou?"

"You offer me six suits of thy apparel and thirteen pence," replied Robin, "to hang these poor men up. What wilt thou add to that fee, if I include thee and a few other rascally Normans?"

"Insolent dog, what meanest thou?" cried the sheriff, somewhat astonished at the remark, "dost thou know to whom thou art speaking, that thou waggest thy tongue thus saucily? The curse of St. Paul on me, knave, an' thou hast spoken thus to insult me, thou shalt make a fourth bird swinging on yonder tree."

"Mark you, sheriff," returned Robin, "I am a poor, ragged, miserably apparelled man."

"Miserably apparelled, indeed!" echoed the sheriff, elevating the tip of his nose, and depressing the corners of his mouth.

"But I possess the same sense of insult which you do; perhaps a keener one. I am naturally sensitive, and feel contempt and disdain as sharply as thou canst. You scrupled not to beg a favour of me, and at the same time insult me on account of my garb, yet you, who hesitated not one second to do this, growl because I retaliated upon you."

"Foh!" exclaimed the baron, "thou silly beggar, thy wits are wandering. Darest thou compare thyself with me? thou art a fool!"

"I am a poor man," said Robin, emphatically, "and I suppose I must bow to thy scorn."

"To be sure," returned the baron; "all poor men have a right to do so—it becomes their situation; they have no business to be poor, and if they will be so, why of course they must take the consequence. But I am not here to bandy words with such as thee—if thou dost accept my offer, proceed upon thy duties at once."

"I cannot say I know what the duties are," said Robin, doing everything to gain time for his men to be at hand; "I was never a hangman in my life, the Holy Mother be praised! My curse upon the disgusting trade; and may he be cursed eternally who first made a man a hangman, or he that was one."

"Art thou fooling me all this time, varlet?" roared the baron. "By the Mass! an' thou dost not commence thy work at once, thou shalt pay dearly for it."

"Suppose I do not consent to hang these yeomen, whom wilt thou get to undertake the office?" asked Robin, quietly. "Thou hast made thy proclamation; it has been heard by all; some time hath elapsed, and

yet thou seest I am the only one who has stepped forward to fulfil thy desires."

"I see what thou art aiming at, thou starved-looking wretch," exclaimed the sheriff, hastily, "thou dost want an addition to the bounty already offered for swinging those knaves into the other world. Well, if thou dost thy work quickly, well, and neatly, I will give thee something in addition, which shall satisfy thee completely, or thou art the most unconscionable rogue on the face of the earth."

"No," returned Robin, "thou art wrong, sheriff, I seek no such thing. I would not wear apparel that had once been on thy person; and as for thy hangman's fee, keep it, thou art the proper person to receive such money; for such coin should only be in the hands of the vilest wretch in existence;—one riler than thou I cannot imagine."

"What!" articulated the baron, as if Robin's words had been sledge hammers beating on his forehead, until he was completely stunned.

"I ask but what I'll have," exclaimed Robin, quickly, "which is three blasts of this little horn, to speed their souls to heaven; but not the one you would send them, but to the one of a sudden and certain release from a shameful death."

As he ceased speaking he blew three loud, shrill blasts upon the horn, and then sprung upon Baron Fitz Alwine. He threw him to the ground, drew a broad-bladed forest knife, and elevating it in the air, cried, in a loud voice—

"He who offers to move a step to injure me or those three yeomen who stand bound beneath the gallows tree, will cause the sheriff's instant death; for so help me the blessed Mary! if any one stirs, I plunge this knife into his heart at once."

"Keep still, all of you," cried the baron, in the voice of a Stentor. "Good beggar, speak thy wants, and thou shalt have them." The sun glittered on the polished blade; Baron Fitz Alwine felt the strength of him who pinned him to the ground to be of a nature which would enable its possessor to carry out his intention of destroying him with the most perfect ease, long ere he could be prevented; and with the instinctive love of life so particularly implanted in him, he felt it would be very prudent to compromise, and therefore he spoke his last speech to Robin in a soft, conciliating tone.

"My wants or wishes are not great, and easily complied with. I came hither with the intention of having them granted to me, and I go not without they are. I require the lives of those three yeomen you are so desirous to hang."

"You ought to know, my good man, that I cannot grant your request," mumbled the baron, in a suffocating tone of voice; "they have been stealing and killing the king's deer. You know, as every one knows, that the crime is punished with death, without reprieve, as soon after they are taken as circumstances make it possible. The whole town of Nottingham is acquainted with my having these men in my possession, and if I suffer them to escape, the news will fly to the king's ears, and then what would he say—aye, do to me?"

"I care not one jot," said Robin Hood; "the men are mine, and I'll have them restored to me scatheless, whether you please or no. I only suggest to you it will be both the wisest and safest plan to comply at once with my request."

At this moment there was great commotion among the crowd, and then the noise of weapons clashing ensued. Robin knew that it was his men fulfilling his directions, and he suffered the baron to sit up and witness their arrival. He did so with the most unfeigned astonishment.

"What men are these?" he inquired, with a conviction that it was a question he scarce need ask.

"They are mine!" was the reply.

"And you are Robin Hood?" said he, as though such reply necessarily involved the rejoinder.

"I am he!" returned our hero, with a smile at the expression of the baron's physiognomy.

Robin's men kept pouring in, the townspeople gladly making way for them; and the followers of Fitz Alwine not opposing them for want of orders to that effect. Will Scarlet and Much leaped through the crowd, and speedily unbound the Joyhearts, supplied them with weapons, and mixed them among the thronging merrie men, who presented a formidable appearance, their numbers far exceeding the sheriff's troops—a fact which Fitz Alwine was not slow to discover, for he was a prudent warrior, one who always avoided danger, and had a noble scorn for all positions which would compromise his personal safety for the mere gain of personal honour.

When he saw that it was utterly impossible to retake the yeoman, and likewise the only way to extricate himself safely from his present awkward situation was by conciliating Robin Hood, he turned to him and said—

"Take your men, take them along with you; you do as you list, there is not another in the country like you. Let me rise."

"There are no thanks due to you for your courtesy," replied Robin, raising him to his feet; "I may thank my trusty band for the safety of my three merrie men, not thee. However, let that pass; thou'rt now upon thy feet again, Baron Fitz Alwine, but mark my words. A long time cannot elapse ere thou wilt be upon thy back in the cold tomb; this thou must know as well as I, for thou art no stranger to the limits of human life, and thy term hath expired—thou hast lived to the period at which life is wont to quit the frame, or in remaining degenerates the body and mind into imbecility, an existence like to the feeble rays of an expiring torch; yet dost thou act as if thou wert in thy youth, and had a long term of years before thee to repent thy evil deeds, and to atone for them; thou dost still continue as undeviatingly in thy path of blood as ever, and dost carry thy resentment to the same wicked lengths as heretofore. I would have thee beware, to alter thy nature wholly, and make a better use of the little time left thee to repair some of the villainies thou hast committed. Commence with seeking thy daughter, the gentle Christabel, and entreating her forgiveness for thy unnatural conduct to her, and endeavour to make reparation for the many wretched unhappy hours you have created for her. Do this, and be earnest in thy endeavours, and thy death-bed may yet be a comparatively peaceful one; but if you persist in thy present conduct, I forewarn you that you may have bitterly to repent it here and hereafter; and thy death, instead of being calm and tranquil, may be somewhat rude and untimely. Take my advice, which is offered thee in a good spirit; think upon it, nor treat it scornfully because it comes from one who stands before thee in the position of a foe, and do your best to try and follow it. Now, begone, I have no more to say to thee than that thy presence is hateful to me. Away!"

Robin waved his hand haughtily to him, quitted him, and summoned his men, bidding them lead on to the forest; and Fitz Alwine, with a face whose expression bore evidence of rage contending with fear, gathered his men together, and galloped at their head up the town to his castle, there to shut himself up, a prey to the torments of defeated malice.

The townspeople, who looked upon deer-stealing

as anything but a crime, who knew the family of the Joyhearts by repute, many of them personally, were delighted at the escape of the three sons, and raised a cheerful shout of joy in honour of Robin Hood. Many pressed forward to shake hands with him—with the bold outlaw, who was so highly famed for being formidable to the people's foes, but gentle to the people. He, however, disliked any show of public estimation in his favour, and tore himself away from many who wished to force their kindnesses upon him, and in the midst of his merrie men was soon in the green wood again.

He had not penetrated far ere he encountered the Joyhearts' sister and parents waiting to meet their rescued relatives. It was an affectionate sight to see the father and mother embracing their children with the most intense enthusiasm, and weeping, out of pure gladness, to hold again in their arms those whom they had thought lost to them for ever; and mingling with their tears and exclamations of happiness, prayers of thankfulness for Robin's salvation of their boys.

Humbly, yet earnestly, did they pour forth, in words of unsophisticated truth and honesty, thanks for the joy he had given to their hearts; and the simple language of nature spoke more forcibly to him in their sincerity of expression, than the finest sentiments clothed in the highest flown language could have done: it was his greatest reward, notwithstanding the satisfaction he would have received from his conscience having told him he had done right.

CHAPTER VI.

"Go we to dyner, sayd Lytell Johan,
Robyn Hode sayd, Nay;
For I drede our Lady be wrothe with me,
For she sent me not my pay.

"Have no dout, mayster, sayd Lytell Johan,
Yet is not the sonne at rest;
For I dare saye and sauffy swere
The knight is trewe and trust.

"But as 'they' loked in Bernysdale
By the hye way,
Then were they ware of two blacke monkes,
Eche on a good palferay.

"Then bespoke Lytell Johan,
To Much he gan say,
I dare my lyte to wedde
That these monkes have brought our pay."

LYTELL GESTE OF ROBYN HODE. THE FOURTH FYTTE.

"The abbot sayd to his covent,
There he stode on ground,
This day twelte moneth come there a knyght
And borrowde foure hundred pounce.

* * * * *
"It were grete pyté, sayd the pryoure,
So to have his londe,
And be ye so lyght of your conseyce,
Ye do to him moch wronge.

"Thou art ever in my berde, sayd the abbot,
By God and St. Rycharde."

LYTELL GESTE OF ROBYN HODE. THE SECOND FYTTE.

ROBIN HOOD, his beloved Marian, his friends, and merrie men, at the expiration of a twelve-month from the time when Robin had behaved so handsomely to Sir Richard of the Lea, were again located in Barnsdale Wood, whose leafy dells and widely-spreading glades offered an agreeable change to Sherwood Forest. The day arrived upon

which Sir Richard was to keep his knightly word, which he had solemnly pledged by a vow to the Blessed Virgin to perform truly, and Robin seated himself beneath his trysting tree to await his arrival. The hour at which the sun attains his greatest altitude was the appointed time for the meeting; but the shades of the trees began to lengthen, and turn from pointing west to east, without the approach of Sir Richard of the Lee. Two hours passed beyond the appointment, and he was not there.

"He will not come," said Will Scarlet, who, with Little John, stood by Robin's side, and were waiting anxiously his coming.

"Then ought we to have no faith in man," returned Robin. "I would not that Sir Richard broke his word for the sake of humanity. No man bore the resemblance of untainted integrity stronger than he did, and if he proveth false, whom may we believe? By the Holy Mass, I dread our dear Lady is wroth with me for some unconsidered act of mine, and thus is it Sir Richard comes not. When I have placed implicit trust in her, she hath never, until now, failed me."

"Have no doubt about his coming," exclaimed Little John. "The sun is not yet at rest, and I dare swear safely, by the Blessed Maid herself, that he is a true and honourable knight. He will be here anon, or I am no woodsman."

"I hope he will," ejaculated Robin, "for the sake of a Saxon's pledge. I will abide here the whole day, and if Sir Richard Lee fail of his vow, then will I trust no man's vow more. Take thy weapons, Little John and Will, and take Much with thee, and walk in the direction of St. Mary's Abbey, and see whether thou canst discern the knight approach, or wealthy Norman, or poor man who may taste of our bounty. I will not dine to-day until I have some guest who shall in some way recompense me for the absence of Sir Richard of the Lee. Away with thee! I will abide here alone until thy return."

"As thou wilt," said Little John, "we will do thy bidding, and thou shalt soon again see us with a guest."

So saying, he beckoned Will and away they went, obeying his commands by searching out Much, and taking the direction he had pointed out for them to pursue.

"Robin Hood seems dull to-day," remarked Will.

"Why so?" inquired Much.

"Because he fears he shall be deceived in Sir Richard of the Lee," returned Little John.

"I do not see why he should care much about it," said Will; "we do not need the money."

"Pshaw!" cried little John, almost angrily, "he has not one thought about the coin. It is that this Sir Richard is a Saxon, and being under great obligations to him, and being bound by a vow to the Holy Virgin to repay the loan granted him, appears not—not even to excuse himself if he cannot pay the money; it is the ingratitude which wounds Robin's feelings, not the absence of the paltry gold, and as well as that a Saxon knight should forfeit his honour. But I still believe Sir Richard will be here."

"And here he comes, I have little doubt," cried Will, suddenly hearing the footsteps of approaching horses, which the thickly studded trees hid from sight.

"St. Julian prove it so!" uttered Little John quickly.

Much ran forward to reconnoitre, but speedily returned, crying out—

"No, it is not he; but two black friars trotting cheerily along, with near a dozen men at their heels."

"Ha!" exclaimed Little John, "a retinue at their heels, eh? Then have they a store of money with them. We must take them to dine with Robin."

"Shall I summon some of the merrie men?" asked Will.

"There is no need," returned Little John, "these monks' serving men's hearts are all in their legs; and they are so much the slaves of their hearts, that they are sure to run away with them upon the appearance of any danger, as you shall see. So here come the monks and men. Now, we must take these monks to dinner with Robin, or never look him in the face again. We are but three, but our three shall exceed thirty such as those who come now. String your bows, bend them, and stand prepared to stop this goodly company."

Will Scarlet and Much did as Little John desired them, and stood with their bows bent, ready to receive the unconscious comers. As they turned round a winding corner of the highway, which had hidden them from the sight of Little John and his companions, they came plump upon our friends, the sight of whom, with their shafts ready to loose from their drawn bows, had a material effect upon their progress. Their steeds were instantly checked, and the monks, who were leading the way, immediately made a movement to gain the rear; they were, however, stayed by Little John, who called out in a loud voice—

"Abide where thou art, monk! abide, or by our Lady, if thou dost attempt to move further, this shaft upon my bow shall bring thee certain death. List ye—I speak in earnest, I hold thy life or death in my hand."

The monk, obedient to Little John's command—for he thought that he looked as if he had not the fear of God and the Church in his eyes, and spoke very much as if he really meant to do what he said if he did not comply with his wish—resigned himself to what was to come with as much calmness as he could assume; he checked his steed, he crossed his hands upon his breast, and making up a most amiable face, said in a voice replete with meekness—

"Gentle stranger, what wouldst thou with an humble and lowly servant of the Holy Church?"

"Beshrew thee for a laggard," said Little John, gruffly, annoyed by the sanctimonious cant the monk had assumed; "thou has kept my lord fasting these three hours waiting for thee; I would have thee quicken thy speed, and that of thy ghostly companions, as dinner waits thee."

"Thy converse is an enigma to me—I prithee, friend, expound," said the monk, in a very mild tone.

"Expound!" echoed Little John, "anon."

"Thou speakest of thy master, and of his waiting dinner for me and my saintly comrade," rejoined the monk; "I know nothing of what thou speakest. Who is thy master, friend?"

"Robin Hood," said Little John, laconically.

There was an immediate movement among the monk's followers, very strongly indicative of considerable apprehension; some of them, who felt a little more courageous than the others, and were preparing to advance to disperse our friends, no sooner heard this announcement than they dropped quietly back to the rear, and got themselves ready for instant flight, casting looks of doubt and alarm on all sides, as if they expected to see, in every shrub and bush, one of Robin's merrie men.

"Robin Hood!" ejaculated the monk, speaking in his natural tone—one more harsh than musical; "he is a strong, sturdy thief, of whom no man ever heard good."

"Thou lyest, monk, in thy teeth!" cried Little John, fiercely; "thou shalt rue uttering it. Mark ye! he is noble in blood and in deeds, and I would

advise no man to say other in my presence, or if he doth, let him beware my quarter-staff. My noble master hath bidden thee to dine with him; he hath waited long for his dinner, and I do not purpose lengthening the time by parleying with thee, therefore prepare thou and thy monkish companion to come with us; as for thy followers, they may return from whence they came, and if they list to do it now, they shall go free and unharmed, but if they remain or offer to oppose my will, then must they prepare to meet their Maker, for they will be helped to a speedy death. Away, those who love their lives; those who wish for a hasty death, stay. Will and Much, bring down the first man who shows an intent to stay."

Much and Will, who had dropped their brows during the converse, immediately upon hearing Little John's words, raised them and drew their arrows to the head. Had a bomb-shell suddenly dropped among the followers, and they perfectly aware of the terrible effects arising from its explosion, they could not have turned their horses' heads and scampered away with greater speed than they did when they saw the three bows raised and presented to them; each man felt as though one of these tremendous long shafts was quivering through him, and spurred his horse furiously with the hope of getting out of the danger as soon as possible.

The monks were about to follow the example of the flying escort, but Little John stopped them, and seizing the bridle of each horse, he prepared to lead the way to the trysting tree. There were two servants who stayed behind when the rest fled, one a groom who had the care of a sumpter horse heavily laden, and one a slight youth who acted as a page to the elder monk; they stayed behind, and, upon explaining what they were, they were suffered to remain, and in the custody of Will Scarlet and Much they followed Little John to the trysting tree.

When they reached it, they found Robin seated under it listlessly and alone. Marian was away at Barnsdale Hall with the family of the Gamwells, and he, disappointed at the non-appearance of the knight, felt dull and dispirited; but he no sooner observed Little John and his companions than his countenance brightened—he sprang up and advanced to meet them—he doffed his cap and made the monks a bow, which, when they saw, concluding he was not Robin Hood, they did not in any way acknowledge. Little John felt exasperated at this, and cried—

"Never heed him, Robin, they are churls; by dear worthy God, these monks are churlish dogs, without kind words to the poor, or good breeding to any."

"No matter," returned Robin: "these saintly folks have no courtesy but for the wealthy or the strong. I know them well and expect no other. Whom have ye there, Will? a sumpter horse, attended by a groom and page?"

"Yes!" replied Will, who was still laughing, and had been convulsively and continuously at the sudden dispersion of the monks' attendants. "Yes, these are two out of more than a dozen, who thought there might be some danger in a stringed bow, so galloped away directly they saw one."

"Most prudent men they," laughed Robin. "Well, my worthy monks, you must be as hungry after your ride as I am with waiting; we will at once to dinner."

Thereupon he drew forth his bugle, blew a blast which summoned the merrie men around him, and gave directions to have the dinner spread, a command which was speedily obeyed; while it was being prepared, Robin observed both monks gazing upon his people, himself, indeed everything, with an expression

of grievous fear; he spoke to the elder, or superior of the two—

"Fear not, monk!" he exclaimed; "no harm will come to thee; thou mayst partake of what is spread before thee cheerily and without restraint. When thou art at home, where is thy abbey? what is its name?"

"St. Mary's Abbey," returned the monk, "and though I am habited and attended simply now, yet am I there the high cellarer."

"Then, sir high cellarer, you are right welcome," observed Robin. "You shall give me your opinion upon my wine, you must needs be a good judge; you shall taste our venison too, cooked i' the forest fashion; my life on't you will not say a fasting man should scorn it."

The monk did not offer a contrary opinion, but sat down to his dinner with an appetite which did credit to the food placed before him; the wine, he confessed, was of exceeding good vintage, and by no means to be despised, albeit it was drunk under an oak tree in the green wood.

"It is a matter of great marvel to me," exclaimed Robin, "that I should be expecting one who was bound to be with me this day by a vow to the Holy Virgin, that he should not have come, and in lieu of him thou shouldst be here, who are of her abbey. I dread that our dear Lady is wroth with me, or him I expected would have come, unless thy abbot hath done him some foul wrong; if he hath, let him beware Robin Hood."

"Our blessed Lady hath kept her faith with thee," interposed Little John. "She hath sent, you perceive, two especial messengers with the money from her own abbey."

"Marry," replied Robin Hood, with a smile, "thou'rt right, Little John. Friend monk, our dear Lady was the security of one to whom beneath this tree I lent a small sum of money. He was to have met me here to-day to have returned it; he hath not come, but I can well believe that thou art a messenger from our gracious Lady come to pay me; if thou hast the money, let me have it, and at some future day, should you need help, you may call upon me and have it."

"By the divinity of our holy patron," swore the monk, "I never heard before of this debt, or even such a securityship. By my faith, but it is not a security which would satisfy me."

"I make mine avow to God, monk," cried Robin, sternly, "that thou speakest profanely, nay, impiously, of the holy dame, thy patron. Thou hast told me with thine own tongue, and thou canst not say nay thou didst not, that thou wert her holy servant. Each hour of thine is spent in her service, therefore speak thou not slightly of her. She hath this day made thee a messenger to me to pay the money for which she was security. She is a gentle lady and true, and maketh me not wait even a day for my due; and I owe thee thanks for coming this day, which I shall render thee when thou hast done thy duty. What hast thou in thy coffers?"

"What have I in my coffers?" repeated the monk, perfectly aghast at the question. "I have but very little, I can assure thee."

"What is the amount?" asked Robin.

"The amount—a—is—twenty merks, and no more, so may I thrive as I speak truth," said the monk, stammeringly.

"Twenty merks!" ejaculated Robin, looking steadfastly at him, as if he would read him through. "If thou hast spoken truth, monk, not one penny of it will I touch. It is a sorry sum for such as thee, and

if thou needest more, I will lend it to thee. But if thou hast not told me the truth, and in thy male there is more than the sum thou hast stated, every coin of it shalt thou lose. Little John, go thou and see if he has told the truth. If there is but twenty merks, I touch no penny of it; if more, it must be ours."

Little John hasted away on his mission, and the monk's face, naturally red, grew to the colour of scarlet, his eyes watered, he puffed and blew, and phew'd, vowed "it was very hot!" and looked altogether horribly confused.

As he saw Little John returning, he dropped his eyelids down, and commenced plucking the grass by his side, then took a long pull at the wine-cup; and when Little John arrived, his confusion became painfully apparent; he essayed a smile, but conscience treated him to such a pinch at the moment, that, instead of a smile, his features were distorted to a grin, which, from its exceedingly ugly character, was wonderfully expressive of anguish.

"What success, Little John?" demanded Robin when he had arrived; "is the monk so poor as he tells me?"

"I don't know whether he be poor," he replied, "but he is a true messenger from our dear Lady, for she hath sent you by him double thy loan. I have counted eight hundred golden merks from out the monk's male, and a handful or so into the bargain."

"I was sure she would not fail me," said Robin, with a laugh; "our Lady is the truest of women. I tell thee, monk, thou mightst search all England through and find me no better security. Fill up the cups, we will drink honour to our dear Lady. In thy prayers, monk, greet her for me, and say, should she ever need the aid of Robin Hood, he will not fail her."

"Thou must needs find her good security," responded the monk, "if thou dost take what thou hast lent from any one who hath money, and who knows nothing whatever of thy transactions but what thou chooseth to tell them. I think it would have been quite as well if our Lady had let me into the secret why and to whom I was carrying the money; beshrew me but I thought I was taking it to London for quite another purpose."

"And for what purpose didst thou think thou wert carrying it?" inquired Robin.

"A great mote (wardmote) is to be holden there a few days hence," rejoined the monk; "our abbot and prior have been much wronged by our reeves, and I was on my way hither to have a settlement with them."

"And instead, you have had a settlement with me" laughed Robin.

"There is yet another coffer to search," said Little John. "Shall I see what it contains?"

"No," said Robin, "I am content with the one; let the others pass untouched. Now, sir monk, having treated you thus courteously, you are free to depart when you please."

"I do not call it being treated courteously, to be invited to dinner and afterwards cleared of all one's money."

"It is our old custom," said Robin. "We serve you with a good dinner, a right plentifulness of wine, and we make you pay for it, as they would at any hostel. It is our manner to leave little behind when we search for the wherewithal to pay the bill incurred."

"Nay, 'fore God," said the monk, shaking his head rather sadly, "I rue me that I came near thee to dine. In Dankastere or Blythe I might have dined cheaper and better."

"Not better," said Robin.

"Well, but much cheaper, and so it would have been better," moaned the monk. "I must now return again to St. Mary's Abbey. Our Holy Patron keep me! what shall I say to the abbot and prior?"

"Greet me to them," said Robin; "they know of me. The Bishop of Hereford hath acquainted them with my name. Greet me to them, and tell them I would be glad if they would send me such a monk to dinner every day. Here is the stirrup cup. Hie thee home with a glad heart that thou hast been honoured by our Lady so as to be her special messenger."

The monk mounted on his steed, accompanied by his groom and little page, and his brother monk, who said nothing, did nothing, but eat and drink, nearly all the while he was there. After draining the cup of wine proffered by Robin as a stirrup cup, he bade him farewell, and galloped sorrowfully back in the direction of St. Mary's Abbey.

"Now, blessed be the Holy Virgin for keeping her word thus rightfully," exclaimed Little John; "if Sir Richard of the Lee is not here, his money is, and that will answer almost the same purpose."

"Indeed no," observed Robin, quickly; "I had rather he had been here coinless, than that he should keep away from his bond, and that monk come in lieu with thrice eight hundred golden merks. I am loath to find there are Saxons who cannot keep faith—"

He was here interrupted by the sudden appearance of sturdy George-a-Green, who ran hastily down the glade, and said—

"Noble master, a knight cometh speeding along the highway, followed by at least a hundred men armed to the teeth—shall we prepare to stay them?"

"Are they Normans?" hastily he enquired.

"You seldom see us poor Saxons so well fashioned as are these men who are approaching," replied George-a-Green.

"Up then, my merrie men; to your bows, to your bows and coverts—quick, away with ye! These Normans must be taught there are still true-hearted Saxon yeomen ready to oppose them, and prevent their taking any path they choose. Fit an arrow to each of your bows, but do not discharge one until I give you the signal; away all of ye."

"Will you not retire with us?" asked Little John.

"No," returned Robin, "I will remain, meet them, and see who and what they are."

"Then I will stay by your side," said Little John; "should these Normans be sportively inclined, they will just think thee some Saxon, and make a target of thee with their arrows; they will not be so frolicsome inclined if two stay with thee."

"Nor if three do," interposed Will; "I will therefore stay with thee, Robin."

"It is needless; these Normans may have the will, but decidedly they have not the power, to hit always at what they aim, even if he be a Saxon," said Robin; "however, do as ye list—it matters not whether three or one meet them."

The merrie men had all at his command retired; and not a vestige of them was to be seen; Robin was seated upon the green turf beneath the trying tree, and by his side, apparently in luxurious listlessness, lay Little John and Will Scarlet, awaiting the coming of this unexpected body of men. They had not long to wait, for down they came, pouring round the corner of the glade, and when within arrow-shot, the leader pricked his steed into a hard gallop up to the spot where Robin was seated.

"It is Sir Richard of the Lee," cried the three, simultaneously.

"Holy Mother! I thank thee," exclaimed Robin, springing to his feet. "The Saxon has kept his faith."

The knight, as Robin rose, drew up his steed, flung himself from its back, and running up, caught Robin by both hands, and squeezed them fervently.

"God save thee, Robin Hood," he cried, "God save thee! I am glad to have met thee."

"God save thee, Sir Richard," responded Robin Hood, "welcome to the green wood, thou gentle knight. I am right glad to see thee, for the sake of thy knightly word, which, by a vow to the Holy Virgin, didst thou pledge to me."

"I would have come to thee, Robin, if I had been penniless," returned the knight; "and having the money to return to thee, it is unlikely I should break my oath."

"Hast thou thy lands again?" inquired Robin.

"I have, thanks to God and thee, Robin Hood. My lands are again in my possession, and have been for some time agone. I should have been here earlier, but that I was detained by an event which I will relate to thee anon."

"Are these thy people?" asked Robin, as a hundred men drew up a short distance from Sir Richard of the Lee, all dressed in handsome dresses of the period, and well armed with weapons of the best make and fashion, all new.

"They are at present," returned the knight. "May I ask some refreshment of thee for them? They have had a fatiguing day, and need something; they are all Saxons, and picked men, good men and true, as I have proved them."

"They shall know what green wood hospitality is," said Robin, summoning his people, who thronged from all parts of the glade immediately they heard his horn.

