

Leigh Hunt (1784-1859)

4 *How Robin and His Outlaws Lived in the Woods*

Robin and his merry men
Lived just like the birds;
They had almost as many tracks as thoughts,
And whistles and songs as words.

All the morning they were wont 5
To fly their grey-goose quills
At butts, or trees, or wands and twigs,
Till theirs was the skill of skills.

With swords, too, they played lustily,
And at quarter-staff; 10
Buffets oft their forfeits were,
Fit to twirl a calf.

Friends who joined the sport were bound
Those hazards to endure;
But foes were lucky to carry away 15
What took a year to cure.

The horn was then their dinner-bell;
When, like princes of the wood,
Under the state of summer trees,
Pure venison was their food. 20

Pure venison and good ale or wine,
Except when luck was chuff;
Or grant 'twas Adam's ale; what then?
Their blood was wine enough.

And story then, and jest, and song, 25
And Harry's harp went round;
And sometimes they'd get up and dance,
For pleasure at the sound.

Tingle, tangle! said the harp,

As they footed in and out: 30
Good Lord! was ever seen a dance
At once so light and stout?

A pleasant sight, especially
If Margery was there,
Or little Cis, or laughing Bess, 35
That tired out six pair.

Or any other merry lass
From the neighbouring villages,
Who came with milk and eggs, or fruit,
A singing through the trees. 40

Only they say the men were given
Too often to take wives,
And then, 'twixt forest and a shop,
Lead strange half-honest lives.

But all the country round about 45
Was fond of Robin Hood,
With whom they got a share of more
Than fagots from the wood.

Nor ever would he suffer harm,
To woman, above all; 50
No plunder, were she ne'er so great,
No fright to great or small;

No, — not a single kiss unliked,
Nor one look-saddening clip;
Accurst be he, said Robin Hood, 55
Makes pale a woman's lip.

And then, oh then, Maid Marian came
From her proud brother's hall,
With a world of love and tears,
And smiles behind them all. 60

They built her bowers in forests three,
To flit from one to t'other,
And Robin and she reigned as pleasant to all,

As faithful to one another.

Only upon the Normans proud, 65
And on their unjust store,
He'd lay his fines of equity
For his merry men and the poor.

And special was his joy, no doubt,
(Which made the dish to curse,) 70
To light upon a good fat friar,
And carve him of his purse.

A monk to him was a toad in the hole,
And a priest was a pig in grain,
But a bishop was a baron of beef, 75
To cut and come again.

Says Robin to the poor who came
To ask of him relief,
You do but get your goods again
That were altered by the thief. 80

See here now is a plump new coin,
And here 's a lawyer's cloak,
And here 's the horse the bishop rode,
When suddenly he woke.

Well, ploughman, there 's a sheaf of yours 85
Turned to yellow gold:
And, miller, there 's your last year's rent,
'Twill wrap thee from the cold.

And you there, Wat of Herefordshire,
Who such a way have come, 90
Get upon your land-tax, man,
And ride it merrily home.

1855

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