

Leigh Hunt (1784-1859)

1 *Robin Hood a Child*

It was the pleasant season yet,
When the stones at cottage doors
Dry quickly while the roads are wet,
After the silver showers.

The green leaves they looked greener still, 5
And the thrush, renewing his tune,
Shook a loud note from his gladsome bill
Into the bright blue noon.

Robin Hood's mother looked out, and said, 10
'It were a shame and a sin,
For fear of getting a wet head,
To keep such a day within,
Nor welcome up from his sick bed
Your uncle Gamelyn.'

And Robin leaped, and thought so too; 15
And so he has grasped her gown;
And now looking back, they have lost the view
Of merry sweet Locksley town.

Robin was a gentle boy, 20
And therewithal as bold;
To say he was his mother's joy,
It were a phrase too cold.

His hair upon his thoughtful brow
Came smoothly clipped, and sleek,
But ran into a curl somehow 25
Beside his merrier cheek.

Great love to him his uncle, too,
The noble Gamelyn bare,
And often said, as his mother knew,

That he should be his heir. 30

Gamelyn's eyes, now getting dim,
Would twinkle at his sight,
And his ruddy wrinkles laugh at him
Between his locks so white:

For Robin already let him see 35
He should beat his playmates all
At wrestling, and running, and archery,
Yet he cared not for a fall.

Merriest he was of merry boys,
And would set the old helmets bobbing: 40
If his uncle asked about the noise,
'Twas 'If you please, sir, Robin.'

And yet if the old man wished no noise,
He'd come and sit at his knee,
And be the gravest of grave-eyed boys, 45
And not a word spoke he.

So whenever he and his mother came
To brave old Gamelyn Hall,
'Twas nothing there but sport and game,
And holiday folks all: 50
The servants never were to blame,
Though they let the physic fall.

And now the travellers turn the road,
And now they hear the rooks;
And there it is, — the old abode, 55
With all its hearty looks.

Robin laughed, and the lady too,
And they looked at one another;
Says Robin, 'I'll knock as I'm used to do
At uncle's window, mother.' 60

And so he picked up some pebbles and ran,
And jumping higher and higher,

He reached the windows with *tan a ran tan*,
And instead of the kind old white-haired man,
There looked out a fat friar. 65

‘How now,’ said the fat friar angrily,
‘What is this knocking so wild?’
But when he saw young Robin’s eye,
He said, ‘Go round, my child.

‘Go round to the hall, and I’ll tell you all.’ 70
‘He’ll tell us all!’ thought Robin;
And his mother and he went quietly,
Though her heart was set a throbbing.

The friar stood in the inner door,
And tenderly said, ‘I fear 75
You know not the good squire’s no more,
Even Gamelyn de Vere.

‘Gamelyn de Vere is dead,
He changed but yesternight:[]’
‘Now make us way,’ the lady said, 80
‘To see that doleful sight.’

‘Good Gamelyn de Vere is dead,
And has made us his holy heirs:’
The lady stayed not for all he said,
But went weeping up the stairs. 85

Robin and she went hand in hand,
Weeping all the way,
Until they came where the lord of that land
Dumb in his cold bed lay.

His hand she took, and saw his dead look, 90
With the lids over each eye-ball;
And Robin and she wept as plenteously,
As though he had left them all.

‘I will return, Sir Abbot of Vere,
I will return, as is meet, 95

And see my honoured brother dear
Laid in his winding sheet.

‘And I will stay, for to go were a sin,
For all a woman’s tears,
And see the noble Gamelyn
Laid low with the De Veres.’ 100

The lady went with a sick heart out
Into the kind fresh air,
And told her Robin all about
The abbot whom he saw there: 105

And how his uncle must have been
Disturbed in his failing sense,
To leave his wealth to these artful men,
At hers and Robin’s expense.

Sad was the stately day for all 110
But the Vere Abbey friars,
When the coffin was stript of its hiding pall,
Amidst the hushing choirs.

Sad was the earth-dropping ‘dust to dust,’
And ‘our dear brother here departed’; 115
The lady shook at them, as shake we must,
And Robin he felt strange-hearted.

That self-same evening, nevertheless,
They returned to Locksley town,
The lady in dumb distress, 120
And Robin looking down.

They went, and went, and Robin took
Long steps by his mother’s side,
Till she asked him with a sad sweet look
What made him so thoughtful-eyed. 125

‘I was thinking, mother,’ said little Robin,
And with his own voice so true
He spoke right out, ‘That if I was a king,

I'd see what those friars do.'

His mother stooped with a tear of joy, 130
And she kissed him again and again,
And said, 'My own little Robin boy,
Thou wilt be a King of Men!'

1820

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