"My merrie men," he said, "these strangers are brother Saxons; they are tired and hungry. Show them how we treat those we love when we get them in our forest home."

The men with the greatest alacrity prepared to comply with Robin's wishes. They soon spread a dainty repast before them, unclothed the horses, rubbed them down, walked them about, and then fed them; paid at the same time every attention to their riders, who soon showed themselves to be as happy as any one in their situation could wish to be. Robin drew Sir Richard to another part, and there, after he had made a hearty meal, he prepared to relate everything he was assured Robin wished to know. He had greeted both Little John and Will Scarlet warmly upon meeting with them, and he requested they should be at his side when he told his tale—a request which was instantly complied with, and he commenced thus:—

"I cannot describe to thee the feelings with which I quitted you on this day twelvemonth; my heart seemed too light for my body. Albeit the horse you gave me was one of the swiftest I was ever on, and the one I had ridden and was then leading as a sumpter horse was very fast, and I put them on their mettle, still I fancied we went slowly. However, I arrived at my castle with foaming steeds. I was met by my dear wife at the hall door; I caught her in my arms, and exclaimed, 'We are saved! we are saved!' she burst into tears of joy, and nigh fainted with excess of feeling. We summoned our children, who had been wandering about the chambers and the grounds like spectres, and communicated to them the blissful tidings. 'And who was this good and kind friend, who had created all this happiness for them?' they asked, with overflowing hearts. I bid them guess;

and they guessed many to whom I had applied in vain. At last I told them it was thee, Robin—Robin Hood the outlaw, I said; a stranger, who hath done that for me which none other dear friends—as they professed to be—would, and he, simply because he deemed me an unfortunate, whom he thought he had a right to succour. They would scarce credit my tale, although they had frequently heard so much good of thee; and when I assured it was so, they went down on their knees and prayed God to grant you all the happiness you had bestowed on them. I could scarce keep my son from coming to seek you out, and thank you as warmly as he felt your kindness; but I showed him that, like a truly generous heart, you disliked to hear of your good deeds."

"Suppose you skip all this part, and come to the abbot of St. Mary's at once," interrupted Robin.

"All in good time," said the knight, smiling; "I will not distress thee by speaking too much in thy praise, but thou must hear how thy conduct to me was received. The gentle Lilas grew quite eloquent in thy favour, and argued strongly that Herbert should seek thee out, but ultimately I was successful, and persuaded him to stay until you come to the Lee, and then he would be better able to show thee how he appreciated what you had done for us; he reluctantly assented, and on the next morning I prepared to go to the Abbey. I did not hurry myself, in order that the abbot might not deem me too eager, and so think that I had nearly lost my property, which was saved by some unlooked-for event; for if he had formed such an opinion, I knew well enough that he would take every advantage he could of it. While on my way there, the abbot said in the refectory, as I afterwards learned, unto the prior—

"This day twelvemonth, a knight, whose estate lieth not far from this, borrowed four hundred merks upon it of me, which upon this day he was to repay me with interest; if he cometh not, the estates are mine. Now, I conceive the day is from noon to noon; and therefore, if he is not here by noontide, I shall consider the day is gone, and the property mine."

"It is full early for such an agreement," replied the prior. "The poor man who hath the money to pay, even him who is in the strait, should have the benefit of the few hours which embrace the daylight. I would rather, for his sake, pay a hundred merks down now, that he had the grace of another twelvemonth, than you should hastily seize upon his estate. He may be away from England, where his right of dwelling, of home, is, and passing wretched days, the victim, probably, of cold and hunger and miserable sleepless nights. It is a pity thus early to claim his land; I would not be so light of conscience were I you. You do him much wrong, and, as members of the Holy Church, it is our duty to lighten, as much as we can, the weary load of woe our suffering brethren bear."

"By God and St. Richard!" cried the abbot, wrathfully, "thou'rt ever bearding me. I wist thou had best keep thy counsel for his palate whom it pleaseth—it is not good to mine. You forget the abbey will receive the benefit of an addition of four hundred golden merks per annum to its income."

"At this time the high cellarer, who knew all the affairs of the neighbouring estates, entered the refectory."

"Hast thou heard aught of Sir Richard of the Lee?" demanded the abbot of him.

"He is either dead or hanged," said the monk, sneeringly; "for nought have I heard of him, and this day I know his estates become thine. By the

Mass! holy abbot, we shall be all the better for his four hundred merks annually.'

"The lord high justice is staying with me,' said

consideration, in bright golden coin, he was of the abbot's opinion.

"He will not come at all to-day, I dare wager,' said



the abbot; 'I will ask him if I cannot claim the estates an' he be not here by noon.'

"The high justice was sought, and for a handsome

he; 'therefore thou mayst well esteem the estates thine.

"He had scarce uttered the words when I reached the gate. I had clothed myself even in the same

apparel in which thou didst see me last year, and the few men I took with me I also clad poorly, but cleanly. As we came to the gates, the porter saw us arrive; he came to the gate to welcome my arrival. He had formerly experienced my bounty, and the poor fellow was grateful. He made me acquainted with what had transpired—which, to say truth, I had somewhat expected, and had thus meanly clad myself in order, if the abbot should endeavour to play me false, to pay him his money, clothe myself and my men in gay clothing which we brought with us, laugh the abbot to scorn, and ride gaily home.

"Welcome, good Sir Richard," cried the porter; "my lord the abbot, with the prior and many lords and gentlemen, are here to wait your arrival—they say out of love for thee, of that thou mayst judge thyself. I hope thou hast the money, and will not have to trust to their affection. By our Holy Dame! thou hast a noble steed; let me send him to the stable, that he may be cared for after his journey."

"Now, by Him who died on the tree, nor him or any of my company," I cried, "shall go in there."

"As I entered the abbot's hall unattended, I saw it nigh filled with ecclesiastics and gentles, to consult upon seizing my estates. They were astounded at the sight of me, as though I had been some foul apparition who had suddenly started up to blast them. With a mock humility I knelt down and saluted them; which, when I had done, I said—

"You see, sir abbot, I have come here to-day, as I appointed."

"Hast thou brought me the money?" he asked, quickly.

"Not a penny of it," I rejoined, enjoying the smile of gratification which played over his features.

"Thou art an unfortunate debtor," he replied; and turning to the justice, said in a low tone, which, however I heard, "Congratulate me, my Lord Justice." He then fixed his eyes again upon me, and said, "What dost thou here, knight, not having brought with thee the money to redeem thy estate?"

"To pray a longer day," I rejoined.

"Thy day is to-day; thine agreement was to pay me to-day—failing in that, thy estates are mine," he replied nervously, and said to the justice, "Thou wilt befriend me with thy counsel, wilt thou not? The estates are mine; is it not so?"

"They are," said the justice. "Thou hast broken thy agreement, sir knight, and the lands now are none of thine."

"Good sir abbot," I exclaimed, "be thou my friend, as thou hast promised to be; hold my lands in thy hand until I can repay thee the four hundred merks, and when I can do so, restore them to me. I will, in consideration of thy showing me that kindness, be thy servant, serving thee truly until I have the money to pay thee."

"Thou talkest to the winds," cried the abbot, with a great chuckle. "I swear by the Holy Saints, get thee land where thou mayst, thou gettest none from me."

"By our dear Lady, then," I said, "albeit thou thinkest thou hast my lands safe in thy grasp, I'll teach thee that thou art right wofully mistaken, for I will have them from thy unchristian claws, however dearly they may be bought."

"Thou speakest unwisely," said the justice; "not paying the money thou hast borrowed loseth thee thine estates, and thou canst not again have them by purchase, however great thine offer, if the holy abbot refuseth to part with them."

"The Holy Virgin speed us!" I said; "but it is

well to assay a friend ere you trust him, in case, when you have need of one, that you may not find him you have trusted play thee false, as thou hast me, sir abbot!"

"Thou art a poor wretch—a coinless hound. Darest thou beard me in my hall before these noble folk?" cried the abbot, with wrath. "Out upon thee for a false knight! speed thee out of my hall, dog!"

"Thou liest, abbot!" I cried, springing to my feet; "thou liest, here in thy hall I tell thee. I was never in thought or act a false knight; he lies most foully who dares say I was ever; and thou, to thy other bad qualities, can add a want of courtesy, or thou hadst not let a knight kneel so long in thy hall."

"Thou didst not kneel all the while that converse passed between you?" interrupted Robin Hood.

"I did," returned the knight, "but it was only to try the extent of his charity and goodwill towards his human brethren, and miserably did he show himself deficient. 'I have been in jousts and tournaments,' I cried to him, 'and have been esteemed as gentle and as noble as any there. As for my estates, think you the king, who knows the value of land as well as any in the kingdom, will suffer thee to retain my land for a paltry four hundred merks? You know him better; you know he would take them from thee and give me a larger price himself, or restore them.'"

"What more will you offer him?" said the lord high justice, in an audible whisper; "you had better give him more and obtain a release from him, or I dare swear that you will never hold his lands quietly and peacefully."

"One hundred merks," said the abbot, gnawing his fingers with anxiety to know what the issue of my interview with him would prove.

"Give him two," suggested the justice, "the lands are worthy of it, and it is more likely to keep him quiet."

"I will give thee two hundred merks," said the abbot, following the Justice's advice, "in addition to the four hundred thou already hast, so that thou do give me a true and proper assignment of thy estate, and a quittance of all claim upon them."

"Though you would give me two thousand more," I cried, moved to wrath by their base efforts to cheat me out of my inheritance, "you should be no nearer having them than ye are at the present moment. I will never own for my heir, nor abbot, justice, nor friar. Behold, here is thy gold," I exclaimed, producing it; "here are the four hundred merks thou didst lend me, but not one penny more. Hadst thou have acted courteously to me, thou shouldst, beside the four hundred thou hast received as interest already, have been paid an additional sum; but not one shadow of a merk more shalt thou have but the sum thou didst lend me. Look you, sir abbot, here are four hundred merks I tender thee in open court; the dial telleth that the hour of noon hath not yet arrived, so in spite of thy base subtrefuges, abbot, the lands are again mine. I have kept my agreement, nor can you or those men of law gainsay it." With that I placed the money at the abbot's feet; he looked thunderstricken; you cannot conceive how he rolled his head on one side, and stared with an expression of idiotic astonishment. However, I heeded it not—I stalked haughtily from the hall, bending neither to the right nor left; but gaining the porter's lodge, I attired myself in more knightly habiliments, and my men also clothed themselves in dresses becoming the followers of a wealthy knight. I then returned to the abbot's hall, accompanied by my men, and my change of attire seemed to strike all present with fresh

wonder. I advanced to the centre of the hall, and in a loud voice said—

"My lord high justice, I address myself to thee, to answer the only question which I have need before this company to ask, and as truly as thou wilt have to answer to thy Maker hereafter, so truly do thou answer to me what I shall ask of thee: Having kept unto my agreement, and paid the whole of my liabilities, are not the estates again mine?"

"They are," replied the justice, reluctantly.

"It is enough," I cried, and I walked singing out of the hall.

"I was met at the gates of my castle by my wife, Herbert, and Lilas.

"Be merry," I cried, 'be happy, and pray for Robin Hood! pray that all his life may be as blessed as our present moments are! had it not been for him we had been beggars. I have paid the abbot his loan; I have the lord high justice's acknowledgment that my estates are again free and unencumbered; and now it shall go hard but Robin Hood shall find I remember what he has done for me and those dependent on me.' With a little industry, my estate soon yielded thy loan: it also has enabled me to make you the accompanying present—it consists of a hundred cypress yew bows, strung and fashioned after the best manner, a hundred sheafs of arrows of equal goodness—the heads of the arrows are brightly burnished, and every one an ell long, the feathers are peacock's, and notched with silver; a hundred men also, well clothed, well armed, with stout steeds well caparisoned: all these, with thy five hundred golden merks, I pray thee to accept."

"I should be doing myself a great wrong were I to take them," said Robin, the water springing into his eyes, and pressing his hand warmly. "I thank thee for them full as heartily as though, needing them greatly, thou hadst given them to me. Know that that same high cellarer of whom you spoke hath dined with me to-day, and paid eight hundred golden merks for his dinner—a strange coincidence that you should have paid his master the same sum on this same day a twelvemonth preceding. I never receive money twice: I took the monk's money as thy payment; so keep thou the four hundred merks, and take back thy present, applying it to thine own use; nor think me ill spoken if I tell thee I know thine estate must have been impoverished by all these demands upon it, and beshrew me if I will add to the number of those who have done it. Think yourself under no obligation to me; and if thou dost list, deem what thou hast brought to me as a present from me to thee, and in that spirit convey it home. Let us speak no more of it. What made thee so late in thy arrival to-day?"

"Thou hast a noble manner of doing things," replied the knight, evidently affected by Robin's conduct to him, "and I will not cramp thy generous nature by insisting on thy acceptance of what I have brought, but take it again as thou desirest, as a gift from thee whom I esteem above all men. I can see that all these thanks disconcert thee, so I will no more of them, but proceed to tell thee what detained me. On my way hither I came past a spot where there was a meeting of some of the best yeomen of the west country at a wrestling match. The prize contended for was a white bull, a courser, a saddle and a bridle studded with burnished gold, a pair of gauntlets, a gold ring, and a pipe of wine; the best man against all comers was to bear this rich prize away. I stopped to see the last of the play, and one yeoman stood against all comers; he was honestly the winner, but he was recognised as a follower of thine."

"Ha! of mine!" said Robin. "What was his name?"

"Gaspar-a-Tin," replied the knight.

"What, the jolly tinker? Beshrew me, he did well to wrestle successfully against all comers from the west country. And so he gained the prize?" said Robin Hood.

"He gained it," answered the knight, "but they refused it him because he was thy follower. He stoutly and fearlessly maintained his right, and when some spoke disparagingly of thee, by the Mass! he laid about him in right earnest, and made the speakers repent their hasty words. Knives were drawn, and he would speedily have been slain; but for love of thee and all thy friends, I rode among them with my men, and dispersed those who sought to slay him, or deprive him of what he had fairly won. I put him in possession of what he had won. I gave him five merks for the wine, and bade it be broached for those who liked to taste it. Giving the yeoman the benefit of my escort, we came on to the green wood,—and that was the only reason why I was so late ere I arrived."

"Sir Richard of the Lee, the man who befriends a yeoman is my friend," said Robin, "and hadst thou done nought else, I should have had good cause to be glad it was in my power to serve thee—it may be again, either with hand or coffer. Never fear to seek me when thou dost need me, and thou shalt always find me as desirous to prove thy friend as I have done, or as thou couldst wish me."

"I shall treat thee as a true friend. I shall think of thee as such—pray for thee as such—and act to thee as such, now and for ever, while I live, so help me Holy Mary in my hour of strait!" cried Sir Richard, with fervent enthusiasm.

"Amen!" cried Little John and Will Scarlet together.

The day was spent in delightful harmony. Sir Richard accompanied Robin, attended by Little John and Will Scarlet, to the Hall, and met with all the family there. He could not but smile at the many wives who were presented to him, nor help being struck with the sight of so much beauty. Will drew him on one side after introducing Maude, and in a whisper asked him if he ever, in the whole course of his existence, saw any one so perfect as she? The knight laughed, and said gently, it would show a want of gallantry in him towards the rest of the ladies were he to answer the question as he seemed to desire, and therefore he trusted he would excuse him saying all he thought. Will was quite satisfied with the answer, and went and kissed Maude, with a conviction that he was the luckiest as well as happiest fellow in the universe in possessing so sweet a creature. The hours glided cheerfully away, and as night drew on, Sir Richard took an affectionate leave of all, and attended by a party of Robin's men to lead the way, followed by his troop which he had brought to Robin as a present, he was shortly again within the walls of his own castle.

CHAPTER VII.

"Until they came to the merry greenwood
Where they had gladdest to bee,
There they were ware of a wight yeoman,
That leaned agaynst a tree.

"A sword and dagger he wore by his syde,
Of many a man the bane,
And he was clad in his capull hyde,
Top, and tayl, and mane.

* * *

"And Scarlette he was flying a foote,
Fast over stock and stone,
For the proud sheriffe with seven score men
Fast after him is gone.

"One shoote now I will shoote, quoth John,
With Christ his might and mayne,
I'll make yond sheriffe that wends soe fast,
To stopp he shall be fayne.

* * *

"Sayes, lye there, lye there, now Sir Guye,
And with me be not wrothe,
If thou have had the worst strokes at my hand,
Thou shalt have the better clothe.

"Robin did off his gown of greene,
And on Sir Guye did throwe,
And he put on that capull hyde,
That cladd him topp to toe."

ROBIN HOOD AND GUY OF GISBORNE.

IT had been ascertained by the Sheriff of Nottingham that Robin Hood with half his men were away in Yorkshire, and he conceived with some shrewdness that it would be possible, with a sufficient number of men, to make an attack upon the merrie men who still remained—clear the wood of them—destroy the haunt—and lie in wait for Robin and the remainder of the men when they returned. He sent to London for a reinforcement of troops, making out a strong case of necessity for them, and they were sent to him; he organized them after his own fashion, and sent them out into the green wood under the command of him who had brought the men from London. The merrie men, from being connected with so many in Nottingham town, soon were aware of what was in store for them. They concerted measures accordingly, and disposed themselves to receive the troop, who marched on sanguine of success; but when they had arrived at the spot, wherethe men had prepared to meet them, they were welcomed with a shower of arrows, which committed dreadful slaughter; it was followed by a second and third, each arrow telling with a dreadful precision of aim, without the assailed knowing from whence the shafts came; then the merrie men rushed rushed forth from their coverts with great shouts, and out down all who offered resistance. A panic seized the troop at this sudden and terrible attack, and they fled without striking a blow in the greatest disorder into Nottingham, with the loss of nearly half their men. Not one of the merrie men received a hurt; and they gathered the bodies of those whom they had slain together, and in the night they bore them into the town, and laid them down at the castle gates, bidding the high sheriff pay them a visit in the green wood, and they would bring him home in the same fashion, an invitation which, had he received, he would have had no hesitation in at once declining. He was horror-stricken at his ill success, and, while in the midst of his wailing at his misfortune, a Norman, whom he had known at Rouen, called to see him with a stout body of men. To him Fitz Alwine detailed his disaster, and repeated a lying history of the way Robin Hood had served him several times,

and excused his own failures by swearing that Robin Hood and his men were invincible.

"Were he the devil himself," said this friend, who was called Sir Guy of Gisborne, from an estate he possessed there, "an' I took it into my head to pull his horns off, I would do it."

"Not if they were Robin Hood's," said the baron, who hoped to egg on Sir Guy to undertake an enterprise against the bold outlaw.

"If they were the devil's, I tell you," cried Sir Guy, "an' it pleased me to do it."

"Well," returned Fitz Alwine, speaking in a careless tone, "I never knew the man who would not quail before Robin Hood."

"Then you never knew me," cried Sir Guy, with an expression of scorn.

"Oh ho!" laughed Fitz Alwine, "he would make you quail like all the rest."

"Pshaw!" roared Sir Guy; "it is not in the power of mortal or devil to do it: I defy them both alike. Let me meet this Robin Hood, and I will cut off his ears, slit his nose, and hang him up like a swine by the feet."

"By the Mass, then," exclaimed the baron, "I wish thou couldst meet with him; if thou wert able to do that, it would be serving me mightily."

"Tell me where he is to be found, and I will undertake it, my head be the forfeit if I fail," cried Sir Guy.

"I have little doubt but it will," said Fitz Alwine, "for I think it is not in man's power to conquer him."

"You will see," said he, contemptuously. "Where is this mighty man to be found?"

"He is in Barnsdale-wood, some two days' journey hence. I will accompany thee, and join my men with thine. He has only half his crew there, and if we approach cautiously we shall have them all snugly."

"Be it so," returned Sir Guy; "but I will don a yeoman's dress and seek him single-handed, and then you shall find whether he or I am the most invincible."

Delighted that he had such an assistant, Fitz Alwine set to work with alacrity; he got all his men ready, and with Sir Guy he started off to Barnsdale. It was agreed that he should lead his men to one part of the wood, and that Sir Guy, in the disguise of a yeoman, should take another, endeavour to find Robin Hood, slay him if he could, and in the event of success he was to blow a horn which had a peculiar tone with it, and thereupon the sheriff was to join him, and together they were to do the best they could to slay as many of the merrie men as they could, and take the others prisoners. With this intention, early one morning they quitted Nottingham.

Two days subsequent to this, Robin Hood, lying down beneath his trysting tree, fell into a slumber. Little John seated himself by his side and was conning over the merits of his pleasant wife, Winifred, when a woodwale (a kind of thrush), alighting on a bough above him, began singing with such extraordinary loudness that he could not but take note of it. Robin also from sleeping disturbedly awoke, and sprang suddenly to his feet.

"How now!" cried Little John, startled. "What is the matter with thee, Robin?"

"Why, where am I?—oh, I have been dreaming," he answered, rubbing his eyes and waking himself up. "I have had a dream. I thought I was treated contemptuously by two yeoman; I threw back their scorn with interest, and we came to blows; they conquered me, beat me, and bound me; they were about to slay me, when suddenly a bird alighted on a tree near me,

seeming like as it had been made of flame, and it appeared to speak, bidding me be of good cheer. My bands at that moment fell from me and I was free: then I awoke."

"It was odd," said Little John, thoughtfully, "while you were sleeping, a woodweele sat itself on yon bough, and sang so loud it waked you; it fled directly you moved."

"It may mean something," said Robin, scarcely allowing to himself that he was superstitious, and therefore chary of making the remark; "warnings should never be despised, however slight; we will look about us and see what is going on."

The merrie men now drew nigh in answer to his summons, and bidding them away towards York, which was the only point from which he anticipated danger, he took Little John with him to reconnoitre one part of the wood, while Will Scarlet, with two others, went in the direction of Mansfeld. As Robin Hood and Little John proceeded something in the same direction that Will had taken, they saw a yeoman with a capul hide (horse hide) about him as a species of cloak—not unfrequently worn by Yorkshire yeomen of that day, especially those who had the charge of horses; he had a sword and dagger by his side, and looked as great a villain as he was in reality.

"Aha!" exclaimed Robin, on seeing him, "here's a stranger; he looks a ruffian—I'll try if he be one; if he is, he hath no business here, and unless he budges pretty quickly, he shall taste the quality of my weapons."

"He looks a dog who will bite," said Little John, scanning the stranger from head to foot. "Do you stay, Robin, beneath this tree, and I will go ask him what he doeth here. Marry, I will make him troop quickly."

"No, Little John," uttered Robin, hastily, "I have a fancy for this fellow. I have not had a bout a long while, and, by the Holy Mother, I never should, if thou hadst thy will: thou'rt ever wishing me to send my men before, and I tarry behind. By St. Mary, but some day I shall have to set to and beat thee for mere want of practice, only that it may be breaking a good staff, thine head being of such especial thickness. No, Little John, I will trounce this knave myself, for I am sure he is one—he looks one; and do thou go to Will, and bid him back; he is not far from hence. When thou hearest my horn, I shall want thee, but not before."

"Your will is my law," said Little John, turning away somewhat tified, because Robin would not suffer him to fight instead of him. Leaving Robin Hood to accost the stranger in his capul hide, we will follow Little John in his path to find Will Scarlet. He wandered on, annoyed that Robin should have taken into his own hands the task of fighting the stranger, for he easily guessed it would come to that, when he wished so much himself to have the pleasure. But a little reflection taught him that he was unjust in being offended where he had no right to take offence, so the fit passed away almost as quickly as it had come; and when he came to consider on what errand he was bound, he found he had wandered considerably out of his path; he, however, bestirred himself, and was soon on the track of Will Scarlet. A long time had not elapsed ere he heard the clashing of weapons, as of men engaged in violent strife; he ran on in the direction from whence the sound emanated, and soon came upon Will Scarlet and his two companions fighting desperately with eight or ten opponents, and the Sheriff of Nottingham advancing swiftly with a large body of men. Little John rushed forward with a

loud shout, and getting his bow ready, he took an aim at the sheriff in such an ecstasy of passion that the sudden force used in drawing his bow broke it, and the arrow fell useless to the ground.

"A curse on thee and the tree on which thou grew!" he cried, bitterly, "thou worthless slip of a more worthless tree, to fail me at such a moment as this!"

He darted forward to help his companions. He saw one of them cut down, after opposing three most manfully, without budging a foot. He seized a bow which the unfortunate outlaw had dropped, and took another aim at the sheriff, and exclaimed—

"One shot will I shoot now that shall quiet yonder rascally sheriff, who is coming hither so fast. He shall stop as suddenly as he is advancing."

He drew the bow, and loosed the shaft. The sheriff's quick eye detected the act, and he threw himself flat upon the horse. A retainer, William-a-Trent, who rode close behind him, received it through his body, and fell dead from his horse. That William-a-Trent had been very anxious to be of the expedition against Robin Hood; but it had been better for him

"To have bene a-bed with sorrowe
Than to be that day in the greenwood slade
To meet with Little John's arrowe."

The troop pricked forward more quickly on perceiving one of their companions slain, and Little John threw himself among those who were sore pressing Will Scarlet and his remaining comrade. He hurled one fellow to the ground like lightning, tore a spear from his grasp, and laid about him with tremendous energy and effect. Will Scarlet's companion was cut down, it was impossible to withstand so many opposers, and Will was himself hemmed in. Little John, however, who had seen the second outlaw fall, raged like a lion. He cleared Will in an instant from his assailants, and roared to him to fly.

"Never," cried Will, "while I have breath!"

"Fly, Will, for the Holy Mother's sake!" urged Little John; "seek Robin Hood, and get together the merrie men, or there will be more true hearts this day on their backs than the green turf will be glad to receive."

Seeing the truth of Little John's words, Will made a desperate cut at one fellow who blocked his path, and felled him to the earth, and then darted off to find Robin; while Little John gave no ground, and fought like a madman. But it was madness to contend with such numbers, and although his prodigious strength stood him in good stead, there were too many against him to make it of much avail. A long staff was thrust between his legs, in endeavouring to avoid it he was thrown; a body of men threw themselves upon him, and bound him hand and foot. There he lay until the sheriff came up, and one fellow bared his sword to cut off his head on the instant, as he fully expected to receive an immediate command to that effect from Fitz Alwine; but he did not give it. His eye lighted on Little John; with a grim smile he ordered him to be placed on his feet, and said to him with a chuckle—

"I remember you, my forest pole, and you shall remember me before you are sent into the other world."

"I don't forget you," said Little John, gnawing his nether lip, to conceal his rage and shame at being a prisoner. "I hung you like a thieving dog under your own roof—how did you relish your due? Remember you, Robin Hood will be here anon—ask him if he recollects you, and note his reply."

"You mean his head will be here," said the sheriff, grinning. "His carcase will be left to rot in the green wood, or else to make a meal for the wolves."

"It will never do that," said Little John, "thou'rt only foretelling thine own doom."

"You will find thy mistake. I will let thee live until his head is brought to thee; then shalt thou speed after him with most uncommon quickness."

"I fear thy threats less than I fear thee, and I fear thee as I fear the miserable worm that trails the ground meeting his death beneath my feet," returned Little John, with cool contempt.

"You shall—you shall—" The Baron was at a loss for a simile, so he wound up with "You shall see. I will let thee know thy fate. Thou shalt be wounded, but not to death, and be drawn at my horse's heels up hill and down dale, and then hung on the highest tree in these parts."

"But thou mayst fail of thy villanous purpose, if it pleaseth the Holy Son of God," said Little John, quietly; "so I care not for what thou sayest."

The Baron intended to have made a reply, but so many synonymous sentences rushed to his tongue together, and each strove so hard to get out first, that he found himself bothered; and so, after a little spluttering, he contented himself with saying nothing at all. He waved his hand for Little John to fall back among the troop, and quietly awaited the result of Sir Guy's undertaking.

We must now return to Robin Hood, who, advancing to the stranger with the capul hide, said to him blithely—

Good morrow, good fellow; methinks, by the stout bow you bear in your hand, you should be a good archer."

"I have lost my way," said the stranger, not heeding Robin's question. "I know nought of this wood."

"I do, every turn," replied Robin. "I will lead thee through it, an' thou tellest me where thou wouldst go."

"I seek an outlaw whom men call Robin Hood," said the stranger. "I had rather meet with him than have the best—"

"What?" asked Robin Hood, observing him hesitate.

