THE MERRY ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD by Howard Pyle PREFACE FROM THE AUTHOR TO THE READER You who so plod amid serious things that you feel it shame to give yourself up even for a few short moments to mirth and joyousness in the land of Fancy; you who think that life hath nought to do with innocent laughter that can harm no one; these pages are no for you. Clap to the leaves and go no farther than this, for I tell you plainly that if you go farther you will be scandalized by seeing good, sober folks of real history so frisk and caper in gay colors and motley that you would not know them but for the names tagged to them. Here is a stout, lusty fellow with a quick temper, yet none so ill for all that, who goes by the name of Henry II. Here is a fair, gentle lady before whom all the others bow and call her Queen Eleanor. Here is a fat rogue of a fellow, dressed up in rich robes of a clerical kind, that all the good folk call my Lord Bishop of Hereford. Here is a certain fellow with a sour temper and a grim look--the worshipful, the Sheriff of Nottingham. And here, above all, is a great, tall, merry fellow that roams the greenwood and joins in homely sports, and sits beside the Sheriff at merry feast, which same beareth the name of the proudest of the Plantagenets--Richard of the Lion's Heart. Beside these are a whole host of knights, priests, nobles, burghers, yeomen, pages, ladies, lasses, landlords, beggars, peddlers, and what not, all living the merriest of merry lives, and all bound by nothing but a few odd strands of certain old ballads (snipped and clipped and tied together again in a score of knots) which draw these jocund fellows here and there, singing as they go. Here you will find a hundred dull, sober, jogging places, all tricked out with flowers and what not, till no one would know them in their fanciful dress. And here is a country bearing a well-known name, wherein no chill mists press upon our spirits, and no rain falls but what rolls off our backs like April showers off the backs of sleek drakes; where flowers bloom forever and birds are always singing; where every fellow hath a merry catch as he travels the roads, and ale and beer and wine (such as muddle no wits) flow like water in a brook. This country is not Fairyland. What is it? 'Tis the land of Fancy, and is of that pleasant kind that, when you tire of it--whisk!--you clap the leaves of this book together and 'tis gone, and you are ready for everyday life, with no harm done. And now I lift the curtain that hangs between here and No-man's-land. Will you come with me, sweet Reader? I thank you. Give me your hand. PROLOGUE Giving an account of Robin Hood and his adventure with the King's Foresters. Also telling how his band gathered around him, and of the merry adventure that gained him his good right hand man, the famous Little John. How Robin Hood Came to Be an Outlaw IN MERRY ENGLAND in the time of old, when good King Henry the Second ruled the land, there lived within the green glades of Sherwood Forest, near Nottingham Town, a famous outlaw whose name was Robin Hood. No archer ever lived that could speed a gray goose shaft with such skill and cunning as his, nor were there ever such yeomen as the sevenscore merry men that roamed with him through the greenwood shades. Right merrily they dwelled within the depths of Sherwood Forest, suffering neither care nor want, but passing the time in merry games of archery or bouts of cudgel play, living upon the King's venison, washed down with draughts of ale of October brewing. Not only Robin himself but all the band were outlaws and dwelled apart from other men, yet they were beloved by the country people round about, for no one ever came to jolly Robin for help in time of need and went away again with an empty fist. And now I will tell how it came about that Robin Hood fell afoul of the law. When Robin was a youth of eighteen, stout of sinew and bold of heart, the Sheriff of Nottingham proclaimed a shooting match and offered a prize of a butt of ale to whosoever should shoot the best shaft in Nottinghamshire. "Now," quoth Robin, "will I go too, for fain would I draw a string for the bright eyes of my lass and a butt of good October brewing." So up he got and took his good stout yew bow and a score or more of broad clothyard arrows, and started off from Locksley Town through Sherwood Forest to Nottingham. It was at the dawn of day in the merry Maytime, when hedgerows are green and flowers bedeck the meadows; daisies pied and yellow cuckoo buds and fair primroses all along the briery hedges; when apple buds blossom and sweet birds sing, the lark at dawn of day, the throstle cock and cuckoo; when lads and lasses look upon each other with sweet thoughts; when busy housewives spread their linen to bleach upon the bright green grass. Sweet was the greenwood as he walked along its paths, and bright the green and rustling leaves, amid which the little birds sang with might and main: and blithely Robin whistled as he trudged along, thinking of Maid Marian and her bright eyes, for at such times a youth's thoughts are wont to turn pleasantly upon the lass that he loves the best. As thus he walked along with a brisk step and a merry whistle, he came suddenly upon some foresters seated beneath a great oak tree. Fifteen there were in all, making themselves merry with