

William Allingham (1824-89)

2 *King Henry's Hunt*

King Henry stood in Waltham Wood,
One morn in merry May-time;
Years fifteen hundred thirty-six,
From Christ, had roll'd away time.

King Henry stood in Waltham Wood, 5
All young green, sunny-shady.
He would not mount his pawing horse,
Though men and dogs were ready.

“What ails his Highness? Up and down
In moody sort he paceth; 10
He is not wont to be so slack,
Whatever game he chaseth.”

He paced and stopp'd; he paced and turn'd;
At times he inly mutter'd;
He pull'd his girdle, twitch'd his beard; 15
But not one word he utter'd.

The hounds in couples nosed about,
Or on the sward lay idle;
The huntsmen stole a fearful glance,
While fingering girth or bridle. 20

Among themselves, but not too loud,
The young lords laugh'd and chatter'd,
Or broke a branch of hawthorn-bloom,
As though it nothing matter'd.

King Henry sat on a fell'd oak, 25
With gloomier eyes and stranger;
His brows were knit, his lip he bit;
To look that way was danger.

Mused he on Pope and Emperor?
Denied them and defied them? 30
Or traitors in his very realm
Complotting? — woe betide them!

Suddenly on the southern breeze,
Distinct though distant, sounded
A cannon shot, — and to his feet 35
The King of England bounded.

“My horse!” he shouts, — “Uncouple now!”
And all were quickly mounted.
A hind was found; man, horse, and hound
Like furious demons hunted. 40

Fast fled the deer by grove and glade,
The chase did faster follow;
And every wild-wood alley rang
With hunter’s horn and hollo.

Away together stream’d the hounds; 45
Forward press’d every rider.
You’re free to slay a hind in May,
If there’s no calf beside her.

King Harry rode a mighty horse,
His Grace being broad and heavy, 50
And like a stormy wind he crash’d
Through copse and thicket leavy.

He rode so hard, and roar’d so loud,
All men his course avoided;
The fiery steed, long held on fret, 55
With many a snort enjoy’d it.

The hind was kill’d, and down they sat
To flagon and to pasty.
“Ha, by Saint George, a noble Prince
Tho’ hot, by times, and hasty.” 60

Lord Norfolk knew, and other few,

Wherefore that chase began on
The signal of a gun far off,
One growl of distant cannon, —

And why so jovial grew his Grace, 65
That erst was sad and sullen.
With that boom from the Tower, had fall'n
The head of fair Anne Bullen.

Her neck, which Henry used to kiss,
The bloody axe did sever; 70
Their little child, Elizabeth,
She'll see no more for ever.

Gaily the King rides west away;
Each moment makes his glee more;
To-morrow brings his wedding-day 75
With beautiful Jane Seymour.

The sunshine falls, the wild-bird calls,
Across the slopes of Epping;
From grove to glade, through light and shade,
The troops of deer are stepping. 80

1877

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