"The best forty pounds that ever were coined," he replied, hastily.

"If you come with me, my mighty yeoman, thou shalt soon see him," said Robin Hood, "but if thou'rt in no exceeding haste, we will have some little pastime beneath the greenwood trees here; let us try our skill at woodcraft. We may perhaps light on this Robin Hood at some unlooked-for time, for I can tell thee he is not always to be met with when sought for."

Robin cut down the thin boughs of several shrubs, pared off the leaves, and then stuck them upright in the ground at some distance apart.

"Now, yeoman," he said, "see if thou canst hit with thine arrow, at sixty yards, either of those wands. Lead off, and I will follow thy shot."

"Nay, good fellow," replied the stranger, "if you ask me to do that which seemeth impossible, thou hadst better lead off, and if it is to be done, show how you do it."

Robin shot without appearing to take an aim, and his arrow went within an inch of the slight wand—so close, indeed, that the stranger thought he had hit it; but Robin told him he had not, and made him go on. After several ineffectual essays, he confessed he could not come within a foot of it. Robin then made a small garland of wild flowers and hung it upon one of the wands, bidding the yeoman send his arrow through its centre; he took a long aim at it, and the arrow went through the garland, just ruffling the inner edge.

"Well shot!" said Robin, "but not well enough for a yeoman. You see the thin slip of wand which

shows itself through the centre of the garland—I will cleave it with my arrow."

"It cannot be done," said the stranger.

"Behold!" cried Robin, his arrow leaving his bow almost as soon as his words left his lips.

"Wonderfully done!" cried the stranger, decidedly astonished. "Why, good yeoman, an' thy heart be as stout as thine hand, thou art better than this same Robin Hood they talk so much of. What is thy name, that I may remember who hath so astonished me with his expertness at the bow?"

"Nay, by my faith," said Robin, jovially, "let me know thine, and I will not withhold mine from thee."

"I have a good estate to the west," replied the stranger, "and am called after it Sir Guy of Gisborne. You may marvel to see me in this unknighly apparel, but I have sworn to take Robin Hood, and I bethought me of this disguise as being the more likely to bring me to his presence. Now, what is thy name, yeoman?"

"I have a good estate here," replied Robin; "I have also one in Nottinghamshire; and one in Huntingdonshire, which is kept from me. I am one who cares for or fears no man, especially such an one as thee. I am he whom thou seekest—my name is Robin Hood."

"Then shalt thou die here!" cried Sir Guy, drawing his sword, "and this horn will convey news of thy defeat to those who are near at hand, and will be glad to hear of it. Say thy prayers, Robin Hood; for come what may, I spare thee not. I have sworn to take back thy head, and I will, by Satan!"

"When thou hast conquered me, thou mayst do thy will on my body," said Robin, coolly; "but mark my words, Sir Guy:—thou hast sworn not to spare me—I will not spare thee, if the Blessed Virgin gives me the victory. Thou art a Norman—that seals thy doom. Come on—no quarter—life for the victor, death to the vanquished!"

Not a word more passed between them, but they set to work in good earnest. Sir Guy of Gisborne, in addition to great personal strength, was an accomplished swordsman, and with these qualities he possessed a ruthless stony nature, which would induce him to take every advantage to draw blood, no matter how unknighly or unfair the act, or whether the meanness gained him any advantage; and acting up to this spirit, he attacked Robin fiercely before he had drawn his sword. Robin leaped back to avoid him, and soon had his trusty blade opposed to the knight's; but he lost ground by it, and was forced close to the straggling roots of an oak tree. Sir Guy pressed him hard, for he well knew he had much the advantage of ground, and he determined to make the most of it; his blows rained hard and fast; they were delivered with a force which made Robin each moment expect to see his own blade shiver at the hilt, but it was a stout blade, and bore all the blows nobly. Robin quickly found that if he remained much longer in his present position, he should stand a very certain chance of being slain; he therefore resolved to use his best efforts to extricate himself, and in his turn attacked Sir Guy; but the knight stood like a rock, and budged not a foot, although Robin kept him well employed in defending himself. After some little time, Robin saw that, without the most tremendous exertion, he could not gain his point, and as this might tell against him if he used it even successfully, he determined to leap lightly on one side, then edge round, and try if possible to place Sir Guy in the same position he had just quitted. No sooner had he come to the conclusion than he determined to act upon it, and just as Sir Guy was delivering a heavy blow, he leaped aside, but his

foot caught in a root of the tree just as he jumped, and he fell to the ground. Sir Guy was not the man to let such an opportunity pass without taking advantage of it, and he accordingly with a shout sprung on his prostrate opponent, with the intention of putting an end to the contest at once. Robin perceived the danger of his situation instantly, and cried earnestly—

"Holy Mother of God! Ah! thou dear Lady! it is no man's destiny to die before the time allotted him to live in this world; my hour is not yet come, I feel. Give me strength to win this fight, or die as becomes a man and a true Saxon."

As he uttered these words he felt a sudden vigour pass into his limbs, every sinew seemed strengthened, and dexterously avoiding the fierce blow Sir Guy made at him, he leaped upon his feet and now obtained the advantageous position Sir Guy had previously possessed; he made the most of it, and the clashing of their weapons grew fiercer than ever. At last Robin, making a powerful parry of a blow delivered by Sir Guy with terrific strength, succeeded in whirling his sword far from his grasp, and of burying his own like lightning in his heart. Sir Guy clenched his hands convulsively, and fell dead without a groan. When Robin saw that he had slain his opponent, he offered up a prayer of thankfulness for his success; and when he had done this, he bethought him of what Sir Guy had said relative to bearing his head to those who were near, and who would be glad to hear the tones of the horn which was to convey the news of his defeat.

"By the Mass!" he cried, "it will be as well to see who these folks are that are so near, and with that capul hide I may disguise myself enough for my purpose. Now, Sir Guy, with your permission we will change clothes, and lose no time either about it, for every moment wasted may be of consequence to those connected with me."

So saying, he stripped Sir Guy's body of such habiliments as he deemed necessary, and divesting himself of the corresponding garments on his own person, he clothed himself in the dead man's dress, and threw the capul hide across his shoulders, as he had seen Sir Guy wear it; then, for fear the strangers whom he was about to seek might come and discover the body of their friend while he was looking for them, he dressed Sir Guy in his clothes; he then cut off his head, which he gashed in the face so that it might not be recognised, and bore it with him, in order to make his disguise more complete, as he had heard Sir Guy say he had sworn to carry his (Robin's) head back, as a trophy of his victory. When he had made all his arrangements, and was about to depart, he looked upon the body of Sir Guy, and exclaimed—

"Lie thou there, Sir Guy—lie thou there! thou hast nought to complain of. I have done that for thee which thou didst strive with all thy might to do for me, and therefore be thou not wrathful that I have prevailed; for, beshrew me, if thou hast had the hardest knocks, thou hast the better garments—the best Lincoln cloth 'stead of thy Yorkshire woollen. Now will I see what the effect of thy little horn will be, for I will blow a lusty blast; I know not if there be any signal agreed upon, but I will stand the chance of that."

He blew a loud blast, and the horn having a peculiar tone, he concluded there was nothing more needful to distinguish it from any others. It was heard and replied to, and no sooner did the return strike upon his ear than he hastened in the direction whence it proceeded. He was soon close to the baron and his party, and blew a second blast on Sir Guy's horn.

"Hark!" cried Fitz Alwine, joyfully, "that betokens good tidings; it is Sir Guy's horn; he hath slain Robin Hood, the vile outlaw."

"A hundred Sir Guys could not do it, an' he fought fairly and like a man!" roared Little John, feeling a horrible misgiving that the baron was speaking the truth, especially as he saw Robin coming down the glade, clad in the capul hide, and imitating Sir Guy's bearing so closely that he had no idea but that it was really the knight who was approaching. "Give me a quarter-staff and let him take his blade, the best steel ever forged, and I will defeat him, if he hath slain Robin: and if he hath, there are as many hands as he hath hairs in his head who will revenge it. He has used some vile means to gain his ends, which no honest man would stoop to do."

"Say thou thy prayers, dog!" cried the sheriff. "Thy master is slain, and so shalt thou be; therefore thou hadst better spend thy remaining moments in prayer than in railing at a noble-hearted knight, who hath slain thy doughty leader as easily as though he were cutting down a reed. Come hither, come hither, thou gallant Sir Guy!" he continued, addressing Robin Hood, whom he saw advancing quickly to him, "thou hast conquered the outlaw—thou hast delivered thy country from the most monstrous villain the world e'er saw—thou hast slain Robin Hood! Ask what thou wilt of me that I can grant, and it shall be thine."

Robin Hood, at a glance, had seen Little John's situation, and smiled as he encountered the fierce glance of defiance and hatred which the latter threw at him, supposing him to be the slayer of his beloved friend and leader. The words of the sheriff alighted on Robin's ear, carrying with them a means of extricating Little John from his situation, and in reply, therefore, he said to the sheriff—

"I have slain him who would have slain me, and since you give me the power of asking a boon of you, I ask but a blow at yonder knave, whom you have there bound. I have slain one; let me see if I cannot prevail over the other."

"If you wish to kill him with your own hand," answered the sheriff, not noticing the change of voice, because he never for an instant supposed, or even thought, that he could be deceived in this manner, "you can, if you list; but [this is no boon; ask something else of me."

"I need no other," replied Robin.

"Then shalt thou have thy will; his life is thine."

"I will shrive him first," said Robin; "then will I loose his bonds, and fight with him."

Little John, although he had not detected our hero in his disguise, immediately he heard his voice, knew him, and was in a moment relieved from the most terrible weight of anguish he had ever felt; he gave a long sigh, the effects of the relief he experienced, and waited then patiently and quietly until Robin matured his plan, whatever it might be. He was not long left in uncertainty, for Robin approached him with some haste; but on finding that the sheriff, with several of his followers, were close upon his heels, he stopped suddenly and said abruptly—

"Stand back! stand back, all of you! did I not say I was going to hear his shrift before I fought with him? and ye all know it is not the custom, nor right, that more than one should hear another's shrift. Stand back, I tell you, or I may trounce some of you, even as I have him whose carcass, without this head, lies in yonder glade! There, dogs! take it and glut your eyes with the trunkless head of him who had a stouter heart than any hound among ye!" So saying, he threw the gashed head of Sir Guy into the baron's

arms, who as instantly threw it among his men with a roar of terror, as if it had been a ball of red-hot iron; none of them were more eager than their lord to retain possession of it, and it fell to the ground to be kicked from one to the other. Robin had no occasion to say another word: the men, accompanied by the baron, fell back to a more respectful distance, quite as much—possibly more—satisfied with his promise to trounce them, than if he had put his promise into execution. He, as soon as he saw them as far as he considered essential for his purpose, approached Little John, and with a forest knife cut loose his hands, placed in his hand the bow and quiver of arrows which he had taken from Sir Guy (he still retained his own), and then blew the call on his own bugle which summoned his merrie men to his side. He had scarce blown it when a loud shout rung in the air, and Will Scarlet, with a face like his name, came bounding into sight, sword in hand, followed by a body of the merrie men at the top of their speed. The sight of all this came upon the baron's vision like a horrible dream; but it so quickly assumed the appearance of reality, when Robin threw off the capul hide and declared his name, and Little John fitting an arrow to Sir Guy's bow, drew it to the head, only waiting for Robin's order to discharge it, that he "fettled him to be gone," and without stopping to give a command to his men, he spurred his horse hard, and dashed off at full gallop. The men were not long in following his example.

"May the foul fiend have a speedy grip of him!" cried Little John, gnashing his teeth; "but his cowardice shall not save him. I'll bring him down from here." And he prepared to discharge his arrow.

"Hold thy hand!" exclaimed Robin, staying him; "do not take his life, he has but a little while to live, according to nature; it is of little use to shorten his time here."

"Robin, I cannot let the old rogue escape scathless," cried Little John, excitedly; "I will not kill him, since you wish me not, but I will give him something to remind him of us for some time to come."

As he concluded he discharged his arrow, and judging from the leap which Fitz Alwine gave from the saddle, and the energetic speed with which he drew the arrow from the place where it had hit him, there is little doubt he would find either sitting or riding essentially disagreeable for some time.

With congratulations upon the narrow escape which he had just had for his life, and at which he laughed almost contemptuously, Little John was led by the merrie men to the haunt in Barnsdale Wood, and the remainder of the day was passed in joyous festivity.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Lyth and lysten, gentil men,
And herken what I shall say:
How the proud Sheryfe of Notyngham,
Dyde cry a full fayre play."

"He that shoteth 'alder' best,
Furthest, fayre, and lowe;
At a payre of fynly buttes,
Under the grene wode shawe,

"A ryghte good arowe he shall have,
The shaft of sylver white,
The heade and the feders of ryche rede Golde,
In England is none lyke."

"But take out thy brown swerde,
And smyte all of my hede;
And gyve me wounds dede and wyde,
No lyfe on me be lefte."

"I wold not that, said Robyn,
Johan, that thou wert slawe,
For all the golde in mery Englonde,
Though it lay now on a rawe."

A LYTTEL GESTE OF ROBIN HODE. THE FIFTE FYTTE.

"Forthe he yode to London tounne,
All for to tel our kyng."

"Toke he there his gentyll knyght,
With men of armes stronge,
And lad hym home to Notyngham warde,
Ibonde both fote and honde."

"Up then sterte good Robyn,
As a man that had be wode:
Buske yeu, my mery younge men,
For Hym that dyed on a rode."

"And he that this sorowe forsaketh,
By Him that dyed on a tre;
And by him that all thynges maketh,
No lenger shall dwell with me."

IBID. THE SIXTE FYTTE.

FITZ ALWINE looked upon Robin as the bane of his existence—the only bane he ever experienced. It mattered little what crosses he had met with in life, from what source they sprung, or how originated: Robin Hood had thwarted him in his dearest project—the wedding his daughter to an immensely wealthy man—and that act involved all other disappointments or evils he had ever met with.

He possessed an insatiable spirit of revenge, and ever tried to wreak it on the unfortunate wretch who had induced it with relentless animosity. His every effort to exterminate—that is the only word which denotes the feeling he bore—Robin Hood and his band had been unsuccessful, and replete with indignity and insult to himself; still he resolved to persevere, hoping that some day before he died he should have the satisfaction of seeing his hopes gratified, and still every event he created for the accomplishment of them proved as unfortunate to him as its predecessor, and he still found himself in the position of a laughing-stock for the townsfolk and the very men he wished to make tremble at his name.

To attempt to gain his point by force he knew was useless. His stratagems, too, had failed. Still, as he had no other means left to apply to than artifice, he determined once more to have recourse to its wiles, and racked his brain to invent some plausible affair which would draw Robin Hood within it, and he be able so to place his people as to capture him and kill him at once, without waiting for shrift or aught which could delay his death one second. He conned and agitated quantities of ideas, and at length struck upon one, which, after arranging it well in his own mind, scheming, planning, devising, and considering means and ways to strengthen every point which was or might be weak, and have the slightest

influence to overthrow his plan, he perfected in imagination, and proceeded to put it into action.

He summoned one of the wealthiest people in the town, and, according to what they had previously agreed on, the merchant summoned a number of the townspeople, and proposed that they should go in a body



town, and, after swearing him to secrecy, he unfolded his plan to him. The man, who was a merchant, and of a miserly turn, was easily brought into his views; to the high sheriff, and beg him, for the honour of Nottingham, that he do call a full fair play of archery between the men of Nottingham and Yorkshire; that

for the sake of both sides it should take place on the borders of the two counties, and the prize to be an arrow, the shaft of which should be silver, the head and feathers of gold.

The proposition was met with the highest enthusiasm by the townspeople, and they went in such a body to the castle to beg the permission, that Fitz Alwine almost danced with joy in anticipation of the entire accomplishment of his scheme, the first part of it having so well succeeded. He dissembled his joy, however, and gave his assent with an air of indifference, and said at the same time, as the consent appeared to give them so much pleasure, he had no objection to preside upon the occasion, if it would be of any consequence or service to the affair.

The deputation of townspeople, one and all present, requested his presence with one voice, and appeared as delighted as if they loved him with all their hearts, and as though there was something goodly in his presence, which would shed gladness on the circle over which he was to preside; and they went forth and published his condescension with outstretched hands, open eyes, and mouths more open still.

The match was proclaimed open to all corners of each county, the day was appointed, and the spot named, between Barnsdale Wood and Mansfield. As means were taken to spread it in the two counties, it soon reached Robin Hood, and he resolved to make one among the competitors, for the honour of the spot where he was brought up—where all his early and happy days were passed. When, however, he heard the Sheriff of Nottingham was to preside at the trial, he suspected something of foul play towards himself. He fancied it might be a lure to entrap him, under the pretence of safety and protection to all comers; and to be on the safe side, as well as turn the tables on those who desired ill for him, he determined to do his best to counteract their schemes.

Accordingly, upon the day previous to the one the match was to take place upon, he assembled his men, and told them he would go and shoot for the honour of Nottingham county, and that with him, as he doubted the faith of the sheriff, should go seven score of the merry men. Six of them should shoot with him; they were to be variously attired, and the remainder were to so dispose themselves that, in case of foul play, they could unite in a body at a moment's notice: they were to have their bows ready bent, their sheafs full of arrows, and be in all ways prepared for desperate action.

His orders were obeyed to the letter, and the time for their departure having arrived, they set forth. On coming near the place where the people were assembled, they separated, and mingled apparently indiscriminately with the crowd. Robin Hood, Little John, Will Scarlet, Much, Gilbert of the White Hand, Reynold Greenleaf, and George-a-Green, being the seven of the merry men who were to shoot, kept together; they were all dressed differently, and scarce spoke to each other to avoid all chance of being recognised; for being in so large an assembly of people, the greater proportion being Derbyshire and Yorkshiremen, his probabilities of escape, should he be set upon, were few, unless by a determined and vigorous resistance, or the employment of the best stratagems.

The spot selected for this play of archery was an extensive glade on the borders of Barnsdale Wood, contiguous to the highway, a long flat of considerable dimensions, and hundreds of people of the neighbouring counties had assembled to witness the sport.

They were arranged in a circle, and nearly in the centre was placed the butts at which the archers were

to direct their arrows, and by the side was a small building erected, in which the sheriff was to sit, judge the shots, and award the prize. He was attended by a numerous body of men-at-arms, and had enrolled a quantity of the townspeople to serve in the capacity of peace officers, who were upon any disturbance to unite, seize the brawler, and drag him before the sheriff.

A great number of men-at-arms in yeomen's dresses were distributed among the crowd, with orders to the like effect; and by these means Baron Fitz Alwine hoped, if Robin Hood made his appearance—which on such an occasion he had little doubt he would—he would be enabled to get him in his power, and wreak in the most summary manner upon him the vengeance which had been so long denied him.

The sport commenced. Three Nottingham men shot at the targets, and all hit the mark, but none in the centre. Three north country yeomen next fired with an equal success, making a tie; then Will Scarlet shot, and put his shaft in the centre of the mark with the greatest ease.

There was a great shout, the arrow was withdrawn, and Little John followed; the point of his arrow occupied the same hole which Will's had previously made; and ere the butt-keeper could remove his shaft, Robin Hood fired, and shivered Little John's arrow to pieces, his own shaft taking its place. There was a great uproar among the people, the Nottingham men offering wagers freely.

Three Yorkshire men, the best archers of their county, next advanced, and taking steady aims, each hit the centre of the bull's eye. The north country men were now upstages in their turns, and took the wagers as fast as the Nottingham men would lay them. The sheriff kept a very sharp look out, but not being quite so long-sighted as he had been years ago, he could not, at a hundred and fifty yards—the distance at which the archers stood from the butts—distinguish the features of any one sufficiently to recognise whether his enemy was among the competitors.

Much, Gilbert of the White Hand, Reynold Greenleaf, and George-a-Green, took their turn next, each hitting the centre with the nicest precision; four north country men succeeded them, and tied them. It was now found that many of these men were so practiced at the butts, that they could hit the centre of the bull's eye without fail; wands were therefore erected, and seven of a side were chosen.

The Nottingham people declared at once for those who had already been so successful for them, Robin Hood and his men; and the Yorkshire men agreed to put the honour of their county in the hands of these yeomen who had ventured so well for them. The Yorkshire men had the lead off, and their first archer slit the wand; the second grazed it; the next missed it, but went so close to it, that it was not thought possible by the Yorkshire men or even Nottingham men they could be beaten. However the opinion was speedily changed, when Will Scarlet advanced, and taking up his bow carelessly, shot his arrow underhand, and clove the willow wand all to splinters.

"Hurrah for Nottinghamshire!" cried the Nottingham men, flinging up their caps without the slightest reflection as to whether they should ever recover them again.

Fresh wands were erected, and each one of Robin's men, from Little John to George-a-Green, clove the wand with the greatest ease; it came to Robin's turn, and he discharged three arrows at the wand with such rapidity, that but for seeing the three

transfix it, and none else but him firing, they would not have credited it.

Thereupon it was declared that the Nottingham men were the better archers; but as only one man could claim the arrow, Robin Hood and the north country archer, who at his first shot had slit the wand, were chosen to shoot for it.

Several descriptions of trials of skill were determined on and essayed, but in all Robin Hood was the victor, although the north country man proved himself an archer of no mean kind. Many there said Robin Hood could not have shot better than did Robin Hood himself—for they knew him not, and distinguished him by the appellation of Red Jacket; but the name got bruited about, and the exclamation, as exclamations too frequently are, got perverted, and at last it was said to be Robin Hood himself; upon which the Yorkshire men cried it was not a fair trial of skill, he being a too practised hand, and not liking to lose the honour or their money—much the preponderating consideration—they tried to bring it to a wrangle.

The merrie men no sooner found what was going on, than, by a preconcerted signal, they united together in a small but compact body of ninety men, and got ready for hard fighting. All this while Robin Hood was led up to the sheriff amid the acclamations of the Nottingham men, to receive the prize which the Baron Fitz Alwine was to present.

As Robin kept his head down in the attitude of humility, the baron could not exactly tell whether it was him or not, albeit there was a great similarity in the figure; he was in a state of incertitude, and therefore, with some complimentary words, he placed the arrow in Robin's hands, keeping the sharpest of sharp glances upon him, to detect if it was or was not the celebrated outlaw. No sooner had our hero received it, than he transferred it to his belt, and looked full in the sheriff's face, saying laughingly—

"I esteem the gift more than I have words to express, more particularly as it is presented to me by so kind a friend as yourself. I am now returning to my home, among the green leaves and flowers, and shall preserve this prize as a memento of having kept for Nottinghamshire the honour of being the best archers, and a testimony of your noble want of prejudice or personal feeling. I bid you good den, Master Sheriff."

"Stop! stay!" roared the sheriff. "Soldiers, do your duty; this is Robin Hood; seize him!"

"Dastardly wretch!" shouted Robin, "you declared this a full fair play, open and safe to all comers."

"But not to you," cried the sheriff. "Seize him!"

"The first man had need to mutter his prayers ere he advances," cried Robin, in a stentorian voice, bending his bow, and aiming at a fellow who came running to seize him, but who, instantly he saw the extended bow, recoiled, stopped, and then ran back.

Robin blew his horn on the instant, and retreated upon his men, who were advancing hastily to support him, led on by Little John and Will Scarlet. They soon joined; and Robin ordered them to bend their bows, and retreat in close order—for the numbers were by far too great to attempt to oppose with anything like success, or without a terrible effusion of blood.

The baron roared to his men to follow them up, and the north country men, annoyed at being defeated and their losses, prepared to assist them; but the Nottingham men being winners, cheered Robin and his men heartily, prevented the Yorkshire men and the men-at-arms, in private clothes, from staying their

progress; they opened a lane for them to pass through, and then closed it up, as Robin, the last to retreat, retired.

They could not long stem the torrent, although the Nottingham men took up the quarrel earnestly, and in the height of their rage pelted and bestowed every epithet of contumely upon the man they had been so delighted to have preside over them.

Soon were the soldiery and crowds of Yorkshire men in full pursuit of them, but they were kept in check by the admirable manner in which Robin conducted the retreat; every now and then his men discharged a flight of arrows, which told with terrible effect upon the pursuers; staying their progress, and frequently throwing them into confusion; they returned the shots, but with very little effect. At length, after they had been retreating some hours, with four or five times their number in pursuit, they halted a short time to recruit, and their pursuers gained rapidly on them; they waited until they came well within arrow-shot, and then they shot so hard and fast that the comers were glad also to halt, and seek the protection of such trees as would cover them from the heavy fire they were receiving, and enable them with more security to return the fire; but when they had ensconced themselves, and commenced shooting with more system than they had hitherto done, the merrie men were in full retreat again.

Little John, who was by Robin Hood's side, after they had been upon the retreat some time, turned suddenly to him and said—

"Dear friend, my time has come; I am deeply wounded, and can go no further."

"What!" cried Robin, looking at him as if he had been stunned.

"It is as I say," returned Little John. "I am wounded in the knee; I have lost so much blood my limbs refuse to bear me;" and he fell heavily on the ground.

"No, no, it is not so," returned Robin, kneeling by his side, and raising him up. "Lean on me, come, fear not, I am not tired, I can well bear your weight. Let me bind up your wound for you."

"Nay, it is of no use, Robin," said Little John, his voice growing feeble, "the strength is out of the limb, and I can walk no further. I know too well the danger of delay, and so do you and the merrie men. Go on, and leave me here."

"Never!" exclaimed Robin, energetically.

"Never think upon it, but do it," urged Little John, "you have too many lives under your protection to think of me. Leave me here; but if you ever loved me as a friend, as a brother who has loved you dearly, or as a servant who has served you truly and faithfully, without thought of himself, if it be only for the meed of my service to you, let not the villanous sheriff and his hounds find me alive, but do thou draw thy good blade, and smite off my head, that I may die as befits a good and true Saxon, and I will, as I have ever done, bless thee for the good deed. Let not a breath of life remain in me, to give them pleasure or me the pain of knowing they can insult my last moments. Do this for me, Robin, if you ever loved me."

"I would not that thou wert slain, John," burst forth Robin, dashing a tear from his eye, "for all the gold in merry England, though it were at my side, in a heap. I would not that thou wert dead, for the sake of the lives of half the band, true and gallant hearts though they be. No! sooner than thou should be left here to die alone, I will bestride thy body, and fight to the last drop of blood left in my veins; and when I fall, it shall be by thy side, and we

will to the next world together, hand in hand, heart to heart, as we have done in this."

"We will all fight, or die by his side," shouted Will Scarlet. "Here's Little John wounded nearly to death," he cried loudly to the merrie men, "who is there among ye will leave him to be captured by the crew who are after us?"

"None, none!" shouted the men with one accord; "let us all form round him and die by his side."

"There's no need for any of you to die yet, nor Little John either," exclaimed Much; "he is wounded only in the leg, and faint from loss of blood. I'll put him on my back and carry him till I drop."

"Then I will take him, and do the like," said Will Scarlet; "cheer up, Little John, we will never leave you."

With a little opposition from Little John, Much lifted him upon his shoulder, and the retreat was again commenced, for Robin had commanded a halt as soon as he had learned his faithful follower's condition; their delay had given their pursuers an opportunity of gaining upon them, and they pressed them very sore. The merrie men, by Robin's command, returned no fire but when it could be effective, for they had yet a long distance to proceed, and it was necessary to husband their arrows. They kept on their way with good hearts, and despaired not of yet reaching their haunt, and when there, they did not fear sending their pursuers back in the shape of fugitives. They kept on, and several times did Much lay down Little John in order to shoot, when a strong and long shot was wanted, and then took him up again, and bore him on his shoulders as cheerfully as if he had only his own quarter-staff there; occasionally he was relieved by Arthur-a-Bland, and Gasper-a-Tin. At length, as they got away from the highway, they saw at a short distance a castle, embowered in trees, and surrounded by a wide moat, and the whole situated in a spacious lee.

"Ha!" cried Robin, "whose can yon castle be? Beshrew me, an' it be one who may not be well disposed towards us, it will go hard against us. Doth any one here know to whom yon castle belongeth?"

"That do I," returned Reynold Greenleaf. "It belongeth to Sir Richard Gower. This is the Lee Castle, and he is called Sir Richard of the Lee."

"The Holy Virgin be praised!" exclaimed Robin Hood, fervently, "she never deserts me in my hour of need. Will Scarlet, haste you and summon the warden of yon castle, bid him with speed let Sir Richard of the Lee know that Robin Hood and a party of his men are without, craving admittance, being hard pressed by foes. We shall see whether the knight has forgotten an obligation."