feasting and drinking as they sat around a huge pasty, to which each man helped himself, thrusting his hands into the pie, and washing down that which they ate with great horns of ale which they drew all foaming from a barrel that stood nigh. Each man was clad in Lincoln green, and a fine show they made, seated upon the sward beneath that fair, spreading tree. Then one of the m, with his mouth full, called out to Robin, "Hulloa, where goest thou, little lad, with thy one-penny bow and thy farthing shafts?" Then Robin grew angry, for no stripling likes to be taunted with his green years. "Now," quoth he, "my bow and eke mine arrows are as good as shine; and moreover, I go to the shooting match at Nottingham Town, which h am sworn to attend." "Ho! listen to the lad! Why, boy, thy mother's milk is yet scarce dry upon thy lips, and yet thou pratest of standing up with no one who held a horn of ale in his hand said, "Ho! listen to the lad! Why, boy, thy mother's milk is yet scarce dry upon thy lips, and yet thou pratest of standing up with the clout at threescore rods, by the good help of Our Lady fair." At this all laughed aloud, and one said, "Well boasted, thou fair infant, well boasted! And what shall be the prize? Methinks I hit the clout at threescore rods, by the good help of Our Lady fair." At this all laughed aloud, and one said, "Well boasted, thou fair infant, well boasted! And what shall be the prize? Methinks I hit the clout at threescore rods." "Now done!" cried he who had spoken first. "And here are twenty marks. I wager that thou cansest no beast to die, with or without the aid of Our Lady." Then Robin took his good yew bow in his hand, and placing the tip at his instep, he strung it right deftly; then he nock ed a broad clothyard arrow and, raising the bow, drew the gray goose feather to his ear; the next moment the bowstring rang and the arrow sped down the glade as a sparrowhawk skims in a northern wind. High leaped the noblest hart of all the herd, only to fall dead, reddening the green path with his heart's blood. "Ha!" cried Robin, "how likest thou that shot, good fellow? I wot the wager were mine, an it were three hundred pounds." Then all the foresters were filled with rage, and he who had spoken the first and had lost the wager was more angry than all. "Nay," cried he, "the wager is none of thine, and get thee gone, straightway, or, by all the saints of heaven, I'll baste thy sides until thou wilt ne'er be able to walk again." "Knowest thou not," said another, "that thou hast killed the King's deer, and, by the laws of our gracious lord and sovereign King Harry, thine ears should be shaven close to thy head?" "Catch him!" cried a third. "Nay," said a fourth, "let him e'en go because of his tender years." Never a word said Robin Hood, but he looked at the foresters with a grim face; then, turning on his heel, strode away from them down the forest glade. But his heart was bitterly angry, for his blood was hot and youthful and prone to boil. Now, well would it have been for him who had first spoken had he left Robin Hood alone; but his anger was hot, both because the youth had gotten the better of him and because of the deep draughts of ale that he had been quaffing. So, of a sudden, without any warning, he sprang to his feet, and seized upon his bow and fitted it to a shaft. "Ay," cried he, "and I'll hurry thee anon." And he sent the arrow whistling after Robin. It was well for Robin Hood that that same forester's head was spinning with ale, or else he would never have taken another step. As it was, the arrow whistled within three inches of his head. Then he turned around and quickly drew his own bow, and sent an arrow back in return. "Ye said I was no archer," cried he aloud, "but say so now again!" The shaft flew straight; the archer fell forward with a cry, and lay on his face upon the ground, his arrows rattling about him from out of his quiver, the gray goose shaft wet with his; heart's blood. Then, before the others could gather their wits about them, Robin Hood was gone into the depths of the greenwood. Some started after him, but not with much heart, for each feared to suffer the death of his fellow; so presently they all came and lifted the dead man up and bore him away to Nottingham Town. Meanwhile Robin Hood ran through the greenwood. Gone was all the joy and brightness from everything, for his heart was sick within him, and it was borne n upon his soul that he had slain a man. "Alas!" cried he, "thou hast found me an archer that will make thy wife to wring! I would that thou hadst ne'er said one word to me, or that I had never passed thy way, or e'en that my right forefinger had been stricken off ere that this had happened! In haste I smote, but grieve I sore at leisure!" And then, even in his trouble, he remembered the old saw that "What is done is done; and the egg cracked cannot be cured." And so he came to dwell in the greenwood that was to be his home for many a year to come, never again to see the happy days with the lads and lasses of sweet Locksley Town; for he was outlawed, not only because he had killed a man, but also because he had poached upon the King's deer, and two hundred pounds were set upon his head, as a reward for whoever would bring him to the court of the King. Now the Sheriff of Nottingham swore that he himself would bring this knave Robin Hood to