

Leigh Hunt (1784-1859)

2 *Robin Hood's Flight*

Robin Hood's mother, these twelve years now,  
Has been gone from her earthly home;  
And Robin has paid, he scarce knew how,  
A sum for a noble tomb.

The churchyard lies on a woody hill, 5  
But open to sun and air:  
It seems as if the heaven still  
Were looking and smiling there.

Often when Robin looked that way,  
He looked through a sweet thin tear; 10  
But he looked in a different manner, they say,  
Towards the Abbey of Vere.

He cared not for its ill-got wealth,  
He felt not for its pride;  
He had youth, and strength, and health, 15  
And enough for one beside.

But he thought of his gentle mother's cheek,  
How it sunk away,  
And how she used to grow more weak  
And weary every day: 20

And how, when trying a hymn, her voice  
At evening would expire,  
How unlike it was the arrogant noise  
Of the hard throats in the quire:

And Robin thought too of the poor, 25  
How they toiled without their share,  
And how the alms at the abbey door  
But kept them as they were:

And he thought him then of the friars again,

Who rode jingling up and down, 30  
With their trappings and things as fine as the king's,  
Though they wore but a shaven crown.

And then bold Robin he thought of the King  
How he got all his forests and deer,  
And how he made the hungry swing 35  
If they killed but one in the year.

And thinking thus, as Robin stood,  
Digging his bow in the ground,  
He was aware in old Shere Wood,  
Of one who looked around. 40

'And what is Will doing?' said Robin then,  
'That he looks so fearful and wan?'  
'Oh my dear master that should have been,  
I am a weary man.'

'A weary man,' said Will Scarlet, 'am I, 45  
For unless I pilfer this wood  
To sell to the fletchers, for want I shall die  
Here in this forest so good.

'Here in this forest where I have been  
So happy and so stout, 50  
And like a palfrey on the green,  
Have carried you about.'

'And why, Will Scarlet, not come to me?  
Why not to Robin, Will?  
For I remember thy love and thy glee, 55  
And the scar that marks thee still;

'And not a soul of my uncle's men  
To such a pass should come,  
While Robin can find in his pocket or bin  
A penny or a crumb. 60

'Stay thee, Will Scarlet, stay awhile;  
And kindle a fire for me.'  
And into the wood for half a mile,

He has vanished instantly[.]

Robin Hood, with his cheek on fire, 65  
 Has drawn his bow so stern,  
 And a leaping deer, with one leap higher,  
 Lies motionless in the fern.

Robin, like a proper knight,  
 As he should have been, 70  
 Carved a part of the shoulder right,  
 And bore off a portion clean.

‘Oh, what hast thou done, dear master mine,  
 What has thou done for me?’  
 ‘Roast it, Will, for excepting wine, 75  
 Thou shalt feast thee royally.’

And Scarlet took and half roasted it,  
 Blubbering with blinding tears,  
 And ere he had eaten a second bit,  
 A trampling came to their ears. 80

They heard the tramp of a horse’s feet,  
 And they listened and kept still,  
 For Will was feeble, and knelt by the meat;  
 And Robin he stood by Will.

‘Seize him, seize him!’ the Abbot cried 85  
 With his fat voice through the trees;  
 Robin a smooth arrow felt and eyed,  
 And Will jumped stout with his knees.

‘Seize him! seize him!’ and now they appear,  
 The Abbot and foresters three: 90  
 ‘Twas I,’ cried Will Scarlet, ‘that killed the deer:’  
 Says Robin, ‘Now let not a man come near,  
 Or he ’s dead as dead can be.’

But on they came, and with an embrace  
 The first one the arrow met; 95  
 And he came pitching forward and fell on his face  
 Like a stumbler in the street.

The others turned to that Abbot vain,  
But 'Seize him!' still he cried,  
And as the second turned again, 100  
An arrow was in his side.

'Seize him, seize him still, I say,'  
Cried the Abbot, in furious chafe,  
'Or these dogs will grow so bold some day,  
Even priests will not be safe.' 105

A fatal word! for as he sat,  
Urging the sword to cut,  
An arrow stuck in his paunch so fat,  
As in a leathern butt:

As in a leathern butt of wine, 110  
Or dough, a household lump,  
Or a pumpkin, or a good beef chine,  
Stuck that arrow with a dump.

'Truly', said Robin without fear,  
Smiling there as he stood, 115  
'Never was slain so fat a deer  
In good old Gamelyn's wood.'

'Pardon, pardon, Sir Robin stout,'  
Said he that stood apart,  
'As soon as I knew thee, I wished thee out 120  
Of the forest with all my heart.

'And I pray thee let me follow thee  
Anywhere under the sky,  
For thou wilt never stay here with me,  
Nor without thee can I.' 125

Robin smiled, and suddenly fell  
Into a little thought;  
And then into a leafy dell  
The three slain men they brought.

Ankle deep in leaves so red, 130

Which autumn there had cast,  
When going to her winter bed  
She had undrest her last.

And there in a hollow, side by side,  
They buried them under the tree;  
The Abbot's belly, for all its pride,  
Made not the grave be seen. 135

Robin Hood, and the forester,  
And Scarlet the good Will,  
Struck off among the green trees there 140  
Up a pathless hill;

And Robin caught a sudden sight  
Of merry sweet Locksley town,  
Reddening in the sunset bright;  
And the gentle tears came down. 145

Robin looked at the town and land,  
And the churchyard where it lay;  
And poor Will Scarlet kissed his hand,  
And turned his head away.

Then Robin turned him with a grasp of Will's, 150  
And clapped him on the shoulder,  
And said, with one of his pleasant smiles,  
'Now show us three men bolder.'

And so they took their march away,  
As firm as if to fiddle,  
To journey that night and all next day,  
With Robin Hood in the middle.

1820

(From *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*. Ed. H. S. Milford.  
Oxford UP, 1923)