"My life on his faith!" cried Will, bounding off like a deer to obey the order.

Robin kept his men well together, and though he made for the castle, yet he did it in such a manner as would enable him, in case of treachery, to alter his route and keep on to the wood; but he soon had the satisfaction of seeing a white flag hoisted on the castle walls, and a horseman leave the castle at the top of his speed, followed by one whom he knew to be Will, on foot. It was but a short time ere the horseman was up with Robin, had flung himself from his horse, and grasped his hand with the most vigorous enthusiasm. He was a tall, noble-formed youth, and he cast his eye over the merrie men with a proud look, as though he would give the world to be the leader of such a gallant little band.

"I am Herbert Gower, the son of Sir Richard. Through me he bids you a hearty, honest, unconditional welcome," he cried, his voice becoming rich-

toned in his earnestness; "and he bade me say, that he is only too glad to be able, in some manner, however slight, to repay the great obligations we are all under to you; and that, be ye in what strait you may be, I and our people will fight to the last gasp for you."

"Most heartily do I thank him," returned Robin; "never did a friend stand me in better need than he does now. Push on, my merrie men, for the castle; I see the cape of the sheriff's men through the trees, and we may as well spare blood as shed it."

The men did as they were ordered, and pushed briskly on for the castle, while Robin Hood went to Little John to see how he bore up against his loss of blood. As they were retreating through the wood, they cut down some branches and made a litter of green boughs, upon which he was gently laid; and passing a brook, Robin stripped off part of his under clothing, a woollen cloth of the finest texture then made, tore it in strips, bathed his wound, and then gathered a few herbs, bruised them as he went along, and laying them on the wound, bound it up. Although the agony must have been intense of cutting out the barbed head of the arrow with which he was shot, and which had buried itself in the flesh just above the knee, the shaft having broken short off at the head in his efforts to extricate it, yet he neither groaned or writhed, but smiled, for fear Robin should think he was hurting him, and so be pained himself. When Robin reached his side, as they approached the castle, he inquired—

"How fares it with you, Little John? are you better?"

"I have never had cause to feel so well, Robin, since I was born," he replied. "Never until to-day did I know the place I held in all your hearts; I thought, it is true, you would all do me a friendly service an' I needed one, or have a kind thought of me when I was laid beneath the turf, but I could never have believed it would have carried you to the extent of kindness you have shown since the stray arrow caught me. It has made me very happy, I do assure you, and I am not sorry that the mere scratch of a flesh wound should have proved the true hearts, and that they should have turned out so bravely—so nobly; it has made me very happy, indeed it has. I wish my heart could speak for me—it would tell you so much better what I mean than my tongue; but as it can't do that, why I must be content with telling you after the only fashion nature allows us."

"And do you think, Little John, after what you have done for and as one of the band, they could esteem you so lightly as not to do more than they have done already?" said Robin Hood. "You would have been the first to do as much—nay, more than what has been done—therefore, think not so much of what others, having the same feelings in common with yourself, would do for you. I am glad to see you are better."

"I am better, and shall soon be well," was the reply, as Robin pressed his feverish hand; and, with a faint smile, he fell nearly fainting from weakness upon the litter.

The moat and drawbridge were soon gained; the men passed safely over; and the bridge was drawn up again. While the sheriff and his men, as they came into sight, observing the castle and Robin's men in full retreat on it, had pushed forward in the hopes of having the fugitives safely in their power, the sheriff was rather startled at seeing the men marching into the castle in such order, but he was determined to advance to the castle gates, and in the king's name demand of the owner of the castle to

deliver up the merrie men and their leader to his tender mercy. This resolve he put into execution, and with about three hundred and sixty men he halted beneath the castle walls, challenged it, and demanded of Sir Richard to give up those whom the knight considered his guests; but he was scornfully refused, and bade to quit the knight's grounds within half-an-hour, or he would rue it. Just about this time, one of the sheriff's men, who had been as he was marching boasting of the accuracy of his aim, seeing the head and shoulders of a sentinel on the ramparts, unhesitatingly declared he could send an arrow through it, and as unhesitatingly discharged an arrow for the purpose; but he failed in his aim, and it just whistled by the ear of the astonished soldier so closely, that at the moment he fancied he was shot, and clapped up his hand to feel, but luckily discovered it to be an agreeable mistake; the arrow was returned with a volley, so thickly and so well directed, that the sheriff's men found their situation vastly unpleasant. It took them but little time to discover this remarkable fact, but quick as they were, Fitz Alwine was the first to ascertain it; and as he preferred consulting his inclination rather than his duty, his prudence rather than a courage which he esteemed little better than fool-hardiness, he resolved to change it. Ere he departed, he thought he would give Sir Richard one more chance of being loyal, and so called another parley, requesting the knight's presence on the walls; which, on a solemn promise of a faithful truce, was granted him. As soon as Sir Richard appeared, Baron Fitz Alwine cried out—

"Dost thou know thou'rt acting as a traitorous knight, keeping here an outlaw, an enemy to the king, and that thou'rt doing this against all law and right?"

"I know that this castle and these lands are mine," returned Sir Richard of the Lee, "that they are my kingdom, and that I shall keep here whosoever I please, and remove any one I please. I have done nothing but what I would do at any and all times, and so, sir, you have your answer. Speed away with thee, and those with thee; say ye what you please to the king, and hear what he shall say to comfort ye; I bid ye hence, and I warn ye that unless ye are gone quickly, your doublets shall be trimmed well with stout shafts. I have no more to say, ye have your answer;" and he disappeared from the walls as he closed his speech. Fitz Alwine believed there was a chance of his keeping his word, and therefore took his advice; he called his men together and led them, tired and disappointed, from the spot.

"Welcome to my castle, Robin Hood," exclaimed the knight, as the sheriff's men departed, "welcome to the home your great kindness beneath your trysting tree in the green wood kept for me; welcome truly art thou to me, Robin, for now shalt thou see what was the comfort I should have lost but for thee, and you may then appreciate how highly I ought, and do, esteem thy act."

"Thou dost overrate a very simple service," returned Robin, "and if you must needs reward me for what I had the will and ability to do, do not speak of it. Ere I do anything, I have a follower of mine who is wounded, and I would see him well bestowed."

"He shall be treated as if he were thyself," said the knight.

"It is Little John—the truest, noblest, most faithful friend I have," uttered Robin, with enthusiasm. "I would not that he should die for any consideration on earth; and while I can in any way alleviate his pain by care and attention, I will do so right earnestly and heartily."

"And for him will I do all that can be done, for I esteem him highly," replied Sir Richard. "We will to him at once, and see that he is well cared for."

"If you speak of *Little John*, as you call him—but I should call him the largest John I ever saw," cried Herbert, entering, followed by Will Scarlet, "we have seen him well attended to. There is a skilful leech from York, on his way to Derby, and he stopped here this morning for hospitality; he is now dressing the wound, and says it will soon be well."

"I am glad to hear thee say so," said Robin; "and hearing this, shall be happy to attend thee where thou pleasest, Sir Richard."

"It shall be to meet my wife and daughter Lilas," he returned; "they are anxious to receive thee, and are now waiting in an adjoining chamber."

"Ah!" exclaimed Herbert, pointing to Will, "I told my friend here that I had the most beautiful creature in the world for my wife, and he tells me that he has one that nothing ever excelled. He shall see mine, and then see what he will say."

"He should see Maude," cried Will, "he would then say something, would he not, Robin?"

"I have no doubt he would," replied Robin, laughing.

"So will you when you see Lilas," said Herbert, speaking as earnestly as if his whole heart was in his words.

And so he did; he made an exclamation of wonder, as did Robin, when they saw a very young timid girl, tall and slender, and as graceful as a fawn, with a face faultlessly beautiful, large, full, blue eyes, fringed with very long eyelashes, and, indeed, all the features as rare and choice as human nature could possess, led to them by Herbert, and he said in a low voice, looking upon her with passionate ardour—

"This is my wife."

And she met them with such a sweet grace, it made them deem her more beautiful, and she thanked Robin, in such terms, and in such a voice, for what he had done, that he really began to fancy he had done some out-of-the-way goodness; but he felt quite rewarded for it, however great it might have been, in being of service to such a being, or being thanked by her. The knight's lady met him with the same grateful feeling, and uttered her welcome with her thanks so pleasantly, and with such an unostentatious air of sincerity, that he felt no embarrassment at their being thus reiterated.

"Understand, Robin Hood," said the knight, when each of the females had concluded, "there is no man on earth I love more, or perhaps so much, as I do thee; and I tell thee this in order that you may know and feel your welcome here is as earnest and sincere as you can desire, therefore hesitate not to do quite as you list. Here you are safe, while one stone stands upon another, from all the proud sheriffs of the kingdom, were they all assembled beneath these walls. I have ordered the gates to be shut, the drawbridge to be kept up, and no one suffered to come in without my especial order. All my people are under arms and at the walls, ready for any attempts the sheriff may make. As for yourself and marry men, you remain twelve days with me, I swear by St. Quentin; after that time you may stay as long as you list, with as sincere a welcome as now."

Robin thanked him, and consented to stay upon certain conditions; which were, that upon its being ascertained that the sheriff had really departed with his men from the vicinity, the merrie men should return to the haunt, and that Will Scarlet should go with them, and return with Marian, Maude, and Winifred. These propositions were gladly acceded to, and

were fulfilled, and a pleasant fortnight did they spend together. At the expiration of that time, with reiterations of mutual good wishes, they separated, and again Robin Hood was with his merrie men in the heart of the green wood.

Fitz Alwine took the advice which Sir Richard of the Lee gave him, and went up to London to have an interview with the king, expecting measures to be taken to punish Sir Richard for harbouring an outlaw, when commanded in the king's name to deliver him up.

"He vows, your majesty, he will keep him, his men, or any one he pleases, in defiance of you," said he to the king, when admitted into his presence, "and that he will be lord of all the land in the north, and set you at naught."

"He shall learn differently," cried the king, incensed; "we will be at Nottingham within this fortnight: take such men as you may deem necessary from London, enter such good archers as your county or any other may boast into our service, at our expense. If, however, we should not be able to visit your city, do the best you can without us, and make prisoner of him or of this Robin Hood, and let us know of your success on the instant, and we will devise what shall be then done."

Fitz Alwine promised most faithfully that he would, and most faithfully he resolved to do it, if it were possible. Gathering together as strong a body as he could muster, he marched to the castle in the Lee, and when there, he ascertained that Robin Hood had gone to the wood again with all his people. The sheriff did not like the idea at all of following him there, and attempting to capture him, so he thought for once he would "shoot at a pigeon and kill a crow," and take Sir Richard prisoner. The castle was too strong to carry by assault, and therefore he resolved to lie in wait for him, and take him by stratagem. He had not to wait long, for the knight on the following day went out with his son and a few attendants; however, they were surrounded, and although they made a vigorous resistance, were captured, bound, and carried off to Nottingham; one of Sir Richard's attendants escaped, and flew to inform his mistress of the sad event. She was horror-stricken at the intelligence, and grew distracted, not knowing how to help her husband, or in what way to act for the best. Lilas, however, bethought her of Robin Hood, and counselled an application to him immediately, and the Lady Gower determined to adopt it. Mounted on a palfrey, and accompanied by Lilas, who would go, and a couple of trusty attendants, she set off for Barnsdale Wood. It fortunately happened that Little John, who had nearly recovered his wound, having promised a fawn to a little girl, the daughter of one of the servants, who had attended him while he lay ill at Sir Guy's, had sent it by one of the merrie men that morning; he therefore served as a guide, and they rode at the top of their speed until they reached the trysting tree. They had the good fortune to meet with Robin there, and no sooner did the Lady Gower behold him than she burst into tears.

"God save thee, Robin Hood," she cried, "God save thee and thy company! I have come to thee as a suitor; for the love of our dear lady, whom you so much reverence, grant me a boon."

"What is the meaning of this distress?" exclaimed Robin Hood, viewing her with astonishment. "Tell me, madam, how can I serve you?"

"Oh, Robin Hood," sobbed the lady, bitterly, "my husband, Sir Richard, has been bound, taken prisoner, and carried with my son towards Nottingham—and all for love of thee."

"Ha!" ejaculated Robin Hood with energy. "When was this? by whom?"

"By that same sheriff who pursued you to our home," returned the lady. "Oh, Robin, by the roof that sheltered you in your hour of need, let not my dear husband and beloved child be shamefully slain by this proud heartless man; they cannot be far from hence, for I fled here instantly I knew of their capture, and they had not been taken but a few minutes ere I knew of my sad loss."

"Fear not, lady," cried Robin; "have no care for this mishap, gentle lady; if thy husband is living when I reach him, he shall be restored to thee; and the sheriff dare not take his life, being a knight, without a trial: therefore dry up thy tears; I will soon be on their track, and thy lord and child shall again be in thy arms."

"Heaven speed thee!" uttered the weeping lady, clasping her hands in a supplicating manner towards the sky.

"And take my sincere thanks, blessings, and prayers with thee," exclaimed Lilas, smiling on him through her fast flowing tears; "thou who hast ever been the comfort, the stay, and friend of the wretched, thy reward shall surely come when thou hast need of past deeds only for friends."

"The noble Herbert shall thank me when once again he is in thy arms," replied Robin; "but keep thy kind words until that is accomplished. Let this console thee—if it is in my power, and in that of the gallant hearts who are ready to second every effort of mine with their lives, he shall again be with thee."

"I know thou wilt try thy utmost," exclaimed Lilas; "and I am sure thy success will be equal to thy good-will."

"Let us hope it may," was Robin's rejoinder. He had summoned such of the merrie men as were absent, and they now pressed round to know upon what service they were required; Robin quickly informed them.

"My merrie men," said he, "the High Sheriff of Nottingham, who kept you in a long and hot chase a short time since, hath captured the gentle knight Sir Richard of the Lee, and his gallant son Herbert. They are on their way to Nottingham, but we must pursue them, rescue our friends, and teach these disciplined troopers how to conduct a pursuit; we will follow them with all our speed through mire, moss, and fen, glades and coverts, until we overtake them. Remember, we must not return without those we go to seek; and he who is a laggard in this matter finds some other place to pass his life in—he shall no longer dwell in the green wood with me."

The men gave a great shout and declared themselves ready for instant departure; and as there was no time to lose, Robin cheered the knight's lady and Lilas with favourable hopes, sent them on their way to the castle in the Lee, and putting himself at the head of his men, accompanied by Little John, Will Scarlet, and Much, started off in full pursuit of the sheriff and his band; two of the men were placed on horseback and sent on in advance, by different routes, in case the sheriff might have taken a different way to that which Robin fancied he had; while the body of merrie men kept on a straight path at the top of their speed, surmounting all obstacles with the most determined perseverance. After a long and fatiguing march, Mansfield was reached, and there Robin learned the troop had recruited themselves and proceeded on to Nottingham; his men were too tired to keep on without some little rest, so he ordered them to stay there, while he, attended by Will Scarlet on horseback, rode on at full speed through Sherwood to the

haunt; when he reached it, he blew his bugle; it was answered quickly by a hundred men in person, who crowded delightedly round him. In a few words, he explained in what way he needed their services, and they were ready to do his bidding, heart and hand, as soon as his wishes to that effect left his lips. He had left Little John in command of the men whom he had brought with him from Barnsdale, with orders that as soon as they were ready to move, they should take the high way to Nottingham, keeping in the track of the sheriff, whom Robin hoped to intercept before he reached there, and if Little John came up in time, thus to place him between two fires. When everything was arranged, and whatever was done was done quickly, the merrie men, under the command of Robin and Will, quitted the haunt, and made for the highway, at a point not a very long distance from Nottingham. They reached it in a short time, and had the satisfaction of ascertaining from a wayfarer, that no troop had as yet passed there on the way to the town. Robin chose the most advantageous position the situation would afford, and gave his orders very distinctly and decidedly; for he had not a chance to throw away, having to sustain an unequal fight, the force of the sheriff surpassing his three times in number, until Little John brought his men into action. Robin ambushed a part of his men, and placed the remainder at a narrow part of the road nearer Nottingham; and when they were disposed as well as circumstances would allow, he waited coolly the approach of the would-be redoubtable sheriff. The arrival of half-a-dozen troopers in advance notified the approach of him and his cavalcade, and a warm reception was prepared for them. The scouts had advanced considerably beyond the ambush ere a shaft was discharged, but when a solitary note of a horn rose on the air, the troop was saluted with a shower of arrows that took a terrific effect; they made an instant halt, and a division of men was sent on each side to clear the thickets, while the main body pushed on. The advance guard were easily captured, and the two divisions fighting at random against an unseen enemy, were also, after being galled by a fire of arrows which could not be surpassed for the dreadful precision of their aim, to save their lives, compelled to throw down their weapons, and surrender themselves prisoners; they were led away into the wood, where they were strongly bound and placed where they could not easily escape; the merrie men who had accomplished this feat hastening on their way to join their companions, who were engaged in desperate conflict with the main body of Fitz Alwine's men. The fight was maintained with desperate vigour on both sides, Robin and his men fighting for the honor of liberating the gentle knight and his son, as well as for the gratification, for their country's sake, of being opposed hand and sword to Normans, whom they viewed as the usurpers and oppressors of the land; who not only crushed and exercised the most tyrannous and despotic sway over the Saxons as a body, but were the principal cause of their (the merrie men) being tenants of the wood, instead of enjoying the comforts of a home situated within reach of the advantages of a village or a town. The Normans, on their side, fought desperately, because they hoped to retrieve the honour they had so decidedly and continuously lost, when opposed to Robin Hood; and that feeling was accelerated by the fact of their foes being Saxons, a race whom they hated with as much fervency as the Saxons detested them. The skill, the coolness, and the unerring correctness of their aim rendered the merrie men, though vastly unequal in numbers, almost an equal match for the troop, and

whatever deficiency might have existed against them, was counterbalanced by the decided advantage of their position; the Normans were not slow to discover this, and made tremendous efforts to dislodge them, but were each time repulsed with a frightful sacrifice of human life. After the battle had raged for some time, without the Normans having gained the slightest advantage, which their superiority of numbers ought to have obtained for them, great shouts were suddenly heard in their rear, which proved to be Little John advancing with his band of merrie men. So soon as they came up and commenced fighting, with enthusiastic earnestness, it acted like an electric shock upon the Normans, who, attacked in front and rear by numbers, of which the excitement prevented them forming a calculation, conceived a great disposition to resign the contest—especially when a great cry arose that the high sheriff, the Lord Baron Fitz Alwine, was slain; and this soon proved to be a fact, for a party of men, led by Robin Hood, had cut their way to the spot where Sir Richard of the Lee and his son were stationed, and they succeeded in reaching it, and Robin with his sword cut asunder their bands and placed weapons in their hands. He found two energetic allies in them, especially in Herbert, who, with all the hot-headedness of youth, fought with an impetuosity nothing could withstand. Followed by a party of Sherwood men, who cheered him on, admiring proudly his gallant daring, he fought his way to the sheriff; but one of the merrie men, anxious to have the honour of deciding the contest, shot the baron through the neck with an arrow, then sprung upon him, hurled him from his horse, severed his head from his body, and elevated it at the point of his sword. He mounted the dead man's steed, and holding the head high in the air, he cried with a stentorian voice—

"Normans! dogs! behold your leader! look upon your proud high sheriff! Down with you, curs! beg your lives, or ye shall all meet his!"

The words died on his lips, for an arrow from the bow of a Norman pierced him through the brain, and with the ghastly head of the dead sheriff he fell a corse from the steed. However, the loss of their leader made the Normans cry quarter, and throw down their arms. The battle was thus won, and Robin moved here and there with the utmost speed to stop the fight in every place where it still lingered. The defeated men, being deprived of all their arms, were, under the escort of a hundred men, led on to Nottingham, bearing the body of their sheriff with them; while the rest gathered up the arms of their conquered enemy, and bore them to the haunt. As the body of the sheriff passed Robin, he approached and exclaimed, almost in a soliloquy—

"Farewell for ever, thou man of an iron heart and a bloody mind. Thou hast at length met the doom I prophesied thee but a short time since. Evil didst thou ever while thou wert living; thy hand was against every man's, and no heart warmed kindly towards thee. In thy word, thy honour, the simplest act of trust, no confidence could be placed. Farewell! hated and execrated while living, thy memory loathed and despised when dead, thou goest to meet the reward of thy past deeds; and although thou didst never spare one when in thy power, may thy soul be mercifully dealt with by Him who extends His charity to all men, howe'er sinful and erring they may be."

And with a look which partook more of scorn than pity, he turned away and addressed Sir Richard of the Lee—

"This is a sad day's work, Sir Richard," he ex-

claimed, "although we be the conquerors, and have succeeded in liberating thee; albeit we have done this and thy life is saved, yet thy estates will be confiscated as surely as thou standest where thou dost. I would we had never met."

"Why?" asked Sir Richard, with astonishment.

"Inasmuch," replied Robin, "that without my aid you might have gained your estates; and had you, you would have still retained them: but through harbouring me, a deed of gratitude done for a trifling obligation, thy liberty and life were first endangered, and now, though from that evil thou art rescued, thy estates will be taken from thee, and thou exiled perhaps for ever; and this through being connected, though slightly, with me."

"Had I lost everything in the world, save my gentle wife and my beloved children," returned the knight, with enthusiasm, "through what I had done in return for thy great kindness to me, at a moment when I so much needed it, I could have smiled, nay, rejoiced, that I could show thee how dearly I esteemed what thou hadst done, nor thought the loss sufficient to express my inmost feelings. But I still retain my estates: I am restored to life and liberty, saved at the peril of thine own life, and at the loss of many gallant hearts, whose lives were each worth twenty such carrion as these Normans, who lay strewed round us. I have still my wife and children to cheer me with their pleasant words and happy faces, and if it should so occur that I walk from my home a naked man, having only my family with me, I shall still fervently bless the hour I knew and found a friend in Robin Hood."

"It is pleasant to hear thee say so," replied Robin, "and I will strive to think thou dost mean what thou sayest."

"I will pledge my life, heart and hand, for its truth!" interrupted Herbert, with startling energy; "and in speaking those words my father does but convey what Lilas and my dear mother feel, and I as earnestly and deeply as my father can himself."

"I thank thee, Herbert, honestly, for thy good feeling, so warmly expressed," said Robin, affected by his warmth, "and can assure ye both, that the friendliness of such as thee compensates richly for the evil thoughts which those who are high and wealthy in the land bear towards me. Believe me, I shall treasure the memory of this in my breast, as in some future hour, perhaps of sadness, it will cheer me to turn to it, and recall a time when there were some noble and pure-minded souls who were not ashamed to acknowledge me for a friend. Now, to change the subject, and refer to your situation: your estates, when the news of this day's work reaches London, will assuredly be confiscated, and, unless you keep away, your life forfeited. I have, therefore, only to offer you and those you love an asylum in the green wood here with us; and I can give you my word, that while the band continue together, thou and they will be safe."

"Your offer is noble, Robin," replied the knight; "but I scarce think there is so much danger to fear as you apprehend. I am closely allied to the Gowers, and they have influence at court, which they will exercise in my favour, and thus mitigate the king's wrath, who may impose a fine, but I think nothing further."

"I hope it may be no worse. However, do as you list; and should you find that affairs turn out as I surmise, the green wood shall still be a place of safety for thee."

"And should they, I shall proudly and thankfully accept your offer," rejoined the knight.

The evidences of the fight—such as dead bodies, broken weapons, &c.,—were all removed, and Robin, with the knight, his son, and half his men, returned to Barnsdale. When Sir Richard of the Lee and his son arrived at the castle, after an affecting meeting with his wife and Lilas, they despatched a special messenger to London, with orders to learn from such of the knight's family as had the greatest influence all that was to be put in force against him; and immediately he had gained possession of it, to spare neither whip, spur, nor horse, in his return to the castle of the Lee. The man obeyed his orders well, and he returned bearing news that the king was so exasperated at the defeat of his troops, that he had issued commands for a troop to proceed at once to the knight's castle, seize the principal inmates, hang them on the branches of the neighbouring trees; and the commander of the troops, a Norman soldier of fortune, had deeds granted him, which secured the possession of the castle and the estates to him and to his heirs for ever. Also, that notices were sent to the counties Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire, offering a great reward to any one, or any body of men, who would capture Robin Hood, and bring him, dead or alive, into the hands of the sheriff of either county. Sir Richard lost no time in acquainting Robin Hood with this intelligence, and, acting upon his advice, everything the castle contained which was moveable was carried away and placed in the haunt at Barnsdale—a spacious cave, comfortably fitted up. After everything had been safely transported, Sir Richard and his wife, Herbert and Lilas, quitted their home in the Lee, to dwell with Robin Hood and his merrie men in the green wood, until such times as the ban was removed from his head, and he could again enter his castle as its lord, without molestation.

When the troop, led on by the newly-created possessor of the castle in the Lee, arrived, they found nothing but the bare walls to greet them—no living soul was near. The commander was rather astonished to find the place so desolate and deserted; but, having all his life been compelled to adapt himself to circumstances, he made the best he could of his situation, and was not long ere he succeeded in obtaining such necessities as he required. He, however, found his vassals horribly refractory, and was not slow to discover that King Henry's gift was little more than a negative good; but, as his previous situation had been worse, it was not in their power to make him quit it, and so he kept it, in spite of all the obstacles which were thrown in his way.





ROBIN HOOD RECEIVING HIS BUFFET FROM RICHARD CŒUR DE LION.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE kynge was wonder wroth with all,
And swore by the Trynyte,
I wolde I had Robyn Hode,
With eyen I myght him se ;
"Then bespake a fayre old knig t
That was treue in his fay,
"There is no man in this cowntre
May have the knyghtes londes,
Whyle Robyn Hode may ryde or gone,
And bere a bow in his hondes :
"Then bespake a proud fostere,
That stode by our kynge's kne,
If ye wyll se good Robyn,
Ye must do after me ;
"Make good chere, sayd Robyn,
Abbot, for charyte :
And for this ylke tydynge,
Myssed mote thou be.
"Now shalt thou se what lyfe we lede,
Or thou hens wende,
Than thou may enfourme our kynge,
Whan ye togyder lede.
"Smyte on boldely, sayd Robyn,
I give thee large lewe.
Anone our kynge, with that worde,
He folde up his slewe.
"And sych a buffet he gave Robyn,
To ground he yede full nere.
I make myn avowe to God, sayd Robyn,
'thou arte a stalworthe fre."

A LYTTEL GESTE OF ROBYN HODE. THE SEVENTH FYTTE.

THREE years elapsed subsequent to the events last narrated, without aught of interest taking place connected with Robin, save a few incidents similar to his meetings with Arthur-a-Bland and Gaspar-a-Tin. His band had increased in numbers, and his fame had spread over all England, as the bravest and gentlest outlaw the world e'er saw. The interval we are passing over, albeit not altering Robin's situation in any particular degree, was one replete with anxiety and woe to Englishmen. King Henry was dead. His son Richard had succeeded him, and, after exhausting the kingdom of almost all its wealth, had joined the Crusade, leaving his brother John regent, a prince who was noted for his dissipation, yet monstrous avarice, his craftiness and cunning, yet vacillating imbecility of mind. During the period he exercised his sway, England groaned under the miseries his conduct, and that of the selfish wretches who surrounded him, produced. So far as lay in his power, Robin Hood relieved the heavy burden of the poorest classes around him, in Derbyshire, Yorkshire, and in Nottinghamshire, and accordingly was idolised by them; but, for the money he disbursed to the woe-begone, the starved, and the homeless, he made terrible reprisals upon the wealthy churchmen and Normans he was fortunate enough to get in his power, suffering none to depart without paying a heavy ransom, and upon all occasions attacking every band of Norman troopers who came within his reach, even as Alfred the Great did the Danes, or, as he more fondly loved to consider, Hereward le Wake did the Normans in William the Conqueror's time, and, scattering them far and wide, proving himself in name and presence a terror to every one of Norman birth or extraction. With him, in the recesses of the wood, still dwelled Marian, the same in heart and in spirit, in manner and words, as she had been when he lived cheerfully on in the hope that she would one day be his; and in every thought and act they were still as gentle and affectionate to each other as they were when they were young and earnest lovers, who hung almost breathlessly on every word and look from each

other, as if their existence was centred in them. The change of years, too, had brought no alteration in Will Scarlet and Maude; he was as enthusiastic in her praise as heretofore, and she as tender and anxious to preserve his happiness as she had ever been, and so they dwelled happily among the trees and flowers, suffering nothing trivial to disturb their contentment, and gathering joy and pleasure from every little event which could offer in any way an opportunity for doing so. Little John and Much had reason to congratulate themselves upon their choice, and Will's brothers—absurd as the events connected with their marriage may appear—had no cause to repent their hasty wedding. Ere we quit them for ever, there are two characters of whom we would speak—they are Allan and his wife, the Lady Christabel. They had commenced living together after their marriage in Linton Abbey as if they were not destined long for this earth, but had only a short time remaining to prove how dearly they loved each other. The house in which they were domiciled had been built by Allan, and he had exercised his utmost ingenuity and taste to render it as like a paradise as art and nature combined could make it, and he succeeded. He seemed to have nothing to wish for; time flew by unheeded, as if he were in a dream of the rarest and most exquisite nature; he never forgot that he had loved Christabel from childhood, and her memory was equally tenacious respecting him; nor did either forget they had endured a bitter separation for many years, and so strove to make up for the sadness of that time by the undeviating joy and sweetness of the present. Christabel bore him several children, who came among them like the budding forth of young flowers: they were always a sweet and choice addition to the beauty of the scene. Weeks flew by them like days, and days like hours. They would wander round their grounds, with their arms folded round each other, and, looking into each other's eyes, would fancy there was no other world but what they were then gazing on. Christabel had never seen her father since the morning on which she was married. He had refused every overture that had been made to him by her or Allan, and, although it was the only disquiet she knew, yet, as he had never acted kindly to her—never, in his mildest moods, having acted as a father to her—her regret was less poignant than it must otherwise have been; and when she heard of his death she wept, but not with the bitterness she would have done had he perished under different circumstances, in relation to his previous conduct to her. Allan had intended to advance his claim to the Nottingham earldom and baronetcy, with its possessions, but the king seized it, and it was bestowed afterwards on Prince John, among other earldoms which Richard Cœur de Lion presented to him before he quitted England for the Crusade. Allan, happy and contented where he was, did not seek to dispute the claim, and satisfied himself by dwelling peaceably with his wife and children, beloved by all, unmolested, for it was known he was under the especial protection of Robin Hood and his merrie men, and as happy as man could be, or could hope to be.

The constant attacks upon the Churchmen and Normans of any rank, by Robin and his men, at length grew to such an extent that it excited the peculiar notice of the Lord High Chancellor of England, Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, who had succeeded in getting the regency out of the hands of Hugh Pudsey, Bishop of Durham, a wealthy prelate, who had paid Richard an enormous sum for it, and lost it while Richard was yet in Normandy. Longchamp determined to put an end to the outlaws and their shode; so fitted out an expedition of five hundred

armed men, well appointed and well disciplined for the purpose. Prince John, who was leading a luxurious life of ease and dissipation, undertook its command, and went down to Nottingham Castle, intending to rest there a short time and then proceed on the expedition. Robin Hood had little difficulty in learning everything relative to this intended attack upon him, and he resolved to render it an undoubted failure, without expending any blood; he therefore disposed his men in such a manner that they could not be discovered, and some dressed themselves in various dresses and offered themselves as guides—on one occasion Robin himself doing so; they were accepted, and as the forest covered between twenty and thirty miles of ground each way, they were led such a dance as a body of men never had the satisfaction of being before; there was scarce a miry spot in the forest they were not led through, marshes and fens they were embedded in, and as night drew on, they were seven or eight miles from Nottingham on their return, fagged and worn to death, without having met with aught save herds of deer. When they entered Nottingham, there was scarce one of the party, save the guides, who were not ready to give up the ghost. Prince John recruited himself and men with a day's rest, and on the following one they marched forth again; but after a day of greater fatigue than the preceding, they returned with the like success. For a fortnight at various times this was repeated with no better fortune, and something attracting Prince John's attention at London, he departed from Nottingham and took his men with him, without striking a blow; leaving Robin Hood to act the same as before, and to congratulate himself upon his stratagem being eminently successful.

Two years subsequent to this, Richard Cœur de Lion returned to England; and prince John receiving a despatch from Philip, King of France, containing only the words—"Take care of yourself, the devil is broken loose!" and knowing from his monstrous misconduct that his brother Richard would deal roughly with him, shut himself up in Nottingham Castle. Richard, incensed, in the highest degree, when he heard all that his brother had been guilty of, stayed but three days in London, and with such troops, a mere handful, as were ready, marched against his brother. The castle was attacked, and held out but a short time, surrendering at discretion. Prince John, however, succeeded in escaping. Richard Cœur de Lion had noticed that his army had been joined by a strong body of yeomen, whose powers as archers had been the principal cause of the victory being gained. They were led on by one of gallant and commanding bearing, and no body of troops, disciplined in the highest degree, could have acted more admirably in concert than did they. When the fight was over, and Richard was in the castle, he inquired particularly respecting these yeomen, who they were, and what was the name of their leader. Nobody could tell him, and on sending for their leader, both he and his men had disappeared, and nothing could be gained until the Sheriff of Nottingham, the same man Robin had deceived under the disguise of a butcher, being questioned, said he knew him and his men too well—that he was the noted and terrible outlaw, Robin Hood, with a band of ferocious villains whom he called his merrie men, who slew the king's deer, robbed Churchmen and Normans, and did many other vile acts. Hal of the Keep, who, maugre his connection with Robin, had managed still to retain his situation in the castle, happened to stand by, and immediately chimed in by saying that he gave to the poor almost all he took from the rich;

that for miles round he was looked upon and blessed as their guardian angel; and he enlarged so much on his good qualities, that he entirely forgot that he stood in the presence of the king, and grew quite eloquent in his praise. Richard smiled as he witnessed the earnestness of Hal, and asked him if he was personally acquainted with him. This question recalled Hal's recollection, and turning red, said he had known him, and what he had repeated was the report of every poor man he had heard speak of him.

"Tush, man," said the king, noticing that Hal seemed disconcerted, "ne'er be ashamed to own a friend, e'en though he be an outlaw. By the Holy Trinity! an' he has done all thou sayest, he is a man to be proud of. By St. Austin! I would be glad to see this same outlaw, and I will, for he has done me service, and Richard of England suffers no man to serve him without requital. I' the morning tide I will go through the forest and see him."

And in the morning he went, attended by a body of soldiers, knights, and was led by the Sheriff of Nottingham, who had a great dislike to his position, through the forest for the purpose of meeting with Robin. But our hero, who did not possess anything like implicit faith in kings, did as he had before done, when Prince John had been in search of him, and with equal success, for the king could not meet with him anywhere. Richard was very fond of hunting, and when quite a youth, he had hunted much in Sherwood Forest. At that time the forest abounded in herds of deer; but Robin's men had made great havoc among them, and now, where he had been in the habit of seeing large herds, not one was visible; this raised his anger, and the sheriff, who had some hopes that he should succeed in making the king as anxious to destroy Robin as ever Prince John had been, added to his wrath by everything he could invent, particularly in giving a history of the death of the preceding sheriff, and the rescue of Sir Richard of the Lee, by Robin, in such terms that the king in a rage exclaimed—

"By the face of God! I would I had this Robin Hood under my hand now, he should feel the weight of a reproof he should not lightly rise from. Mother of God! he hath carried on these pranks too long; we must check him; and for that same knight, whose'er will smite off his head, and bring it to me, shall have the knight's lands. I will grant a charter for it, to have and to hold it for ever more; I will seal it with my own hand. Do thou proclaim it, sheriff."

"It shall be done; but let me suggest, my liege lord and king, that while Robin Hood lives, there's no man in the country can hold the lands; so long as he can hold the bow, so long will Sir Richard of the Lee's estates be untenable by any but himself. The knight to whom your royal father, King Henry of blessed memory, granted them, was unable for any length of time to remain; he was made so wretchedly unhappy, that he went to live in another part of the country, and obtained his revenues as he best could; he is since dead, and since that time no one has dwelled in the castle; the tenants keep it in good repair, but no one dares approach it but them."

"Fore God, it is time we came to England!" cried Richard, "these lawless rogues must be taught that there are others have a voice in the disposal of property besides themselves. Lead on, we will hang up this Robin Hood, immediately we catch him."

But he had no opportunity of keeping his promise. Day after day was the wood searched, but without the least success, Robin and his men contriving to evade all efforts to discover them. At length one man, who held the nominal office of forest-keeper for

the vicinity of Nottingham, was summoned, and asked if he could point out the best way of coming across Robin Hood, and he was made acquainted with what had been already done. His reply was singularly characteristic of Robin's fame. He shook his head and exclaimed—

"Were ye to continue as ye have done for a year or more, ye would never come within arrow shot of him. He knoweth of your purpose, and did it please him to fight with thee, his knowledge of the ground and its advantages are such that he would defeat thee didst thou attack him with twice five hundred troops; but he hath no love for blood-spilling, and ever avoids it where it can be done without compromising his honour or the safety of his people, and thus it is why he doth shun thee; but if thou really dost wish to see him, and see how he lives in the green wood, do thou to the abbey close at hand here, and dress thyself in an abbot's or friar's gear, and four or five of thy knights, not more, in like gear, and let me be your leader. I forfeit my head if you do not meet and dine with him and his merrie men in the forest. I will answer for thy safety with my life. Robin Hood, though he despoils churchmen, does not maltreat them."

"Now, by the Holy Rood, your counsel likes me well, forester!" replied the king. "It shall be as thou sayest. I will don this disguise—although, by my father's beard! I do not think it will sit pleasantly on me—to the forest and partake of this outlaw's green-wood hospitality. It will be an easy matter, on once finding his trysting-place, to fall in with it again."

The king, ever impetuous, picked out four knights and had them clothed in monk's weeds, while he himself was clad in an abbot's habiliments. According to the arrangement made by the forester, there was a mail-horse and two sumpter-horses, as though they were bearing great wealth, and they were led carefully along. They had not advanced three miles, when the forester advanced to the king's side, and said—

"My liege, it is as I have said; yonder standeth Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlet, the three most noted men of the band."

"The face of God, but that is well!" cried Richard; "I am right glad of this; forester, we owe thee twenty golden merks. Speed, thou lazy beast!" he continued, spurring his steed, and riding towards Robin at a good speed, which, however, the forester advised him to check, or Robin would immediately suspect him to be no churchman. As he reached Robin, he continued as though he would pass him, but Robin stepped out, seized the bridle of his horse, and stopped him.

"By your leave, sir abbot," he exclaimed, "you must abide with me awhile; you are welcome to the green wood and its merry inhabitants."

"Ungodly sinner!" cried Richard, trying to assume the language of the Church, "who art thou who dost impiously and profanely stay the progress of holy men on a sacred mission?"

"We are yeomen of this forest," replied Robin Hood, with a laugh, "and dwell in the green wood. We live upon the king's deer, and what we can gather from such richly-endowed churchmen as thee."

"Thou'rt a modest rascal, truly," observed the king, trying to hide a smile, "to tell me to my beard that thou dost live by eating my—our king's deer—and by robbing churchmen. St. Hubert! thou hast at least the merit of candour."

"It is our only shift," returned Robin. "You, on the contrary, have revenues, church-lands, tythes, rents, and a store of gold, and out of all this, for

Saint Charity, thou canst grant us a sum of money for our simple wants, for we clothe and feed the poor, which you do not; and we nor guzzle nor over-eat ourselves, as do ye; therefore our wants are fewer than thine, who hath more gold than wants, and we more wants than gold."

"Thou speakest frankly, yeoman," said the king, almost forgetting his assumed character, "and I like thy bearing well. Thou dost look more honest than I fear me thou art; but, natheless, for Saint Charity's sake, I will give thee all the money I have with me, which is forty golden merks. You must know I have stayed at Nottingham since the king has been there, and, by him who died on the rood, his majesty hath nearly emptied my pockets. Still, thou'rt welcome to the money, for I do like the looks of thee and those sturdy yeomen with thee, and were it an hundred, thou should'st have it as freely as I now give thee this." So saying, he handed over a bag containing forty golden merks.

"Thou'rt a marvel among churchmen!" exclaimed Robin, laughing; "and but that I am sworn to let no churchman pass free, I would return thee thy gold. However, thy generosity shall in no wise suffer. Thy mail and sumpter horses shall pass untouched, and take thou this twenty merks back again for thine own spending, and the other twenty, acting up to mine oath—which our dear Lady doth know I have never broken—shall be devoted to the interests of my merrie men."

"Thou dost act generously, outlaw, and I like thee the better for't," uttered Richard, with warmth. "The king has a great desire to see thee, having heard of thee, and bade me, did I fall in with thee, to greet thee with this signet, and bid thee to Nottingham, to meat and meal, for the service thou and thy men didst him when forcing the castle. He would fain know why thou didst him that service, and wherefore thou didst so suddenly disappear when thou hadst done it?"

"Should it be my good fortune to meet with his majesty, I shall not hesitate to tell him," rejoined Robin, "but at present we will say nothing about it; however, for the love I bear Richard, who is a true knight and Englishman, though he be of Norman extraction, I will take thee and thy monks to my trysting-tree, and thou shalt there taste a forester's hospitality."

"I take thee at thy word, yeoman; I would fain see how a man thrives with grass for a couch and leaves for a roof. By the Holy Cross! I have tasted their sweets, and have not found them unseemly; and my life on't, thy sinews are none the weaker for feeding on venison and sleeping on turf!"

Robin could have told him they managed things better, and have shown him the haunt under-ground was as well furnished as many a baronial mansion, but that would have been exceeding the limits of a prudence he bound himself always to observe, therefore he replied only by a smile, and said—

"This way, sir abbot," as he led his horse and its rider into the recesses of the wood, followed by Little John, Will Scarlet, and the five fictitious monks. As they went their way, a deer at the top of his speed bounded by them; in an instant Robin fitted a shaft to his bow, which was always ready, and discharged it; the deer sprang high into the air, and fell dying upon the turf with the shaft buried in his side.

"Well struck! well struck!" shouted Richard, delightedly. "A yeoman's shot, and fairly done."

"'Tis nothing, Sir Abbot," returned Robin, eyeing the king with surprise. "There is not a member of my band who cannot strike a deer i' that fashion,

shooting under hand; my wife can perform far more difficult feats of archery, with the greatest ease."

"Thy wife, Robin!" echoed the king. "Hast thou a wife? By the Mass, but I should like to see the maiden who would dwell with thee in the green wood!"

"Thou shalt see many," replied Robin, "who prefer a true heart with a forest home to a false one though surrounded by the comforts which a town can boast."

"Thou shalt see my wife, sir abbot," cried Will Scarlet, who overheard the last remarks; "an' if thou dost not say she would grace a king's palace, then confess thyself of no taste."

"St. Dunstan and the holy saints!" exclaimed Richard, "but ye may well call yourselves merrie men. Beshrew me, but I long to see them."

He had not long to wait. By this time they had reached the trysting-tree, and Robin wound on his horn three *mots* or blasts, *waa, tra, la*, so loudly, that the wood echoed the sound with almost as much distinctness as the notes were given, and a minute scarce elapsed ere seven score men, all clad in dresses of Lincoln green, armed with bows and quarter-staffs, appeared; and each, as they passed the tree, made a low obeisance to Robin, and then they all arranged themselves in squares and files, according to the capacity of the glade, with a celerity and perfection of discipline which surprised Richard amazingly.

"By St. Austin!" he muttered, "but this is a wondrous sight, and a right seemly one also. As I am a—a—an abbot, by our dear Lord's pain! methinks his men are more at his bidding than my rascals are at mine. I will observe closer; one may learn something even of an outlaw."

The dinner was spread—a right sumptuous one: fat venison, cooked in all fashions; bread, the best made at the time; and plenty of ale and red wine to moisten the meal.

"By my mother's conscience—and Dame Eleanor has so little that it is a rare thing to swear by—but this is a dinner worthy of a king!" exclaimed Richard, eating voraciously, and with every evidence of enjoying it greatly. "Thy wine, too, Robin, is of exceeding good vintage. By the heart of the lion, noble beast! but this green wood living is right good; I confess me I do not wonder thou dost hold thy sway so strongly when I see thy measures. And now, having dined—and, God be praised! I have had such a meal—I would see the beauties of your forest,—these same sylvan dames you were speaking of—these pretty dryads who would grace a palace."

Robin bade Will Scarlet fetch them, while he gave orders to prepare for sports of all descriptions.

"Make thee good cheer, sir abbot," said Robin to him, "Now thou shalt see what manner of life we lead, and when thou art again in presence of good King Richard, thou wilt tell him, thus do the merrie men of Sherwood Forest."

"Never fear, good yeoman," replied Richard; "his majesty shall know all thy doings, even as if he were himself present."

"Thou'rt the most gracious churchman my fortune ever brought me in contact withal," exclaimed Robin, and waved his hand; at this signal twenty-five merrie men sprung from the general body, with bent bows, and Richard, on the impulse of the moment, shrunk back, as if he feared they were about to shoot him, but they elevated their bows in the air, and fired altogether upwards. Richard followed the arrows with his eyes until they went beyond his vision, and then turned round to Robin for an explanation. Our hero pointed out a circle marked in the ground, with a diameter of two feet, and bade him watch it. The words

had scarce left his lips, when the shafts descended and transfixd the earth within the circle, not one falling without the line.

"That is a singular way of firing at a target," cried the king, admiringly, "and well pricked it is too. By the Lord! Robin Hood, but a man had need be well incased in armour to get quit of thine and thy men's arrows."

"Let him be ever so well and closely incased in steel, I doubt not but I could find a place to put a shaft in him," said Robin Hood.

Will Scarlet now appeared, leading Marian and Maude, both habited in dresses of Lincoln green, and each bearing a bow and sheaf of arrows. They were followed by Barbara, Winifred, and Lilas; and then came a long troop of young females, who were wedded to various members of the band. The Lion-heart opened his eyes, and gave a long stare as he saw them approach; but his gaze was one of admiration, especially when Marian, with blushing cheeks, was presented to him by Robin Hood as his wife.

"Fore God! yeoman," he cried, "and queen of the forest and foresters too! Gra'mercy! thou hadst need be proud of so beauteous a damsel as this. Fair lady, I greet thee as queen of this broad wood! and suffer me to pay thee the same homage which it is the duty of thy subjects to render thee."

And before he could be stayed, he knelt on one knee, and kissed Marian's hand with an appearance of great reverence.

"I thank thee for thy courtesy, good abbot," said Marian, withdrawing her hand, "but I prithee rise; it becometh not one of thy station or order to bend to any one, save thy Maker."

"A reproof, and a right moral one, by all that is sacred!" muttered the King; "and from an outlaw's wife in the green wood. By the holy Mass! but this is a living wonder."

"This is my wife, sir abbot," cried Will Scarlet, as the King rose, and bowed low to Marian as she passed and took her seat under the trysting-tree, introducing Maude to his notice.

The King turned his eyes on her, and smiling, ejaculated, "And this is the damsel who would grace a king's home?" Will nodded affirmatively. "Our Lady! but thou'rt right. By your leave, lady, the kiss of grace could never be better bestowed than on so fair a cheek as thine." So saying, his lion-hearted majesty imprinted a kiss upon the forehead of Maude, who curtsied as she received it, and hastened immediately to the side of Marian.

"A word in your ear, abbot," said Will, drawing near to the king, "thou hast good taste, and art a churchman, as a churchman should be. Thou hast never need to fear passing through this wood again, for after this day thou wilt have honourable escort and good entertainment whenever occasion brings thee here."

"I thank thee for thy courtesy, yeoman," said the king, and turned to Robin Hood, with a smile, to see if Will had uttered more than he was justified in doing; but our hero confirmed it, and the king reiterated his acknowledgments of the obligation. "Ha! what have you here?" he cried, as Will's two sisters and Lilas advanced; "by my halidame, but your dryads are indeed fairies." He took Lilas by the hand, and muttered, "By'r Lady! I thought nothing in the world could compare with Berengaria, but here is one who, even to my prejudiced mind, surpasses her. Fair damsel," he said, aloud, "thou hast chosen a wild life for one so young and tender as thou dost appear. Hast thou no fear that the rough winds of the forest may destroy so fragile a flower as thou art?"

"The wind often spares the blossom, when it destroys the flower, reverend father," replied Lilas, and there is one here who is far dearer to me than life itself. I should find it pleasanter to be here with him, were there no comforts, than in a sheltered place abounding in luxuries, away from him."

"Thou dost well to say so, gentle one, if he is worthy of thee," responded Richard, with something like a sigh, for the recollection of the happy days when he first loved the King of Navarre's beautiful daughter and she responded to it, passed across his mind.

"He is worthy of a love far surpassing mine, although I love him as dearly and earnestly as nature has given me power to do," she exclaimed, enthusiastically, and the next instant turning crimson, as she beheld the large blue eye of Richard fixed on her with an ardent gaze. She withdrew her hand gently from his grasp, and when he had paid a compliment to Barbara and Winifred, they passed on to Marian's side, where the rest of the young females had already arranged themselves.

"I make mine avow to God, Robin," said the king, energetically, "there is not a court in Europe can boast so fair a display of loveliness as can thine, although it be in the green wood. Well, well, I have seen the women of all lands, but there are none equal to the sweet quiet beauty of the Saxon maidens; beshrew me, but one of those sweet faces I have just looked upon, is worth a hundred eastern, or indeed any foreign dames."

"I am glad to hear thee say so; it sounds as if thou hadst the true Saxon blood in thy veins," exclaimed Robin, warmly; "I have never been out of the three counties, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire; but I can well believe they do not equal our Saxon maidens in beauty."

"No, that I can answer for," cried Will; "I have been through a great deal of France, and saw nothing to compare with Maude; and if she is not a specimen of English beauty, I should like to know what is, that is all."

"You have served, then?" said Richard, looking hard at him.

"Yes!" replied Will, "under King Henry, in Aquitaine, Poitou, Barfleur, Evreux, Beauvais, Rouen, and a quantity of other places."

"Hum!" said the king, and turned his head away, for fear Will should recognise him, "and I have little doubt wert a good soldier. Ah! Robin Hood, I see your people are preparing for sport; I shall be glad to see what they can do."

"That you shall, and speedily," answered Robin; "you shall see to-day such woodcraft as never was equalled by any archers in the world. I know what can be done by a shaft and bow, and I know what it requires to accomplish the power to make them do what the will decrees, and therefore feel myself free to say there is not another body of archers who can do such feats with the bow as can my merrie men."

"I can believe thee; they began by a singular and clever feat, admirably performed," observed Richard, "and I dare say will finish better than they begun."

Robin then commanded his men to perform various feats of archery, which, accustomed as Richard was to seeing good use made of the bow, perfectly astonished him, especially when the females took their places, and, firing at the target, hit the bull's eye without an exception.

"I would gladly know how you manage to teach your followers to be such accurate archers," exclaimed Richard.

"Thou shalt see," replied Robin. "They are in a course of practice at a willow wand through a garland;

I will have one set up, and you shall see the method I take to teach them. Much, see that the rose garlands are hung upon the wands."

Much obeyed the order, and in a short space of time two wands were erected, each with a garland hanging from the top, so that the top of the wand appeared perpendicularly through the circle of flowers.

"Now," cried Robin, loudly, to the merrie men as they came up to shoot at this mark, "whoever fails to hit the willow wand between the garland, shall lose his best arrow, giving it to me, let it be ever so much a favourite with him, besides receiving a buffet on the bare head; let every man, therefore, shoot his best, for, by our Lady! I will spare none of ye. I will shoot with ye, and if I miss I will receive the like punishment."

Many of the men fired, but most of them missed it, although their arrows went within an inch; they, however, received the punishment, and bore it very patiently; some saved themselves by just grazing the wand; at length Robin shot and cleft the wand in pieces. A fresh one was put up, and Will Scarlet fired and grazed the wand, Little John doing the like; Much, and Gilbert of the White Hand, hit the wand full and fairly; many others followed with various success. When as many had fired as Robin deemed sufficient, he separated those who had hit the wand, and paring the end of the rod much finer than before, he placed it up again to be fired at. He fired the first shot, and though from the distance he stood it looked no more than a piece of thread, his arrow struck it and shivered it to pieces; another was put up, and Will Scarlet fired but missed it; he received his buffet, and vowed nobody could hit it but Robin. Little John missed it and received his blow, while the glade rung with shouts of laughter. Much shared the same fate; Gilbert of the White, who was a famous shot, hit it, and was loudly cheered; all the rest missed it. A second essay was made, and every one missed it; all receiving their punishment with as much merriment as those who witnessed its award. Robin fired the last shot, but desirous to show the pretended abbot that he made no distinction between himself and his men in such cases, he purposely missed the wand by an inch.

"Aha!" cried Gilbert, who looked upon the miss with the utmost astonishment; "master, thou hast missed it, thou hast lost an arrow; stand forth and take your pay."

"I am ready," cried Robin, laughing, "take your choice from my sheaf; and which of ye will give me the buffet? Thou, Little John, thou art the strongest? do thou give it me!"

"Not I," said Little John; "I should never look on my right hand with pleasure again."

"Nor I," exclaimed Will.

"Nor I," cried three or four other voices.

"This is foolish childishness," said Robin, seriously; "I did not hesitate to strike any of thee. I have earned the punishment, and in strict justice must receive it; however, since none of ye will give it, sir abbot, to you I deliver my arrow, and I pray thee, sir, serve thou me even as thou hast seen me serve my men."

"Nay," said the king, laughing, "by thy leave, good yeoman, it does not become my order to strike any one, especially so good a yeoman as thou; I would grieve no man, least of all thee, Robin."

"Thou wilt not grieve me, good abbot; smite boldly, never fear. I give thee fair leave to smite as becomes a man," exclaimed Robin.

"I shall hurt thee too much; my sport is somewhat of the roughest," observed the king.

"I am not so tender as a weak boy," rejoined Robin; "and as I awarded and bestowed a buffet to all who missed the wand; I prithee, as I have missed it, give me one, or I shall begin to think our observance of stern and strict justice is weakening."

"As thou wilt," cried the king, folding up his sleeve and baring an arm of great muscular proportions; he then struck Robin a blow upon the shoulder, which hurled him to the ground like lightning, but Robin was to his feet in a moment, exclaiming—

"I make my avow to God, thou'rt the most stalwart friar I e'er met with; there is too much pith in thine arm for such a holy calling as thine. Thou canst, I will wager, shoot or play the quarter-staff better than thou canst bear a crossier."

"I think I might do as much," said the king, smiling, "or handle a sword, or wield a spear and shield."

"Thy speech savours more of the field than the church," observed Robin, looking wistfully upon him. "I can read thy face well, and it tells me that it is all unused to the cant of false sanctity: I would gladly learn who thou art; strange thoughts rise within me."

"I would have thee set them at rest—let them subside; thou shalt know anon whether I am or am not what I seem to be," uttered the king quickly, turning his head away.

Sir Richard of the Lee, who had been absent all this time, now approached to speak to Robin, and as his eyes lighted upon the king, he started, recognised him, having seen him often when a prince, and turned quickly to see if Robin and his men appeared to know the real rank of their guest; but they were all engaged in various sports, and it was evident from their manner that they were quite ignorant of the quality of the disguised monarch. Sir Richard immediately whispered—

"Know you the name and rank of him who stands here in the garb of a monk?"

"Not for certainty; but I have a shrewd suspicion," returned Robin; "I think that light sandy hair, and those extraordinary blue eyes, can belong to but one man, and he is—"

"Richard of the Lion Heart, King of England," said Sir Richard, his earnestness getting the better of his prudence, and speaking audibly.

"Ha!" exclaimed the king; and at the same moment Robin and Sir Richard knelt at his feet, the former saying—

"I know thee well, now, your majesty—thou'rt Richard of England, whom God save! And as thou hast seen how we live, hast heard what little violence we have done, and when thou dost know that we have all been driven here by the most unjust and wicked oppressions, I do beg and hope thou wilt grant grace to all who are here with me."

"Arise, Robin Hood," said the king, "and tell me why thou didst mingle thy men with my troop, and help me to compel the castle of Nottingham to surrender?"

"Because," returned Robin, speaking frankly, "having heard much of thy deeds, I had learned to esteem thee, even as men call thee a lion-hearted hero, one who like a true knight fought thine own battles, and were ever a friend to the oppressed; else not thy title as King of England should have made me but now bend at thy feet. Hating and execrating, as every lover of England must do, thy brother John, and his adherents, and learning you had come to England, and from London had advanced to Nottingham, for the purpose of bringing him to account, I marshalled my men, and led them on to aid in bringing

so desirable a purpose all the success it deserved. Having succeeded, I retired again to my haunt in this wood; I was aware of the strict search you made for me, and purposely avoided meeting thee, as I could foresee easily, had we met while you were under the influence of what a lying sheriff had uttered, there would have been much blood spilt, with little good gained—for your majesty may see I can hold my station in this wood against five times the number of my men, and thou hast, I know, a better use for thy men than putting them against men who are expert at their weapons, who know every inch of ground they are contesting, who would never surrender with life, and who have done no wrong in being born Saxons."

"Thou hast answered me in the true spirit of an honest heart, Robin Hood," replied the king; "thou hast dealt candidly with me, and I feel pleased with thee. Freely I forgive thee and thy men all thou hast done against the laws, because I find that thou hast had the power of doing much evil, and hast not exercised it; but on the contrary, have succoured those who needed aid, and levied thy contributions only upon those who could well spare what thou hast taken from them. I would forgive thee, unconditionally, were it only for not having added to the miseries this poor country has endured during my absence, when hundreds in thy situation would have done so without compunction; but when I know that the poor and needy, the outcast and the sufferer of all descriptions, who came within thy province, have been relieved, their sorrows and wants mitigated, their cares and griefs soothed by thee, whom men brand as an outlaw, by the grace of God, I see so little to pardon, that my tongue can scarce shape itself to speak the word. Yet, since forest laws have been infringed, and the rich have been made to disgorge a portion of their wealth in a manner which the law disallows, and thou art thereby rendered liable to be its victim, I hereby, in the presence of these knights, and when in Nottingham Castle will ratify my words by deeds, pardon thee and thy men freely and fully, removing from thee and them the ban of outlawry, reinstating thee in the rights and privileges of freemen—so help me the grace of God!"

"Long live King Richard of the Lion Heart!" cried the knights.

"God keep and save thee to be the blessing to thy people thou hast proved to me and those around me!" exclaimed Robin, in a deep tone of voice, bending his knee and kissing the king's hand; then he sprang to his feet, and, throwing up his head proudly, blew such a blast on his bugle that the forest echoes never woke to before, and on the instant every sport was quitted by those engaged in them; the scouts out in all parts of the forest obeyed the summons, and soon the glade was filled by the whole band of merrie men. When they had formed an extensive semicircle, Robin waved his hand for silence, and cried—

"My merrie men all, bend your knees to the earth; here stands our sovereign lord and king, Richard of the Lion Heart! uncover your heads, and pay him the homage which, as King of England, and, what is dearer to our hearts, an English King, is his due."

Robin Hood set the example, and, while yet upon his knee, he made them acquainted with the king's clemency, and bidding them to their feet, said—

"Now let the old wood ring with your cheers—such cheers as you know how to give—such cheers as such noble generosity deserves."

The merrie men needed no second command, but gave breath to a tremendous hurrah, that might have been heard for miles, and repeated it until Robin checked it, and the king spoke again.

"By God's mercy!" he cried, "with such a troop of gallant hearts to back me as you have here, I'd keep the whole country in subjection. Wilt thou, Robin, and thy men, with me to Nottingham? I have much to do there; I give thee my royal word thou shalt be treated nobly, and thy trust shall be safe and true. I may perhaps need thy aid, and in return ask of me any boon thou wilt, and it shall be thine."

"Thy word is pledge strong enough for me," said Robin. "I will readily, with seven score men, attend thee; and in thine whole army thou wilt find no truer followers than Robin Hood and the merrie men of Sherwood Forest."

"Thy readiness has my thanks, Robin Hood, and you shall find Richard of England knows how to reward a good service, willingly and promptly accorded," exclaimed the king; "now let thy people to thy sports again, and hand me that flagon of red wine, which I warrant me came out of some churchman's cellar, for it is too good to have come from any other place. And now tell me who is yonder giant, for I have no other name for him. Beshrew me, but I thought Richard Cœur de Lion no very small bird, but you fellow makes me look like a chicken."

"That is a follower of mine," returned Robin Hood; "he is next in command to myself, but he has a title far higher, for he is my dearest friend—the noblest, proudest, most gallant, and yet most gentle spirit of any man I ever met with since I could discriminate between an honest heart and a knave; he would shed a tear at a sad story, but stand opposed to an army, and fight unflinchingly until he was cut to pieces, without budging an inch or winking an eyelid; his heart's as true as steel and as pure as gold; he is the best quarter-staff player in the world, and an expert and accurate archer, as you have seen: in truth, he is a friend to be proud of; for he is a man in every sense of the word, back and edge."

"Ha! that is praise indeed," replied the king, scanning Little John, who was the person in question, with an admiring eye. "I would speak with the yeoman. How do you distinguish him?"

"His name, your majesty, is John Naylor; but we call him Little John, as you may guess, from his size," returned Robin.

"By the Mass! but a band of such Little Johns would have astonished the infidel dogs in no small degree," exclaimed Richard, laughing. "Ho! you forest tree—you Tower of Babylon—Little John as they call thee! Come hither, man; I would speak with thee."

Little John approached, and, doffing his cap, stood in front of the king, quietly waiting his commands. Richard put several questions to him respecting his strength, inspected his limbs with an air of astonishment, and tried feats of strength with him. Richard, who was immensely strong, however, found himself greatly inferior in strength to Little John, particularly in one instance, where Richard bade him hold him in as firm a grasp as he could, and he would endeavour to wrest himself out of it. Little John obeyed him, and held him as if he had been screwed in a vice; the king made tremendous efforts, but could not move, and at length declared Little John to be the strongest man he ever met with, and Little John told him in return that he had no reason to complain of want of strength, as he had no easy job in holding him. Richard then joined in many of the sports, only to prove how the merrie men, one and all, excelled in everything they practised, as a sport or requisite accomplishment; Richard declared the scene to be the happiest and most festive he had ever witnessed, and entered into the full enjoyment of it with as much zest as any one

there who had no rank to lay aside. At length, when the sun began to decline, and the soft twilight began to take the place of daylight, and the heat of the day had subsided into a refreshing coolness, dances were indulged in, songs were poured forth, and all pastimes, which might be more pleasant, and receive additional charms by being lighted by the moon's mild beams, were partaken and performed. That night the king of England slept soundly and sweetly beneath the branches of the trysting-tree; and in the morning when he arose, after partaking heartily of a repast spread before him, declared his intention of at once returning to Nottingham.

"Hast thou any garbs similar to those worn by thy men, Robin?" inquired Richard. "If thou hast, and will supply myself and knights with them, I think we shall meet with some sport on our return to Nottingham. Your people in office are ever extra officious when they deem their superiors near to scrutinise their conduct, and I doubt not that we shall see some choice specimens of bravery exhibited on the part of the high sheriff and his gallant followers."

"We have plenty of dresses," replied Robin, laughing. "Your majesty and followers can, if you list, change the semblance of knavery into that of honesty, and from churchmen be transformed into yeomen; but, if you look for bravery in the high sheriff or his men, you may as well search for a herd of deer in a hostel, charity in an abbot, or virtue in a Norman."

"Thou think'st but lightly of priests and Normans," returned Richard, with a laugh: "but let me tell thee, friend Robin, I have found gallant hearts among the latter, and considerable virtue in many of the former."

"Cases of exception," exclaimed Robin, merrily, "which only makes my assertion the stronger."

"I care not to argue the point, Robin Hood," remarked the king, shaking his head with a smile; "so we will, as I know my presence to be needed, on to the town."

His request was complied with; he was clothed in a dress similar to those worn by the merrie men, and all his accoutrements were in every respect the same. His five attendants were also habited in the like manner, and, after bidding a merry farewell to Marian and the damsels assembled to witness his departure, he proceeded on his way, accompanied by Robin Hood, Little John, Will Scarlet, Much, and seven score of the merrie men. As they rode along, Richard, who was no mean hand in the use of the bow, tried his skill in opposition to Robin's, but with so little success, that he cried out at length—

"God help me! it is of no use to attempt to compete with thee in the use of the bow; thou hast given me every odds, and yet hath defeated me; it is no game to play with thee—were I to shoot from this to doomsday, I should not get a game of thee."

"An' your majesty had had the practice I have, you might shoot as well as I," returned Robin.

"I doubt it mightily," observed Little John; "each man has some gift in which he excels beyond any other, and it is of no use to try to compete with him in it. I have practised at the bow longer than thee, Robin, but cannot shoot like thee; but with the quarter-staff—and I say it modestly—I think no man is better, perhaps not so good; but then it is my gift, and that's the secret of it."

"That's the philosophy of it," said the king, laughing.

"Yes," replied Robin, "Little John is our forest philosopher."

"It is the reason of it," remarked Little John, quietly.

They now approached near the town, and according to the king's desire, commenced shouting lustily. The cheers soon drew the attention of the townspeople, town, that the King had gone in disguise to take Robin Hood, they immediately concluded that his majesty had been slain, and the outlaw had come to



who no sooner saw the body of merrie men coming, armed to the teeth, openly into the town, and knowing, because the sheriff had spread it through the slaughter the inhabitants, and pillage the town. The people ran here and there in the greatest affright, alarm bells were rung, the town troops were called

out, but the high sheriff was nowhere to be found; the troops in the castle were summoned, but they were ordered by the knights to remain until there was some foundation for the rumour; but when it was seen that they were marching up the town, then they turned out and prepared to oppose them.

"Here come our fighting dogs," cried Richard, laughing. "Now, by St. Mary Magdalen! we did not think the townspeople were so chary of their lives, beshrew us but they seem to think it pleasant to live as long as they can. We do not see my lord the sheriff or his doughty followers among them."

"No," replied Robin, "they find more charms in a homely fire-side than a fighting field, so they have hastened to enjoy it."

"Ha! our rascals are going to speak with their cross-bows; by St. Denis we must stop them. Will this horn talk?" said the king, hastily raising to his mouth a horn which had been presented to him with the dress.

"Your majesty can make it speak good language, if you have breath enough," returned Robin.

"By our halidame! then it shall say some good *mots*," cried the king, making a pun upon the word, notes on the horn being formerly called *mots*; and blew two loud blasts in the shape of a signal, which was at once recognised, and responded to, by a loud cheer on the part of his bowmen, who immediately recovered their weapons and awaited his approach. The news of the king's arrival in amicable company with the "Prince of Outlaws," spread as fast as did the news of his approach, for the purpose, as they imagined, of pillage and slaying; and those who had sought refuge in their houses, now came forth in throngs to greet the band. No sooner was it known that Robin Hood might be acknowledged openly, without compromising personal safety, than hundreds pressed round him to welcome him—to grasp his hand, or even touch his clothes; and on all sides might be heard echoed by hundreds of voices, "the noble Robin Hood!"—"the gallant yeoman!"—"the bonny outlaw!"—"the gentle Robin Hood;" until Richard could not but exclaim—

"By my crown and sceptre, methinks thou'rt king here, Robin Hood, and not we—at least thou'rt king of their hearts."

"Ah, your majesty," replied Robin, shaking his head, "it is but the homage of an hour! These same fellows, whose tongues are so familiar with my name, did you turn your countenance from me, would be the first, if they had the courage, to hunt me to the death."

"Thou'rt right, Robin, the knaves are the same everywhere," replied the king: "he who has the strength of mind and power to keep himself in a state high above them, as their hero, whom they pretend to idolise, but let once fortune serve him a slippery trick, and they who are loudest in his favour are ever readiest to thrust him down. The dogs! Too well we know it."

"If report speak true respecting what you have endured on your return from the Holy Land," rejoined Robin, "your majesty has good reason to say so."

"I faith, Robin, report must go a very long way out of its road if its account exceedeth what we did undergo," exclaimed Richard. "By the holy saints! we can tell thee, Robin, our temper has been sore tried. But no matter; we are once more king in our own land, and, by the Rood! there's many shall be made to know it, too, to their ruth. Look ye, now, how these knaves use their lungs; their tongues are wagging faster than the hoofs of an Arab's courser at

full speed; and yet these same churls, when we entered the town to bring our graceless brother at our feet, were wondrous sluggish, and showed but very cautious symptoms of joy at our return to England, fearing, we suppose, with our handful of men, that we should not be able to reduce the castle, and John still be in the ascendant. But we taught them different, and now you see how the curs bespatter us with their beastly flattery. Pah! it sickens us. We had rather John had their praise and dust-licking services than ourselves. Face of God! their hate would sit more pleasantly on us than their love. Had we been unable to make the castle surrender, we should not have received the service of one of these same rogues, who seem as if they are now ready to lay down their lives for us. By-the-bye, that reminds us that to your timely aid we owe that victory, and for that service we are indebted to you a boon, which, ask of us when you will, we grant it."

"It is on my lips, and has been since thou did'st a short time back graciously please to tell me thus much," returned Robin; "it is in favour of one who now accompanies me, and for some time has sought refuge with me in Sherwood; he is a noble knight, and if your majesty will so far favour me as to listen to his story, I have no doubt but that you will with pleasure grant the boon as soon as asked."

"It is much in this same knight's favour," observed Richard, "whatsoever the cause which made him dwell with thee in thy leafy home, that thou dost undertake to plead his cause. We have given ye our kingly word; we will grant the boon ye ask, and as thou sayest it is in the knight's favour, he may rejoice, for his desire is obtained. Still we would gladly hear what has lost him his estate, and what thou hast to tell us in his behalf."

Thereupon Robin related to him Sir Richard of the Lee's story, and the king betrayed the greatest interest in the recital. When our hero had concluded, he said—

"By'r Lady! but he has been much ill-used, and thou hast acted nobly to him. It shall not be said of Richard of England that he would not profit by a good example. Let us see this same knight."

Robin led him up to the king. "Sir Richard of the Lee," cried he, directly the knight stood before him, "thy gallant friend, Robin Hood, hath possessed us with thy history; and to show thee what we think of his conduct and of thy misfortunes, we reinstate thee in thy lands, and free thee from all government levies and contributions for one twelvemonth, besides reversing the decrees of outlawry against thee, leaving thee as stainless as if it had never been laid upon thee. Attend at the castle, and we will execute in form what we now speak; and we leave thee, Robin Hood, still the boon to ask, which we will grant, whatsoever it be."

"What shall I say to thee, most gracious monarch? how thank thee for thy great clemency?" exclaimed Sir Richard of the Lee, his heart overflowing with emotion at Richard's generosity.

"Hold thy tongue, man," replied Richard. "Return to thy lands, and be chary how you offend a member of the church again."

"Your majesty is a king in your generosity as you are in all other things," observed Robin Hood; "and it would ill become me in any way to limit it. I therefore accept the boon in the same spirit as that which made you offer it to me; but, with your majesty's permission, will wait a short time ere I ask it."

"Ask it when you will, it is thine," returned the king. "Come, let us on to the castle. Thou didst

treat us well while in the green wood, it shall be very singular if thou'rt not feasted to thine heart's content in Nottingham Castle. By the way, thy men have a choice way of cooking venison, and the flavour the fresh air gave it made us eat hugely, and deem the repast sumptuous."

"Your majesty had a right to eat heartily of the venison," remarked Robin, with a laugh, "for while it ran in the wood it was considered as belonging to you."

"Ours or any man's who could bring it down with a shaft, thou dost mean, Robin," replied Richard, smiling; "it was considered ours by everybody but thou and three hundred of thy people; thou and they seemed to think it more thine than any one's."

"I fear me that if we had not thought thus, your majesty," returned Robin, "there would have been many a gallant heart suffered sorely with hunger."

"Very likely; but we can assure thee, Robin," said the king, "we are not too glad to see the havoc that has been made in the deer since we have been from England. We fear that if thou and thy men dwell there much longer, there will be none in the wood."

"Your majesty is mistaken, or at least misinformed, and with a view to prejudice your majesty against me; I can give you my word there are more deer at the present time in the forest, than there were when I first recollect it."

"How can that be," asked the king, "when so many have made their dinners of them for so long? and how was it we saw so few as we entered the forest?"

"Because, your majesty," replied Robin, "they have shifted their quarters to the more southern part of the forest; we have made it our study to increase the breed and improve it, and we have succeeded. Upon the word of a Saxon, there are more deer than ever there were, and of a much finer breed."

"We are pleased to hear thee say so, and believe that thou dost speak the truth, Robin," exclaimed the king. "By the Holy Rood! we can tell thee it went hard with us to be friendly with thee, when we kept thinking of our deer; we are glad to find the wood has not suffered so much, and that thou and so many human beings have been supported—we should say—amply."

"Never lived a body of men with fewer wants, and those few so fully gratified, guided by simpler laws, or happier than have I and my merrie men, your majesty," exclaimed Robin, enthusiastically.

"We can believe so from what we have seen," uttered the king.

Conversing thus, they took their way up the town to Nottingham castle; it was gratifying to Robin Hood, in the highest degree, to see himself thus in juxtaposition with a monarch renowned for his prowess and gallantry, surrounded by his true-hearted Saxon followers, and marching through the town amid the cheers and acclamations of a populace who had but a very short while preceding been expecting to see him led past them to grace a gallows.

Had all his acts been those of a knight, and done under the eye of noble dames and crowned heads, he could not have been treated with more courtesy, or hear his deeds spoken of with greater enthusiasm; it made him smile as he heard some one relate to another the way he had treated several dignitaries of the church, and laud his conduct to the skies for having done so. Then came tales of his charities and kindly considerations for his poorer brethren, and blessings might have been heard on all sides; in short, had he been an emperor celebrated for noble and good acts, instead of an outlaw dwelling in the wild wood, he could not have received a heartier or more

earnest reception than he did on that memorable day. He entered Nottingham Castle, and Richard kept his word of feasting him sumptuously, and after that of signing a deed, removing from him the decree of outlawry, reinstating him in his rights, titles, and possession of his estates in Huntingdonshire, ratifying and sealing the deed with his own hand.

Thus was Robin Hood at last done justice to, and restored to his right as Earl of Huntingdon.

When all this matter was arranged, he sought his men, and detailed it to them, making them the offer to return to their homes, or to enrol themselves as a troop under his command. They preferred the latter; and there was not one in the band who made the least indication of a desire to quit him. There was great rejoicing among them; and no one felt more proudly happy than did Marian; not for the idea of being the Countess of Huntingdon, for she scorned the mere distinction of title; but she was delighted that he whom she loved and honored with such devotion, should, as he possessed all the attributes of a lofty, noble nature, thus become an earl of England;—his right, by birth and native qualities.

There was thus made a great change in the state of the band of merrie men; they were no longer to levy contributions upon churchmen and wealthy Normans, but to be clothed and fed from the revenues of their gallant and now noble leader, Robin Hood, Earl of Huntingdon. After they had agreed to follow him he made them swear never to disclose the situation of the haunt; for he said a time might come when they would again be glad of its services. The times were unsettled, and there was no telling what might occur; it was therefore much the wiser plan to keep its situation concealed from every one, that in case of emergency, they might fly to its sanctuary, should any unfortunate circumstance arise to compel them to do so.

The men cheerfully complied with his wishes; they saw the full force of what he uttered, and they were so used to place their judgment in his keeping, that they believed, whatever he said or did, it was right.

Everything was arranged to quit the bonnie old green wood, where they had spent so many happy hours, for a time—most probably for ever, and Robin Hood could not but feel regret at parting from a spot which had ever held out its green arms to receive and shelter him at all times and under all circumstances. Such was the effect of this feeling, that he resolved he would not quit it until every affair which related to his full and entire possession of the earldom was completely and fully arranged.

And thus, while the king stayed at Nottingham he attended on him, aided him in council—for Richard easily discovered Robin to possess great natural penetration, good judgment, and a quick decision, qualities which were almost, under existing circumstances, invaluable to him; and he freely called upon them, being invariably gratified by the prompt and talented return with which the call was answered. He was fond, passionately fond of hunting; and when he went into the forest, Robin Hood was ever with him, pointing out the best spots to follow his favorite pastime, and getting his men to turn out a magnificent buck, which always afforded splendid sport, much to Richard's enjoyment.

On the 30th of March, 1194, Richard held a great council at Nottingham, and among the many things discussed, Robin Hood's right to the earldom of Huntingdon, was one. The king's wishes were readily met by the councillors, and prepared by them to be put in force. Richard now prepared to return

to London, where he was to be re-crowned, to set aside all the effects his long captivity might have had upon the people—a ceremony to which he had a very strong objection, but was overruled, because it was deemed politic, and therefore he departed with his train for London, leaving Robin Hood still a tenant of the green wood.

CHAPTER X.

"Yer thee to leave is death, is death indeed.

"Clasp me a little longer on the brink
Of fate! while I can feel thy dear caress;
And when this heart hath ceased to beat—Oh! think—
And let it mitigate thy woe's excess—
That thou hast been to me all tenderness,
And friend to more than human friendship just,
O! by that retrospect of happiness,
And by the hopes of an immortal trust,
God shall assuage thy pangs—when I am laid in dust!"

CAMPBELL.

"Lay me, then, gently in my narrow dwelling—
Thou gentle heart;
And though thy bosom should with grief be swelling,
Let no tear start;
It were in vain—"

MOTHERWELL.

"Touch'd by the music and the melting scene,
Was scarce one tearless eye amidst the crowd.
Stern warriors, resting on their swords, were seen
To veil their eyes.

Then mournfully the parting bugle bid
Its farewell, o'er the grave of—"

CAMPBELL.

IT was perhaps a fortunate resolve which determined Robin Hood to remain in his old dwelling-place, until all things had been laid in a train to insure him and his men a safe abode in Huntingdon Castle. Inasmuch, that when Richard arrived in London, he was so plunged into affairs of all descriptions, that he had not an opportunity of scarce even inquiring whether his mandate had been fulfilled, and our hero placed in the halls of his forefathers.

His coronation, which took place at Winchester, soon after he had quitted Nottingham, necessarily involved much of his time, and but a very short period subsequent to that, he quitted England, at the head of a body of troops, to revenge himself upon Philip of France, for the injuries he had inflicted upon him while away from England.

The Baron of Broughton, who still retained Huntingdon Castle, as well as the title, possessed likewise of enormous revenues, independent of those which the estates pertaining to the title produced, exerted the whole of his influence, backed by no mean disbursement of wealth, to evade Richard's decree, and retain the earldom. "Possession is nine points of the law," says the adage, and the crafty Abbot of Romsey tried hard to make it ten; he did not attempt open opposition to the will of Richard, but he craved time to enable him to retire to his other estates; and during that time he employed every means to gain the Chancellor to his side, by making him presents of great value, and offering his assistance in any way, should it be required; and by these means the decree of Richard was evaded, and Robin in his greenwood home awaited patiently the tidings which should tell him impediments no longer existed to his assuming his title, and transferring his home from a forest to a castle, until long after Richard had left England; but there seemed no evidence whatever of his being nearer to the restoration of his rights than he was before he met with the Lion Heart, who was, at the expiration of a year after he had given Robin the deed of restoration, still in Normandy.

Once Robin Hood urged his claims to Hubert Walter, whom the king had advanced from the Bishopric of Salisbury to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, and had appointed him Guardian of England and Grand Justiciary; and his claims, though not treated with contumely, met with the greatest indifference. He speedily found that opposition against so wealthy a churchman, and so influential a noble as the Abbot of Ramsey and Baron of Broughton, who in one person united those titles, in addition to the Earldom of Huntingdon, was vain and futile; so, after a slight mental struggle, which the hopes of being looked upon by his fellow-countrymen as a noble without taint had created, he wisely determined to give up all thoughts of it, and live in the green wood in the old manner, and, if possible, with equal happiness.

He summoned his people together, and told them this. He concluded by saying that, taking everything into consideration, it was, perhaps, for the best, because they had been as a little community which was completely, as it were, isolated in society. They had lived together without mixing with any but those of the band, and did they go once more into society, they would, probably, frequently have reflections cast upon their former mode of life; they would be disunited, and compelled to be subservient to laws and customs which a habit of living freely and simply in the green wood would render highly distasteful and oppressive. They had for years looked up to him, as a large family would look up to a loved and honoured head of the house; they had been accustomed to his sway, and ever cheerfully obeyed its dictates; they had been very happy as they had lived, and they might almost insure, if they still followed the same mode of life, that they would still receive the same amount of happiness which they had hitherto experienced, and, therefore, they would live on in the old way, nor change their acts and manners in any one way but where they might be improved. There was still the same shelter—still the green leaves and flowers to dwell among; and he believed that, after a cool consideration, he should lay his head down with calmer contentment, and sleep more lightly, than he should have done had he made the change in his condition which he had expected.

His discourse had a great effect upon his followers. He spoke to them in the terms and endearing manner of a loving brother. His language was of the most earnest and affectionate nature, and there was not one who stood around him, beneath the old trysting-tree, but what could read in the deep, rich, trembling tones of his voice, that in all his thoughts and wishes his heart was with them, his old companions.

How highly, how fondly they appreciated it, was evident in their clasping hands, and swearing by our Dear Lady, upon the hilt of their swords, to live and die with him, and be true and constant as they had ever been. They were glad in their hearts that they had not to quit the wood, for associations had rendered it so dear to them, that it would have been the same pain to them to quit it as it would have been for a band of patriots, unjustly exiled, to quit their native land.

In all things the band resumed their usual occupations, and Robin Hood sent a notice to Hubert Walter, that as his claim, sanctioned by the King of England, had been treated with the most marked indifference, and as there was every disposition to retain the present holder of the titles and estates in his usurpation, he should, in conjunction with his merrie men, act as they had hitherto done, ere they had rendered the king unasked an important service.

The Grand Justiciary took no notice of the docu-

ment—as if he had never received it; but Robin Hood found that during Richard's life-time, although Hubert Walter exercised the most vigorous measures for the restoration of tranquillity throughout England, hunting and scattering in all directions through the kingdom such bands of men who had lawlessly congregated together, save and except those in Sherwood Forest, and they were left unmolested.

Four years passed away, and they lived as they had hitherto done, with the same amount of cheerfulness and pleasant mirth as ever, and then it became known in England that Richard of the Lion Heart was dead. The effect upon the people of England was tremendous. Prince John had succeeded in obtaining for himself the most decided hatred of the nation before he quitted it, and no sooner was it known that he would have the crown, than it seemed the signal for violence and outrage all over the kingdom: the nobles and barons drew in their vassals, filling their castles with armed men and provisions, while the peasantry and poorer classes committed violence and devastation to a frightful extent. Nothing but the greatest vigilance on the part of the Primate and those connected with him could have prevented the kingdom becoming one terrible scene of carnage and anarchy.

It was about two or three years after John's accession, that he returned to England from Rouen for succours, after having expended an enormous amount of human life and treasure in a useless war, prosecuted while he was wasting his time in luxury and dissipation at Rouen, that the Abbot of Ramsey passed in great state through Sherwood Forest on his way to York; he was attacked by Robin Hood and his men, made prisoner, and treated to a repast of the most scanty nature, and then made to pay for it, not only with all the property he had with him, but also a very large sum of money which he gave a written order for, and for which Robin despatched two of his men while the abbot was yet in his custody. When the men returned with the treasure, the abbot was liberated, and the first use he made of his freedom was to acquaint the king with the outrage upon his sacred person and upon his property.

John, who had need of every noble or wealthy person for a friend at this time, turned an attentive ear to what the abbot stated, and sent an hundred men cased in steel, and commanded by Sir William de Gray, brother to John de Gray, his favourite minister, to rout Robin from the forest, and cut him and his people to pieces without quarter or mercy.

The knight, who was a Norman, his band also being all of that country, vowed he would lay Robin Hood's head at the abbot's feet, and departed upon his errand with the firm purpose of putting his threat into execution. His men were armed only with long swords, and fully expected to obtain a victory with the greatest ease, but when they were in Nottingham they were taught to expect a different issue; they however, laughed to scorn all they heard; and marched with the greatest confidence to the green wood.

Robin Hood, who knew of their arrival in Nottingham, of their intention and equipments, prepared in a certain part of the wood to meet them. One of his people, disguised as a peasant, offered to guide the Norman troop to Robin's haunt, and his services were accepted; after leading them several miles through almost one entire entanglement of briar, bush, brake, and covert, and fatiguing them, being encased in armour, excessively, they at length arrived at a glade studded in all parts with tall beech and elm trees, and there were posted Robin Hood and his men. The Normans gave a great shout as their eyes lighted upon their enemy; and the merrie men responded by a loud

insulting laugh of derision: this inflamed the Normans in a very high degree, and they rushed on to the attack with all the impetuosity their fatigued limbs would enable them. To their surprise, the merrie men opposed them with nothing but quarter-staves, and with such agility, that the troop found their swords of little use, for they could not exercise an activity at all competent to cope with that displayed by their adversaries; and the heavy quarter-staffs rattled with such vigour upon their casques and breast-plates, that they grew utterly confused; and when some of the men threw away their helmets to enable them to act with greater freedom, they were so beaten about the head that they fell senseless to the ground.

Sir William de Gray, who directed the movements of his men, grew enraged beyond description at the drubbing his men were receiving, and perceived at the same time that, encased with such a heavy weight of metal, they had not sufficient power to act, heartily cursed him who had advised him to go thus equipped, and thought it prudent to draw off his men, and retreat upon Nottingham, with the intention of returning on the morrow in a very different guise, and then either conquering or perishing in the field. He accordingly blew a blast of his horn, and summoned his men to retreat, which they did in tolerable good order, Robin not suffering his men to pursue them, save a few scouts, who followed them for the purpose of ascertaining that they really did quit the forest; and when that was ascertained, he returned with his followers to the trysting tree, and there enjoyed a good repast after his morning's exertion.

Robin anticipated that Sir William de Gray had not yet done with him, and the arrival of one of the men who had been sent to learn their movements, with intelligence of their intended attack on the morrow, proved he was right. On the morrow they came clad in the light dresses of archers; they were good bowmen, and this time they were armed with bows and spears, and a lighter species of sword and buckler.

Robin determined to meet him in the same spirit, and to read, through him, a lesson to others who might attempt to dialodge him. He drew up his men in the same place as he had the preceding day, and waited their coming.

Time passed on, however, and they came not; Robin began to think they had altered their mind, when one of his people arrived, stating that the troop were in the wood—were on their way to attack him—and, by a singular circumstance, had missed their road, and stumbled upon the direct track to the trysting tree, where all the females were assembled, waiting the issue of the conflict.

Not an instant was to be lost; the men broke up their position, and at the top of their speed proceeded to check the further advance of the Normans. They had some distance to pass over, and notwithstanding their efforts, the Normans succeeded in getting close up to the glade, in the centre of which stood the trysting tree. There they saw the females assembled, and with the ruthless barbarity of the time, Sir William, feeling satisfied he should inflict a bitter sting upon the outlaws, and gratify revenge for his previous defeat, seeing them unprotected, resolved to suffer his men to violate them first, and butcher them afterwards; but the women, on seeing them, set up a shriek, and retreated with precipitancy; and he noticed that many of them followed the directions of one who appeared a superior among them, and prevented a continuance of the heedless confusion into which they were at first thrown, and who was now

with rapid steps leading the females away: he raised his bow, and taking a deliberate aim, fired. He was a good marksman—his arrow struck his victim, and she fell bleeding to the ground.

A shriek of woe filled the air, and she was borne by the maidens swiftly away.

There was one who saw her danger, who observed Sir William take his aim, and came bounding along in a series of frantic leaps, to throw himself within range of the arrow. He had his own bow bent, and fixed, he thought, in sufficient time to prevent the discharge of Sir William's arrow; but he was too late; the knight's arrow quitted his bow at the same moment Robin Hood's left him—for it was he who witnessed and strove to prevent Sir William's barbarous act.

Each sped to its course: Marian fell, mortally wounded; and Sir William, with a quivering shriek, leaped five feet in the air, and fell dead with an arrow through his heart.

Robin Hood knew it was Marian that fell, and was in a state of frenzy; Little John also knew that she had fallen, and to the men he communicated it, to animate them to revenge. Every man in the band had loved her, as though she had been a dearly prized sister, and yet a queen. Her gentleness, her uniform sweetness, kindness, and tender consideration, had won their esteem and love to the furthest extent human nature allowed them; and when they knew she had fallen by the cool and deliberate act of the leader of the men opposed to them, they uttered a short fierce shout, which, in its tone, told a terrible tale, and then they rushed on to the attack with a stern silence, which, in all their actions, they had never before exhibited.

But they resolved that her memory should receive an oblation which should not easily be forgotten. They went to work like tigers, with a fury and deadly success that was frightful to behold.

Little John's exertions were terrific. With a huge sword—for, independent of the unfortunate event just related, they had expected the encounter to be a fierce one—he cut down every one who confronted him; every blow carried certain death with it; he slew and spared not; and stalked on, mowing down men as if they were briars in his path.

Robin Hood, too, fought with a fierce and desperate resolution: his brows were upon his eyelids, and his eyeballs were as round as marbles; while his teeth were clenched, his lips set firm, and his face pale to deathliness; his arm seem nerved with a giant's strength; all who came within his reach, and stood up before him, met their death.

He seemed unconscious of all things but the deadly task he was pursuing with such tremendous success. Unwounded, he fought in the thickest of the fight; his sword flew in all directions, inflicting utter destruction upon whomsoever it alighted; and as he cut down each opposer, he changed not, save to set his teeth still firmer; for, with all this horror around him, he had a thronging sense of the agony which was awaiting him in the glade.

Soon it grew understood there was no quarter given or taken, and each man fought actuated by the knowledge he was fighting for his life, and a resolve to sell it dearly. The conflict was of the most sanguinary nature; fierce oaths and execrations mingled with the groans of the dead and dying.

The Normans fell in numbers; man after man was cut down, wounded to the death—while the merrie men seemed to bear a charmed life; but they were all expert swordsmen, powerful men, and frenzied by a burning desire of revenge, and a deadly hatred of

the Norman race; their hands grasped their weapons firmer, and their arms seemed nerved with an additional strength in being opposed to them.

For two hours fought they in this way; and at length a mere handful of Normans were left, and then they threw down their arms and fled, the merrie men pursuing them, cutting them down as they overtook them. Out of the hundred men who that morning had marched blithely from Nottingham, three only returned to relate the events of the fatal and bloody conflict.

When the conflict was ended by the flight of the Normans, Robin threw his sword from him and flew to the glade where he had seen Marian carried, and there he saw her laying extended upon the ground, and Maude, in a torrent of tears which blinded her, making ineffectual efforts to stanch the blood which was flowing from her side.

Robin threw himself by her side, his heart bursting with anguish, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, he felt choking and unable to articulate a word. At his approach, Marian opened her eyes and turned them upon him; she recognised him instantly and scanned him hastily.

"Are you unhurt, dear Robin?" she articulated, in a feeble voice.

"I am, I am," he uttered hoarsely, trying to force the words out.

"The Holy Mother be praised!" she exclaimed, a faint smile illumining her features. "I have prayed earnestly that you might, and the Blessed Virgin has heard my prayers. And has that terrible battle ceased, dear Robin?"

"It has, Marian; we have driven them from the wood. But, dear Marian, you—I—Holy Mother of God! I cannot endure this sight!" burst forth Robin, with agony, and buried his face in his hands.

"Nay, Robin, dear Robin, look up," faintly uttered Marian, trying to speak cheerfully; "I am not much hurt, indeed I am not; see, the arrow is out, it is only a flesh wound. You know, dear Robin, if the wound were mortal, I should have died when I drew it forth, and I am smiling on thee; look upon me, dear Robin;" and she reached forward her hand to touch him; he raised his head at her words, and found that the exertion had caused her to faint away.

But her words had raised hopes in him; he saw it was as she had said, and he believed fondly that she still might be spared to him; he therefore prepared to stanch the blood by means in use among them, and which had ever proved effectual.

With the aid of Maude, part of her dress was removed, the wound bathed, some bruised herbs applied, and then it was carefully bandaged. As the exertion of removing her might have a fatal effect upon her, a couch was brought, a large tent of leaves erected over her, and she was carefully watched until she came to her senses; after a little while she seemed better, and expressed a desire to sleep, and soon she fell into a deep slumber.

Robin then went to see the condition of his men; he found Little John actively employed with Much and Will Scarlet in binding up the wounds of those who had been maimed in the fray, and directing the burial of all who had fallen. He had the satisfaction of discovering that not one of his men was killed, and but seven badly wounded; the wounds of the remainder were of no moment, while the slaughter of the Normans was awful.

A deep pit was dug far from the scene of action, and their bodies were thrown in it. When this was completed, Robin returned to Marian, and sat by her

side until she awoke; and when she had shaken the effects of her deep sleep from her eyelids, she turned her full dark eyes upon him, and smiled as she told him she felt no pain, and she was sure she should soon be better.

She said this more because she knew he would be happier to hear it than from any inward conviction she felt that such was the case; but she wished only to see him cheerful, whatever might be her own feelings, and she knew the nearer he deemed her recovery proportionably would his cheerfulness increase.

For some days she continued thus, but at length a change took place for the worse; inflammation ensued, and all hopes of her recovery fled. Robin scarce ever quitted her side.

At length, on the evening of the day succeeding inflammation commencing, she awoke from a deep sleep into which she had fallen, and her eyes lighted on Robin, who was kneeling by her side, and with his hands upraised was praying in passionate earnestness, while the big scalding tears were coursing each other down his pale cheeks; his words had no sound, but she could tell by the quivering emotion of his lip how enthusiastically fervent were the prayers he breathed.

She awaited silently until he had concluded; then she called in a faint quiet tone to him—

"Dear Robin," she exclaimed, "my beloved husband, my first, dearest, and last love! the time has come when we must part; I feel the hand of death upon me, and I know that my time here with thee, thou dearly loved, is but brief. Before we part I would tell thee, with my expiring words, with what felicity I have dwelled with thee ever since we were united; I would tell thee how in my heart of hearts I have cherished the daily, hourly exhibition of thy love for me, how I have felt in all things it has known no change, never, never! I would tell thee, Robin, how happy, how very happy thou hast made me, and in the fulness of my heart would wish most earnestly I could coin my thankfulness into some visible shape, that you might see how I have appreciated thy love. That I have loved thee with the entire worship of a heart wholly engrossed by thee, the Holy Mother be my judge. I have tried to show thee as much, indeed I have; and if my acts have been inadequate to my wishes, it has arisen wholly from inability to express that which was so deeply engraven upon my heart. I have striven to discharge the duties of one who loved thee, and of a wife—"

"And have done so, dear Marian—have more than done so," interrupted Robin, trying hard to speak, without betraying the anguish his spirit was crushed beneath.

"And should have done so, dearest Robin," she continued, faintly smiling, "had it pleased heaven that we should have lived on together until we laid down our lives, good old folk; however, such is not ordained, and I shall pass away from you happier, as I think you have appreciated my love to the extent it existed. Place your arm round me, dear Robin—so, and let me lay my head upon your shoulder; there, now I can breathe my last words into your ear, and my spirit will pass lightly and happily away, for I shall utter my last sigh upon thy breast."

"Beloved Marian, talk not so," cried Robin, in a voice of the keenest misery, "I cannot bear to hear thee speak of parting for ever; Holy Mother of God, it is too much! Oh, dear Lady of Heaven, if thou didst ever hear me, and serve me at my prayers, hear me now; spare her to me, spare her, or I am miserable for ever—for ever!"

"'Tis a vain wish, dear Robin," uttered Marian,

gently pressing his hand with her hot parched fingers, "we must at some time part; it is bitter, God knows it is bitter to part; but it is the will of Him who ordains all things, and we should not repine or seek to change what he ordaineth. Think, dear Robin, that we shall meet again. Oh! yes, we shall again meet among trees and flowers, and sweet shining faces, and all fair things, and never part again, never! never! a place where there is nought but sunshine, and nothing to alter the sweet nature of the beauty around.

"Just ere I awoke, Robin, I had a dream; I thought you and your people were all in the pleasant old wood, and you smiled and made merry, and the sun shone on the green leaves, and the blossoms and buds were in their brightest colours, and the trees were all garlanded, as on the happy, happy day that saw us united, dear love; and I thought, amid all this joy and delight, I was suddenly led away, and I seemed to be taken to some drear, dark place. I had no power to prevent being taken—I looked on you, and the smile I saw before still played on your features; the people appeared to grow gayer yet, and it seemed as if I was about to leave it all for ever, never again to look upon what I then beheld; in my anguish I covered my eyes with my hand and wept. While still in tears, a light hand was placed upon my shoulder; I turned my face to see who had touched me, and looked upon the placid, sweet features of my dear mother. 'Weep not, my dear child,' she exclaimed, 'weep not, thou'rt passing the ordeal we must all endure; thou hast but quitted a pleasant, yet a fleeting scene of happiness, for one which is eternal—behold!' I looked, and suddenly I found myself in a garden of surpassing beauty, the loveliest faces with the sweetest expression of mildness and purity were beaming round me, the air was fragrant with the scent of the most delightful flowers, and the trees were so green and so fresh, and the birds warbled so beautifully, and the air was so cool, that I have no words to describe them; and, oh! dear Robin, what far exceeded all, I saw thee hastening towards me, looking upon me with loving eyes, and a face so happy that, with a cry of delight, I sprang towards thee, and my mother's soft voice sounded in my ears, saying, 'and this endureth for ever;' at that moment I awoke, and I knew that my hour was come.

"I feel that I am dying; I can feel myself each moment growing weaker and weaker; but, dear Robin, my head is pillowed on thy breast; thine eyes, which have always turned upon me with the soft endearing expression of affection, are looking on me, if sadly, yet lovingly; thy arm is round me, and like a weary child upon its mother's bosom, I feel as if falling into a gentle slumber; my voice grows fainter, I can hear, and my sight is dimmer, for I cannot see thine eyes so plainly as before; kiss me, Robin."

He pressed his burning lips to hers, and she felt his hot tears raining on her face; she lifted her feeble hand, and with her finger traced the spot where a tear had fallen, and pressed it to her lips—her voice became a whisper, and now her lips almost touched his ear; again she spoke—

"Robin, my best beloved, when I am away from thee, when thou hast only the memory of her who loved thee to live in thy heart, let not thy sad thoughts make each hour one of weariness and wretchedness; believe that I am happy, that my spirit is hovering round thy spirit, as it will, if it be permitted, and that it will receive pleasure when it sees thee smile and look cheerful; and for the sake of those around thee, who so much honour and love thee, as I have most proudly seen and known, who look up to thee

in all things, and take the tone of their actions from thy looks and temperament, and would be sad wert thou sad, even to the extent of thy sorrow; and for my sake, for thy Marian's sake, to lighten this dread hour of parting, turn not thy face from thy people, but be pleasant and cheerful, and happy, as before; promise me this, dear, dear Robin, and I shall die so happy."

"I will—I will strive—I—God help me! I know not what I shall do," sobbed Robin, weeping like a child.

"Bless you, Robin; may the Almighty bless thee, my beloved; and I have now one last request—you will grant it me, I know, sweet love. I would I could see thee smile, but all is dark around me, and I hear my mother's gentle voice summoning me away. I come—I—Robin, hour after hour have we sat beneath yon trysting tree, long before cruel men made thee a tenant in the wood; we were young hearts then, dear Robin, and sat beneath that tree, with its trembling leaves quivering over us, and the sweet delicate flowers waving round us, gazing upon each other with deep love, and thoughts which had no tongue, and hearts that throbbed and panted till we felt faint.

"One night, when the moon shone clearly over every leaf and flower, and there was no cloud to shade for an instant its gentle light, we wandered through the wood; it was before you told me that you loved me; yet I knew that you did, yet feared and doubted. We seated ourselves beneath that tree, and you said kind words soft and low, and I felt a sweet languor steal over my senses. I thought it would be pleasant to weep, I knew not why; my head sunk upon your shoulder, the bright moonlight showed clearly all the beautiful things growing and waving silently around us, and then I thought how sweet it would be to be buried there among those flowers; and ever since we have dwelt in this wood I have cherished that hope, treasured it up, and now I would, dear Robin, be laid in that spot, for thou wilt be ever near me, and the flowers will not bloom less brightly, nor the grass be less green and fresh because it is waving over the head of one who loved to look upon their tender beauty while living. I—let me hear thee say, Robin, I shall be laid there."

"You shall, dearest Marian, you shall, my sweet angel: and when my time shall come—God grant it may be soon!—if there is one true heart near me to do my last bidding, I will lay beside thee; and the green turf shall wave over us both, dear Marian, in death, as it did beneath us in life."

"Bless thee! bless thee! with my last breath I pray for thee, with my last words I bless thee. Farewell—let thy lips receive my last sigh, my beloved Robin; smile upon me,—I cannot see thee, but I shall know if thou dost. I die happy—happy—I come—I—Robin, bless thee—dearest—bless—"

The words, which were barely beyond a whisper, ceased; Robin felt his lips receive a faint kiss as a low sigh left Marian's, his hand a gentle pressure, and then all was motionless. For a long time he remained in the same position, scarce daring to breathe. Then some one entered the tent: he looked up wildly; it was Maude; he turned his eyes rapidly upon Marian's face, and then suddenly depositing his slight burden upon the couch, he sprang up with convulsively clenched hands, with a frantic madness in his eyes, and shrieked forth, falling senseless to the ground as he uttered the words—

"Holy Mother of God! she is gone for ever! my best beloved—my wife! **MARIAN IS DEAD!**"

CHAPTER XI.

"Now, quoth Robin Hood, Ile to Scarborough go,
It seems to be a very faire day;
[He] took up his inne at a widow woman's house,
Hard by upon the waters grey.

"Master, tye me to the mast, said he,
That at my mark I may stand fair;
And give me my bent bow in my hand,
And never a Frenchman will I spare.

"Then straight [they] boarded the French ship,
They lyeng all dead in their sight.
They found within that ship of warre,
Twelve thousand pound of money bright."

Robin Hood's Preferment.

"She blooded him in the vein of the arm,
And locked him up in the room;
There did he bleed the live-long day,
Untill the next day at noon.

"Lay me a green sod under my head,
And another at my feet;
And lay my bent bow by my side,
Which was my music sweet;
And make my grave of gravel and green,
Which is most right and meet.

"Let me have length and breadth enough,
With a green sod under my head;
That they may say, when I am dead,
Here lies bold Robin Hood!"

Robin Hood's Death and Burial.

"Upon an ivied stone
Reclined his languid head; his limbs did rest,
Diffused and motionless, on the smooth brink
Of that obscurest chasm;—and thus he lay,
Surrendering to their final impulses
The hovering powers of life."

SHELLEY.

HEART-SORE to an extent he did not believe human nature could be carried, Robin Hood complied with Marian's last wish.

A deep grave was dug beneath the trysting tree, her gentle form was laid in it; and then all the maidens strewed flowers over her body in such profusion, the cold damp earth could not touch it when they filled the grave up.

The body was followed by every member of the band, and every female connected with it. Her brother and Christabel shed sincere and heartfelt tears for her loss; and the stern and rough natures who stood round witnessing the last ceremonies performed to one they had revered and esteemed so much, were melted; and it was an affecting sight to see men, who never weep, stand like a band of sobbing children, as they caught the last glimpse of her they should never see again on earth.

Robin Hood stood and looked upon all that was done; took his last look of all that had made life worth living for, without shedding a tear. His was a grief

"Too deep for tears."

And when the grave was filled up, and flowers placed over it, his men turned their eyes upon him to see a statue: had he been of marble he could not have stood more motionless.

He stood thus for some time. When Maude approached him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder, he started as if he had been struck by an arrow, looked hastily and confusedly around him, then struck his clenched fist against his forehead, exclaiming—

"Oh, God! it is all true!" He waved his hand to prevent any one speaking to or approaching him, and turning away with his face upon his breast, he wandered among the solitary recesses of the wood to wrestle with his great grief alone.

Time, which soothes and softens the greatest miseries and griefs, had little influence upon Robin Hood, and ameliorated but slightly the intense anguish he suffered in losing the being who had made the old wood an earthly paradise to him.

For a long time he wandered through the solitary glades and unfrequented alleys with which the wood abounded, alone, completely absorbed in sad thoughts

had so often strolled, wrapped in calm converse, which in every thought and word was invested with gentle affectionateness, the memory of those times would run



of the gentle spirit who had quitted him for ever. And as occasionally he struck into glades, and sweet, cool, shady places, where he and his beloved Marian

through his brain, making him feel his loss with ten-fold pain.

The wood grew distasteful to him. He retired to

Barnsdale; and when there, mournful recollections crowded upon him more thickly than ever. He became, in person and in spirit, the shadow of what he had been.

As Marian had predicted, the band became infected by his sadness, and no longer was heard the jocund, careless laugh of light, unsophisticated mirth, ringing bonnily among the branches and leaves of the forest trees, and finding a mirthful echo from all the hollow places round. Little John dreaded the consequences of this dullness, this spiritless feeling among them, and the ravages it was evidently making on Robin's frame and health; and he therefore set to work and remonstrated with him kindly, but firmly, and persuaded him for some short time to leave the wood entirely, and when he was ready to return to Sherwood or Barnsdale again, he would find himself a better and a happier man.

Little John's arguments, though not polished, still were uttered with a native delicacy, which carried great weight with them; it was an eloquence whose base was the best and kindest motive, and Robin yielded to its reasoning as much for the motive which induced it, as for the necessity he awoke to of throwing off this sad-coloured garment of grief.

The more effectually, he thought, to create a change, he determined to make a short sea voyage, ~~an idea~~ which met with a hearty concurrence from Little John; and when this was all resolved, Robin assembled his men under the tree, and communicated his intention to them, with annotations by Little John, whenever he thought it necessary to make them, in order to strengthen the necessity for Robin's absence. The men cheerfully acquiesced in his determination, and promised in all things to obey Little John in his absence, as if he were Robin himself; and Little John vowed he would try hard to be to them all Robin had ever been to them.

Our hero took an affectionate farewell of them, and wended his way to Scarborough. Previous to his departure, he changed his dress for the apparel of a simple peasant, and when he arrived at Scarborough, he stopped at a cottage kept by an old woman, the widow of a fisherman. During a slight ~~visit~~ ^{visit} he took there, he ascertained that the old woman still kept the fishing boat which belonged to her husband. It was manned by three men, who were scarce adequate to the duty required, as the vessel was a large size, and the widow said she could not afford to keep and pay a fourth.

On the impulse of the moment Robin offered his services, and the old woman instantly and gladly accepted them, and a bargain was struck between them. He gave his name as Simon of the Lee, and was in due time installed in his new situation on board the fishing vessel. But his utter ignorance of everything connected with the rigging or working of a vessel rendered him of little service to his companions; and when out at sea, he could only be employed by the men in the meanest offices, frequently being greeted with a coarse laugh as he each minute displayed his utter inexperience.

One great cause of laughter was his having brought his bow, and a sheaf crammed with arrows, on board with him, the men telling him that he must get ready to shoot the fish, and save them the trouble of using the net. He bore all their taunts with the greatest good nature, and being very willing to do all he was told as well as he could, the men, albeit they joked him so, took a great liking to him. Robin, however, was out of his element; he was looked upon as a quiet, harmless fellow, but as a foolish know-nothing, and his pride was thereby wounded. He soon began to wish himself back in the green wood again.

"If I had these fellows in Plompton park," he thought, "they would not be so ready to laugh at me for a fool; but each man to his craft. My men, had they these fellows shooting with them, would laugh them to scorn, as they now do me."

The fishermen made a very successful haul of fish, and with their boat loaded to the gunwale, hoisted their sails and made for home. Upon their way they perceived a French sloop of war of small build bearing towards them, manned only by a few hands, but no sooner did the master of the fishing vessel behold her, than he cried out "all was lost."

"Why?" asked Robin Hood.

"Why, thou foolish varlet, they will bear down upon us, board us, take us prisoners, and thrust us under hatches in some filthy ~~dungeon~~ ^{dungeon} in France."

"But you will fight with them first," said Robin, "you will not let them take you without striking a blow?"

"It is of no use," said the master bitterly, "they out-number us, and would soon cut us to pieces."

"I do not think they would cut me to pieces so easily," queried Robin.

"Faugh!" cried the master, scornfully, "you—you indeed! why, if you were thrown overboard, there's only a long lubber lost; but if one of us were to slip our wind, there would be as good a ~~man~~ ^{man} gone as ever tread a plank on salt water."

"You hold me cheaply," replied Robin, almost inclined to be angry; "give me but my bow and arrows, and you shall find I know somewhat more than you think I do," and running below, he fetched his bonnie ~~yew~~ ^{yew} bow and good arrows. Upon his return he said—

"Tie me to the mast, that my aim may be steadier, and I will show you that if I am not expert at handling a rope, I am a bow-string."

His request was complied with; he was affixed to the mast, and waited quietly for the French sloop to get within range; it was fortunately a calm, clear day, and there was very little heave in the sea, a circumstance which enabled him to take a surer aim.

As soon as the vessel neared them as he felt sufficiently, he took an aim at a fellow who was in the bow of the sloop, and although the distance appeared greater than the bow would carry, yet his arrow pierced the Frenchman's body, and he fell backwards lifeless; one who ran to his assistance also received the same fate, and the master and the men of Robin's vessel set up a shout; the master then pointed out the man at the helm of the sloop, and Robin brought him down.

The consequences were, that the sloop came up in the wind, and was soon unmanageable, although there was not enough wind to send the mast over the side; a Frenchman who ran to the helm to put the vessel's head right, and to supply the place of the steersman just killed, shared his fate, and fell dead.

The two vessels were now near each other, and there were only six men left in the sloop,—a number speedily reduced to four, and then to three; although as they neared they returned Robin's fire smartly with cross-bows, but without any avail, as his companions had rigged up a small bulwark upon the deck, and from its shelter assisted Robin with cross-bows; however, no sooner did they ascertain there was only three left, than they resolved to run the vessel aboard them; they had lashed the helm to keep the vessel to the wind when they got behind their bulwark, and now they released our hero, and put the vessel about and laid her aboard of the sloop, which was yawing about in the wind, having lost all command for want of

steering; they boarded sword in hand, and the three Frenchmen threw down their arms and surrendered. It appeared that this sloop was conveying a large sum of money to meet some exigencies of Philip of France, to the amount of twelve thousand pounds sterling; and as they were not a long distance from their port of destination, they thought they might as well realise a little sum for themselves, by the capture of a fishing boat or so, and this was the result of their speculation.

The master and his companions were delighted beyond measure at their success; they were now inclined to worship where they before had scoffed, and with primitive generosity declared the prize wholly and solely to be Robin's—his intrepidity had gained the victory.

"If mine be the victory," said Robin, "thou shalt be the better for it; one half of the sloop and its contents I will give to the poor widow who owns this vessel, and the other half to thee and thy companions."

"No, no, good Simon," cried the master, "your good nature shall not be imposed on thus; you have won the vessel with your good right hand—it is yours; do you be the owner, and we will serve and follow thee."

"I thank you much," replied Robin, "for your good feeling towards me, my honest friends, but it shall be as I have said; and the gold shall build ye all, and those who are poorer than ye, better houses in Scarborough Bay. I have said it, and nought will change me."

The men vowed he was a thorough-built good fellow, and when he landed were not slow in spreading the events of their voyage and his generosity. He was overwhelmed with the thanks of the people, and he stayed with them long enough to see his wishes partly carried into effect; and then, having had quite enough of the sea, and his heart yearning once more to be in the green wood with his merrie men, his foot aching to be once more pressing the soft turf, he one morning summoned the fishermen together, and telling them he hoped that his little act would teach them to have bolder hearts, and never give up all hopes again when attacked, until the battle was irrecoverably lost; they saw what one man could do, and if they courageously united, they could conquer five times their number of French, or Normans, as they were better known by that name; and to strengthen his remarks, he gave the Normans a very doubtful character, and after more good advice, to which they listened with the most devout attention, he wound up by saying that in all probability he should never see them again, but he hoped that for many a day to come, they would have a good word and kind thought for Robin Hood.

Ere they could recover the surprise which his name created, for he had all along gone by the name of Simon of the Lee, he was out of sight. To this day the little bay where these events occurred bears the name of Robin Hood's Bay.

Robin was soon again in Barnsdale Forest; it was a beautiful morning as he entered its precincts, and he felt his heart lighten and his step spring as he found himself surrounded by trees and flowers, and listening to the cheerful song of the birds.

He discharged a few arrows to try whether his powers were impaired by his journey, but found that he shot with as much truth as ever; a swift hart flew by him, and he brought it down as cleanly as he had done when in full practice; and then, to ascertain whether his men were in Barnsdale, he blew a lusty peal upon his bugle—the summoning signal.

For a moment it rung in the air, echoed by the

hollow places, but presently a loud halloo sounded from a distance, and five minutes scarce elapsed ere there was a rattle of footsteps, a crashing of boughs, and suddenly out sprung Will Scarlet, and gazed for a moment on Robin, then clasped him in his arms, the next instant disengaging himself and tossing his cap high up in the air, performing a leap himself as if he intended to follow his cap and fetch it down; then again he seized Robin's hand and laughed, while the tears of pure joy run down his cheek; his voice was very husky when he essayed to speak his welcome, but his gladness was as clear as anything could be. In another minute the band were crowding round him, overjoyed to see him. Little John waited until the hubbub had subsided, and then grasped Robin's hand with a fervour that would have crushed the hand of any modern person, and welcomed him to the green wood again.

"Welcome! welcome!" shouted the band, giving birth to stentorian hurrahs. A merry feast had they that day, every one seemed to vie with the other in giving birth to expressions of delight, and rendering his return as joyous as possible.

He entered into their feelings warmly, and though the scene raised remembrances of Marian, for the sake of the simple, earnest, and joyous hearts around him, he stifled the sadness that ever and anon would strive to steal over him, and received the warm greetings and welcomings in the spirit they wished him; and when night came, and they each separated to lay their heads down in gentle slumber, Robin remained beneath the trysting tree, and while the ground was strewed round him with sleeping men, he knelt down and prayed for the repose and everlasting bliss of her whose pleasant face was no longer near him, whose kind voice should never again sound in his ear, whose tender touch should no more thrill with sweetness through him, and whose gentle spirit he felt was hovering around him where'er he went. In the stillness of that clear night, when all were hushed in deep repose, he wept the last tears to her memory that he ever shed, resolving inwardly to keep her memory clear and bright in his soul, with a brilliancy nothing could sully, and to fulfil her wish of thinking she had gone to some brighter, better place, where she was far happier than she was with him, and to be cheerful and light of heart as if some great good had occurred to her, and to live on in the pleasant hopes that he should one day rejoin her. When he had finished he felt a sensation of calm joy pass over him, and he laid down beneath the tree to sleep; it came quickly, as if borne on the wings of zephyrs, chanting music soft and low. He dreamed a sweet dream of a reunion with his beloved, and when he awoke it was late in the morning, and Little John with Will Scarlet were seated near him watching his slumbers. He started to his feet, and taking a hand of each in his own, exclaimed—

"Little John and Will, my dearest friends, from this day you will find me in all things Robin Hood."

"Amen!" they both said, and returned his grasp with as much fervency as he gave it.

Time passed on.

Under King John's sovereignty the miseries of the people daily increased.

Robin, to all far and near in the three counties, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire, proved a terror where an unjust law of oppressive power was exercised. His feats, single handed, and backed by his men, were the theme of conversation, and obtained a notoriety for him all over England.

Frequently were bands sent to crush him, but in vain; and after each encounter he proved more for-

midable than ever. He was devoted to his band, and his band to him.

Years passed away, and they still adhered to the primitive laws which, as they closely observed, had created so much happiness for them. There had been but few changes in the band, but such as they were it may please the reader, ere he shut the book, to know.

Sir Guy Gamwell died at a very advanced age, and was soon followed by his wife; upon this the brothers returned to the hall, leaving the wood, as a dwelling place, for ever. Maude Clare had a little family growing up round her, and discovered that it was better to dwell with them in a hall than in a wood; and Will Scarlet, who could not exist away long from her, for he still loved her with the old affection, left his green wood life, and took up his abode with his wife, accompanied by Much and Barbara.

But Little John knew nothing, could see nothing, which could ever create a necessity for leaving Robin Hood while he lived; and therefore, hand in hand, heart to heart, like dear brothers, instead of leader and follower, did they dwell together. Little John's wife, Winifred, the gentle and amiable, had lost her life in giving birth to a child, which was brought up tenderly by Barbara; and save this, he was without a tie or cause to induce him to quit the wood; but had there been such he would never have done it—his love for Robin would have kept him by his side when all others had quitted him, and until one of them ceased to breathe.

These were the only changes which had been made of any note; for our old friend Tuck, for whom Robin had built a small chapel in Barnsdale, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, still considered himself as one of the merrie men, and was as roistering and fond of drinking as ever. Hal of the Keep had met with great preferment. While Richard of the Lion Heart was at Nottingham, Robin Hood had recommended Hal to his especial notice, and he had been made marshal of the castle, a sort of governor, and had discharged his duties so well, that he was still retained during John's reign in the office, and he held his trust true and faithfully. His wife, as she grew older, lost none of her beauties—at least so little, it was not missed, for she had such a quantity to spare; and her daughter, their only child, grew up the counterpart of her mother in loveliness and sweetness of temper.

Sir Richard of the Lee had lived quietly and happily with his wife, leaving the more active duties which the possession of the castle and estates involved, to his son Herbert, who made a figure among the Barons of England, when King John's tyranny induced them to revolt; and when the ever memorable *Magna Charta* was signed, Herbert, with the praise of brave and virtuous men, and the character of a brave and highly daring soldier, returned to his wife and home. Lilas proved a treasure to him; and both Sir Richard of the Lee and Herbert had reason to bless the day when the father gave to the son, and the son wedded the daughter, of a Saxon yeoman.

Robin Hood, whenever opportunity offered, became their honoured guest, ever to their delight, and to his own peculiar gratification; and under all circumstances, at all times, Sir Richard never forgot the day when he first met with Robin Hood, while Herbert and Lilas taught their child to love him, and lisp his name in their prayers.

Soon after *Magna Charta* was signed, after a series of monstrous acts, King John wended his way to Nottingham, spreading devastation and horror everywhere. He was accompanied by a number of Generals, whose acts had obtained for them the names of

"Falco Without Bowels," "Manleon the Bloody," "Walter Much, the Murderer," "Sottim, the Merciless," "Godeschal, the Iron hearted;" they were the heads of foreign mercenaries. Their path was marked by blood and fire, death and extermination; a catalogue of the horrors they were committing flew before them, and as they approached the different villages the inhabitants fled in terror and horror.

Robin was not slow to learn all this, and he determined, that while near him, these foreign hordes, these merciless slayers, should be made to endure some of the sufferings they inflicted. The army approached Sherwood Forest, and a small advance guard came first, scouting. When the main body of the army came up, they found more than half the bodies of their comrades hanging from branches of the trees, and the remainder dead and dying upon the ground. They were astounded at the sight, but pushed on. Their numbers, however, would have made it mere madness for Robin to attempt to stay them, and his only plan was to harass them, and terribly did he perform this duty. Men fell, pierced by arrows, whilst almost in the centre of the army; stragglers were cut off and killed wherever they appeared, and as yet the enemy was unseen.

A panic was fast spreading through the army, dictated by superstition, for they began to believe they were in an enchanted wood. Sottim, the Merciless, however, determined to put a stop to it: and placing himself at the head of a body of fifty men, galloped into the recesses of the wood to turn out the unseen enemy; but he had not ridden a thousand yards ere he was shot dead, and not one of the troop returned to tell his fate.

The army entered Nottingham, and after committing great excesses there—a place which had declared itself favourable to them—they proceeded, led on by John, through the wood, to Yorkshire, burning and slaying wherever they came, as before.

It was known that Robin Hood was busy, and throngs of young men who had had wives, maidens they loved, and sisters, brutally defiled, fathers and brothers murdered, and property utterly destroyed, came out to join him; and all the way John went, Robin with his band was at his heels, cutting to pieces every straggling body of the army they encountered. One party they came up with, who had quitted the army, and were plundering and burning a small hamlet near Mansfeld, subjecting the females to the most horrible treatment; in the middle of their monstrosities, Robin and his men were up with them, and cut them to pieces to a man; untiringly, after rendering such assistance as the shortness of the time would enable them, they were on John's track again, and repaying with terrible interest all his villainies. Fortunately, Allan-a-Dale's house, being in a deep dell, escaped them, as it was out of their route, and the castle of Sir Richard of the Lee as well; but whatever castle was taken, was given to some Norman adventurer, and instantly taken possession of; but Robin Hood, whose band had been reinforced by the men of the three counties who had been sufferers through this terrible visitation, to the number of seven hundred men, who had sworn to be true to each other, and die sword in hand rather than surrender or give an inch of ground, as quickly stormed these castles and put these Normans to the sword; and harassing John's army beyond expression, for they had defied all efforts to capture them. The bands who had been sent out to cut them off, being always too small in number, were invariably repulsed with frightful loss.

John raged and stormed when he heard of it, but

would not stop nor send a greater number to attack them, but pushed on after the young king of Scotland, who was retiring before him, vowing he "would unkennel the young fox."

John seems to have been actuated by the most fiendish impulses; he set the example of burning by setting fire to the house in which he had slept the night previous, and sanctioning the Normans to put his native subjects to the most horrible torture, to discover where they had placed their money. King John went as far as Edinburgh, and Robin Hood followed him as far as Northumberland—a terrible accompaniment to his march; his name got well known in the army, and whatever portion of it his men appeared among, were certain of being slain to a man. Failing to gain his ends in Edinburgh, John returned to England, leaving, as before, a wide trail of blood; and as soon as he came within Robin's reach, our hero made the same tremendous reprisals upon him as he had previously done, never leaving him while he had a chance of retaliating upon the horrors he was inflicting; and to the Normans the name of Robin Hood became a terror, as Hereward le Wake's had to their predecessors, when similar scenes were enacted in William the First's reign.

John quitted the north for Dover, and left commands for several bands of troops, stationed in various places, to follow and join him. Those which had to pass through Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, or Lincolnshire, were mostly intercepted, and but few escaped to tell that the Saxon Robin Hood had been among them. Soon after this, John died, and his son Henry came to the throne.

Robin had now reached his fifty-fifth year, and Little John his sixty-fifth, and yet both were as hale and strong as many who were their juniors twenty years; there was little necessity for them to pass such an active time as they had during John's reign, because the Earl of Pembroke, who was guardian to King Henry III., disliking bloodshed, did much to ameliorate the condition of the people. Probably from inactivity, Robin Hood began to feel dull and listless; the sudden cessation of excitement produced a reaction on his spirits, and again he was ever at the grave of Marian, and then wandering alone in the most solitary part of the wood; a presentiment was upon him that his time was near at hand, and much as he strove to shake it off, it clung with the utmost tenacity to him. Little John, who always tended him with the most affectionate earnestness, quickly perceived the melancholy change which had taken place, and applied himself at once to the task of arousing him from its influence; he traced it to its right source, and judged if a change was made in his system, that he would recover the healthful tone of spirits he had recently enjoyed.

Robin had more than ever excited the love of the people for him by his daring acts in their behalf, and could with safety traverse any part of the county of Nottingham alone.

An abbey which stood on the borders of the wood, called Kirkleys Abbey, had once received him when wounded in an attack upon a band of Normans; the prioress claimed a relationship, and tended him very carefully until he recovered. Little John now strenuously advised him to seek her and there be blooded, a remedy at that time for nearly all diseases of the frame or mind—and to gratify the strong desire Little John evinced, Robin complied with his wish; he sent word a day or so before, in order to prepare the prioress, and when he went there she received him with a smiling face and outstretched hands. She invited him to partake of some refreshment, which,

however, he declined, and requested only that she would bleed him, a duty which she performed with much dexterity upon such members of the abbey as needed it, and he knew her skill, and had no hesitation in trusting her. She showed him into a small upper room, which she said she had prepared for him, and he laid upon a couch while she opened a vein in his arm; she then took such an enormous quantity of blood from him, that he refused to permit her to take any more; and then she smiled as before, bound up his arm, and leaving him to repose, quitted the room, carefully locked the door after her, put the key in her pocket, and descended the stairs with the smile still upon her countenance.

This prioress, although devoted to God, had an unsaintly love for a certain knight, who was very frequent in his visits to the abbey; he learned from her that the celebrated Robin Hood, her kinsman, was coming to her to be blooded.

This knight was a brother of Sir Guy of Gisborne, a mean, dastardly, spiritless wretch; who, without the courage to meet our hero, worked upon this woman's fears, until he persuaded her to bleed Robin to death. The woman, of a weak mind, not possessing a spark of real virtue, suffered herself to be drawn into his views, and satisfied herself that she was doing a good act, in shortening the life of one who was an outlaw, and therefore a bad man: she had succeeded in drawing a great quantity of blood from her victim, but his resolution prevented at that time carrying her project into effect, but when darkness drew on, she stole cautiously to the chamber, and found our hero in a deep sleep; she quietly removed the bandage from his arm, and, having the satisfaction to see the wound break out afresh and the blood begin to trickle down his arm, she carried the bandage away with her, locked the door as before, and descended, leaving him there alone to die.

The morning broke, and as it began to pour its beams into the little chamber, Robin opened his eyes, but experienced such a dreadful sensation of faintness, that he could scarcely move. For a short time he lay still, and he began to think of his young days, of green trees and blue skies: then he exerted himself to try and shake off the faintness, and then he discovered he was deluged with blood, that the bandage was removed, and, from the loss of blood he had experienced, he was on the verge of death. His first impulse was to spring up and try the door, but he fell to the ground in the attempt: he, however, crawled to it and found it fast. He then dragged himself to the window, but found he had not strength for the leap, and, as a last resource, he put his horn to his mouth, and blew three weak blasts. His dear old friend Little John was near at hand, as he ever was when his services were needed. He heard the summons, feeble as it was, for he was hovering round the abbey walls.

His blood ran cold as he heard the faint tones, and in an instant he suspected something was wrong. He called together a party of the merrie men, rushed to the abbey, and demanded instant admittance. It was denied him, and his suspicions were confirmed.

He seized a large block of stone which lay near, which no two other men could have moved, and hurled it against the door. It dashed it open, and he rushed in. Again he heard the feeble notes of the horn. He followed the sound, flew up the stairs, and threw himself against the door of the room where Robin was confined, and burst it open, to see a sight which turned his heart cold. Robin, with scarce half an hour's life in him, was leaning against the case-ment: the couch was a mass of blood, which had

trickled and dripped, and lay a pool upon the floor. He uttered a cry, which was almost a shriek, as he beheld this. He clenched his hands and ground his teeth.

"Who has done this?" he cried. "Robin Hood, dear master, who has done this? Tell me, for the love of Heaven!"

"It matters not, Little John, now—all is over with me. I have bled to death!" feebly uttered Robin.

"By foul means," cried Little John, hoarsely—"by foul means. Is it not so, Robin?"

"I cannot die with a lie on my tongue," moaned Hood. "It is."

"Dear, beloved leader," cried Little John, throwing himself upon his knees before his dying friend, "if thou hast ever loved me—and I know thou hast—let me have my revenge for this. I pray you, by your love for the Holy Mother of God, to grant me this. I will raise this accursed place to the ground. Not one hated stone shall stand upon another—not one shall live to say I dwelt there. Grant me this, for our blessed Saviour's sake, who died on the holy rood. I know you will."

"No, Little John, not if I had lost twenty lives," exclaimed Robin, in a weak tone. "From the earliest hour of my life I never did harm or hurt to woman-kind, nor ever suffered it where I could prevent it. The last act of my life shall not change in spirit to what was my first. No, let her conscience be her punishment: I will not harm her. Give me my bow, Little John, and one arrow: it will be my last shot, and where it falls in the green wood there would I lay me down and die." Little John, with a bursting heart, did as he requested. "Raise me to my feet," he said; "I would fire my last arrow as I fired my first." He drew the bow with a sudden exertion of strength—a convulsive effort of expiring nature—and it flew over the tree tops to a considerable distance. Little John followed the arrow with his eyes until it fell, and then turned to Robin, who continued in a scarce audible voice, "It is my last shot—the last time I ever draw bow-string. Farewell, my bonnie yew bow and my trusty broad arrow! Bear me to the spot where it fell."

Little John took his bow and arrows, and bore him in his arms as if he had been an infant; and when the merrie men, who were congregated below, saw him, they uttered an exclamation of horror, and would at once have proceeded to violence, if Little John had not checked them and bade them follow him. They soon reached the spot where the arrow fell, and there Little John laid down his beloved friend, who was gently passing away with an expression on his features of utter stupefaction.

"Summon my merrie men," uttered Robin, faintly. "I would see around me my gallant hearts, who have truly and faithfully followed me for so many years—I would heave my last sigh in their presence, the brave souls!" Little John blew three loud blasts, which summoned every member of the band, who little thought they were hastening to look their last upon their noble leader. Among them came Will Scarlet, who, although he had quitted the band of merrie men and the green wood as an abiding place, yet had still so much of the old leaven in him that he was a frequent visitor to them; indeed, he divided his time between his family and his old companions, and at the present time happened to be on a visit to Sherwood. When he saw Robin laying upon the turf, supported in the arms of Little John, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and anguish, and threw himself upon his knees by his side. Robin smiled upon him, as his faint eyes turned to him, and stretched forth his hand to greet him.

"Holy Virgin! Robin, what does this mean?" gasped Will. "Thou dost lie here as if bereft of motion; thy cheek is ashy pale, thine eyes glazed, and dost look as if the grim hand of death was on thee. What is the meaning of this? Art thou wounded? Does he live still who has done this? Speak, Robin—Little John, for Saint Charity tell me!"

"The meaning thou shalt know anon, Will," faintly articulated Robin. "Will, thou hast said right, the grim hand of death is on me; I feel his icy hand upon my heart, and in a few short minutes I shall have passed from among ye."

"No, no, Robin, it cannot be so," cried Will, earnestly, "it cannot be; you overrate your danger. You must not die."

"It would be a dreary thought to me," said Robin, feebly, "to imagine that a time would never come when I should die. I have lived long, and lived happily, have been loved and honoured as no man was ever before; and, though I may feel a pang of regret at parting with so many generous friends, such unwearied faithful followers, yet the pain is lessened by the hope that we may again meet in a better world, and grasp hands in the same fervent spirit of fraternal fellowship as we have in this. I am glad thou'rt here, Will: I am very glad thou'rt by my side, Will, at my last hour, for we have been brothers in all things save the accident of birth. We were merry boys together, sharing our little property as freely and as sincerely as we shared our hearts, and from those early days until now we have had no division of spirit. We have been in our elder days the same true friends we were in our childhood, dear Will; and for the possession of thy honest heart, which is, and has ever been, as pure as native gold, for the constant receipt of kindness bestowed, with all the fresh sincerity of incorruptible honesty, I do most earnestly thank thee, and with my dying lips do pray to the Holy Mother she will shower upon thee all the blessings life can give thee. For myself, Will, I have tried to be to thee the same friend thou hast been to me, and it would please me to know I have not failed."

"Dear Robin! my first, my only friend!" exclaimed Will, sobbing like a child, scarce able to articulate his words,—“Thou hast been more than a brother to me; in all things have shown me such affection that had I not filled up my heart with thee as a boy, I should afterwards, had it only been out of gratitude for thy repeated kindnesses. I did love thee, Robin; no brother ever loved brother half so well; and, now thou art departing, I feel how strongly—how deeply—that love is implanted within me; and the thoughts of thy death are madness to me. Would to God I could lay down my life for thee! I should bless the moment that saw thee rise up in health as the breath quitted my body. I cannot bear it. I feel like a child—I—I—” his sobs literally drowned his words.

"Living in a house, Will, has made a woman of thee," uttered Robin, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Hadst thou lived all the time in the green wood, thou wouldst have looked upon my death with a steadier eye and a firmer heart. Well, well; my heart feels with true gratitude the value of this exhibition of thy love for me, and thou mayst be sure that in this, my hour of death, I feel happy to know the hearts I deemed mine in life, do not change in my last moments. God bless thee, Will; my single-hearted earnest friend! We shall meet no more in this life; but in the world to come I fondly hope we shall be re-united in the same loving friendliness as here. When I am dead, tell Maude, thy sweet wife, that I did not forget her in my last moments; that I

cherished ever the kindest thoughts of her during life; that I loved her as a sister, and that at times, when I appeared to take slight notice of many little kindnesses, then most appreciated them affectionately and fervently. The Holy Virgin keep her! She has been a treasure to thee, Will, which thou knowest far better than I can tell you. Bear my last words of kind remembrance to her; and say I blessed her with my dying breath."

"I will, I will!" exclaimed Will, pressing Robin's hand earnestly, his words trembling, as they were uttered, and the tears still streaming down his face.

"Farewell, Will; my end is approaching, our dear Lady shower her kindest gifts on thee and thine. Farewell! we part for ever here, Will; if He who adjudges all things wills, we shall meet again never to be separated. God bless thee! When I am gone, thou wilt offer up a prayer for the friend of thy boyhood, the brother of thy heart, thy companion for many years—Robin Hood."

"May I never meet thee in Heaven, if I do not keep thy memory in my heart brighter than my honour," cried Will, with enthusiasm; "my first prayer in the morning, and my last at night, shall be for my oldest and best-loved friend. Fare—my throat chokes at the word—Fare—I cannot say it, Robin;" and Will, burying his face in his hands, wept in the bitterest anguish; Robin pressed his hand, and had no heart to try and soothe or check his grief; and so he turned to his merrie men—who were now all assembled and standing round in mute astonishment, a fierce desire of revenge burning in their eyes—and thus addressed them:—

"My old companions, dear friends of my heart! ye who have shared my toils and dangers, my joys and pleasures alike, with the same devotion and truth, receive my last thanks and blessings, my constant friends. I am quitting ye for ever, but to the grave I bear with me the proud assurance of ever having had your love, your affectionate service tried to the death, and proved truer than steel; and I have loved ye truly and sincerely as brothers, one and all; and now, as my fleeting breath speeds from my soul, I am happy, proudly happy, to see the old, the loved faces around me, that I may look my last on them. Farewell, brothers! Saxons, we have made the Normans tremble at our name, the poor to love us, and I die with that conviction cheerfully and resignedly. God bless you all! I fear not that I shall live in your memory; and if after death we can dwell with pleasure on the recollection of those we loved in life, I will have ye ever present in my memory. My old companions, bless you, bless you! And you, Little John, thou noble heart, thou more than brother! grieve not that I have quitted the old green wood for ever; the birds will sing as sweetly, the sun shine as brightly, the flowers, the leaves, and the grass be as green, as fresh and fair, when I am gone, as ever, old friend. Thou hast told me often it is vain to grieve for what must be; therefore, thou dweller in my heart, shed no tear for me, but when you think of me, smile and believe I am happy—most happy. My time is come; give me thy hand, my kind, constant, dearly-loved friend; I would die with it in my grasp. It is well, I—my breath grows weaker, and everything is fading from my sight. When I am dead, lay me beneath the trysting tree by the side of Marian—and the flowers—and the old trees—it is thy hand I grasp, Little John?"

"It is," groaned Little John, the big tears rushing from his eyes with the agony of blood-drops.

"It is well. Bless thee, old friend—I die happy—happy—Marian, we meet again—never—to—"

The voice ceased, and the bright unsullied spirit of the beloved of many hearts, the noble high-soul'd Robin Hood, had passed away.

His followers, broken-hearted at their loss, bore him sadly to the spot which was to be his last earthly resting-place; beneath the old trysting tree, in the heart of the old wood—where he had passed the happiest hours of his life, the scene of all his festivities, the assembling-place for those whom he loved, the forest home which had always sped forth its arms to afford him a shelter; and which, as it had been a resting place in life, now performed the same kind office for his beloved Marian and himself in death. There, in obedience to his last wish, was he laid close beside her, his yew bow and sheaf of arrows at his side; and his favourite hound, which Little John slew on the grave, that he might serve no other master, was placed at his feet; and then, amid the tears and prayers of all around, the remains of their gallant leader was hid from the sight of the merrie men for ever.

Thus ended the career of him whose life forms one of the most extraordinary features in the annals of this country. Thus passed away—the victim of one of a sex whom he had ever most highly honoured—one adored by the common people far and near; his memory revered for the open-handed generous-hearted charity with which he relieved wants, and the bold chivalric spirit with which he endeavoured to lift the wretched serfs out of the galling clutches of a dire oppression. He who at all times, and in all seasons, was at the service of those who needed his aid, at any risk, at any personal sacrifice, undaunted by appalling dangers, unmoved at the prospect of future punishments, was thus struck down, and by the hand of woman; her from whom, having exhibited such devotion, such true knightly feeling in her behalf, he could least have expected the blow. Thus he, who had faced the perils of fierce conflicts, encountered foes singly and in numbers, had withstood the desperate efforts of well-trained swordsmen, the chance bolts in a *melee*, or death-dealing weapons in a sanguinary fray;—he who had dared and escaped all these, now gave up the ghost, treacherously and wickedly deprived of life by means which added one strong pang to the regrets which he felt at parting with his old companions and the old familiar places for ever.

Thrice ten thousand times would he rather have fallen, with his bonnie yew bow in his hand, or his trusty sword, than thus steal out of the world, the victim of a malicious wanton, who, under the garb of saintly sanctity, covered sins of the most infamous description. But thus it was to be; and the "just, generous, benevolent, faithful, and beloved," quitted the scenes of his vicissitudes, trials, exploits, happiness, and sorrow, for a better world, leaving behind him a name which has come down to us intact, extolled by a priest for his piety, by the oldest historians for his humanity and gentleness, and universally honoured for the efforts which he made, as the last of his race, to shake off the oppressive yoke of the Norman conquerors.

PEACE TO HIS MANES!

The property of the band was shared amongst its members, and then they separated, scattering themselves far and wide, some returning to their homes, some to other counties, some to foreign lands in various parts of the old world, but none to return as inhabitants of the once merrie old wood.

Little John was the last to quit it; he wandered to and fro among its now dreary alleys and glades, a broken-spirited, broken-hearted man. Many were the

efforts he made in solitary loneliness to draw bow against the fleeing buck, but his hand had lost its cunning, and the fleet stag would fly among the leafy nooks unhurt, while he, with a heavy heart, would turn away with a sigh, exclaiming with a full heart, "It was not so in bonnie Robin's day."

And anon he would strive to wake up the echoes of the old wood with a note from his horn, but it was a sad sound; his eyes would fill with tears, his throat would swell and pain, and he would turn his back on the old wood, for it was no longer a place for him.

And he took up his abode with Will Scarlet and his brothers, but he found no resting place. They strove to cheer him, and turn his thoughts from him whom in life he had so loved, but who was now passed away—but in vain; he was a broken-hearted man, and he sought only now to lay down and die, that the impatient spirit, chained here to a weak and wasting frame, might soar aloft and join that chief who on earth alone reigned supreme in his heart.

And that time was not long coming; the one constant hope and wish was permitted him; and one bright morning his cousin, Will Scarlet, who, with the most affectionate solicitude, tended him, sought him in the fresh cool air, found him reclining against the trunk of an aged oak tree, his face turned towards the old forest, a calm smile playing over his pale features, but his eye was glazed, his features rigid. The spirit of Death had laid his hand upon his heart, and Little John was with his chief in the land of spirits.

Poor Will Scarlet was sorely grieved; tears of sincere regret were shed by him over the inanimate body. He raised him tenderly from his cold resting place, and bore him to his dwelling; from thence he

was carried to his grave in Hathersage churchyard, about six miles from Castleton, in Derbyshire. The grave is distinguished by a large stone at the head and one at the feet, on which are yet apparent to the curious visitor the initials I. L. A strange story is told of one inquisitive antiquarian, who many years since, caused the grave to be opened, and, discovering some unusually large human bones, bore them away as the veritable remains of the renowned forester; but while they were in his possession he met with such a series of disasters and accidents—the sexton who had assisted him in the sacrilegious pillage, being also fearfully tormented—that to obtain peace he was compelled to restore them to their original resting place; and after their return the torments and troubles afflicting both antiquarian and sexton instantly ceased.

Our task is ended. Perhaps our reader will kindly think what has been done weakly, has been done earnestly, and join with us heartily in repeating the words of that sweet poet, John Keats:—

"HONOUR TO THE OLD BOW-STRING!

HONOUR TO THE BUGLE-HORN!

HONOUR TO THE WOODS UNSHORN!

HONOUR TO THE LINCOLN-GREEN!

HONOUR TO THE ARCHER KEEN!

HONOUR TO TIGHT LITTLE JOHN!

AND THE HORSE HE RODE UPON!

HONOUR TO BOLD ROBIN HOOD!

SLEEPING IN THE UNDERWOOD!

HONOUR TO MAID MARIAN!

AND TO ALL THE SHERWOOD CLAN!"

The End