justice, and for two reasons: first, because he wanted the two hundred pounds, and next, because the forester that Robin Hood had killed was of kin to him. But Robin Hood lay hidden in Sherwood Forest for one year, and in that time there gathered around him many others like himself, cast out from other folk for this cause and for that. Some had shot deer in hungry wintertime, when they could get no other food, and had been seen in the act by the foresters, but had escaped, thus saving their ears; some had been turned out of their inheritance, that their farms might be added to the King's lands in Sherwood Forest; some had been despoiled by a great baron or a rich abbot or a powerful esquire--all, for one cause or another, had come to Sherwood to escape wrong and oppression. So, in all that year, fivescore or more good stout yeomen gathered about Robin Hood, and chose him to be their leader and chief. Then they vowed that even as they themselves had been despoiled they would despoil their oppressors, whether baron, abbot, knight, or squire, and that from each they would take that which had been wrung from the poor by unjust taxes, or land rents, or in wrongful fines. But to the poor folk they would give a helping hand in need and trouble, and would return to them that which had been unjustly taken from them. Besides this, they swore never to harm a child nor to wrong a woman, be she maid, wife, or widow; so that, after a while, when the people began to find that no harm was meant to them, but that money or food came in time of want to many a poor family, they came to praise Robin and his merry men, and to tell many tales of him and of his doings in Sherwood Forest, for they felt him to be one of themselves. Up rose Robin Hood one merry morn when all the birds were singing blithely among the leaves, and up rose all his merry men, each fellow washing his head and hands in the cold brown brook that leaped laughing from stone to stone. Then said Robin, "For fourteen days have we seen no sport, so now I will go abroad to seek adventures forthwith. But tarry ye, my merry men all, here in the greenwood; only see that ye mind well my call. Three blasts upon the bugle horn I will blow in my hour of need; then come quickly, for I shall want your aid." So saying, he strode away through the leafy forest glades until he had come to the verge of Sherwood. There he wandered for a long time, through highway and byway, through dingly dell and forest skirts. Now he met a fair buxom lass in a shady lane, and each gave the other a merry word and passed their way; now he saw a fair lady upon an ambling pad, to whom he doffed his cap, and who bowed sedately in return to the fair youth; now he saw a fat monk on a pannier-laden ass; now a gallant knight, with spear and shield and armor that flashed brightly in the sunlight; now a page clad in crimson, and now a stout burgher from good Nottingham Town, pacing along with serious footsteps; all these sights he saw, but adventure found he none. At last he took a road by the forest skirts, a bypath that dipped toward a broad, pebbly stream spanned by a narrow bridge made of a log of wood. As he drew nigh this bridge he saw a tall stranger coming from the other side. Thereupon Robin quickened his pace, as did the stranger likewise, each thinking to cross first. "Now stand thou back," quoth Robin, "and let the better man cross first." "Nay, answer ed the stranger, "then stand back shine own self, for the better man, I wet, am I." "That will we presently see," quoth Robin, "and meanwhile stand thou where thou art, or else, by the bright brow of Saint AElfrida, I will show thee right good Nottingham play with a clothyard shaft betwixt thy ribs." "Now," quoth the stranger, "I will tan thy hide till it be as many colors as a beggar's cloak, if thou darest so much as touch a string of that same bow that thou holdest in thy hands." "Thou pratest like an ass," said Robin, "for I could send this shaft clean through thy proud heart before a curtal friar could say grace over a roast goose at Michaelmastide." "And thou pratest like a coward," answered the stranger, "for thou standest there with a good yew bow to shoot at my heart, while I have nought in my hand but a plain blackthorn staff wherewith to meet thee." "Now," quoth Robin, "by the faith of my heart, never have I had a coward's name in all my life before. I will lay by my trusty bow and eke my arrows, and if thou darest a bide me my coming, I will go and cut a cudgel to test thy manhood withal." "Ay, marry, that will I abide thy coming, and joyously, too," quoth the stranger; whereupon he leaned sturdily upon his staff to await Robin. Then Robin Hood stepped quickly to the coverside and cut a good staff of ground oak, straight, without new, and six feet in length, and came back trimming away the tender stems from it, while the stranger waited for him, leaning upon his staff, and whistling as he gazed round about. Robin observed him furtively as he trimmed his staff, measuring him from top to toe from out the corner of his eye, and thought that he had never seen a lustier or a stouter man. Tall was Robin, but taller was the stranger by a head and a neck, for he was seven feet in height. Broad was Robin across the shoulders, but broader was the stranger by twice the breadth of a palm, while he measured at least an ell around the waist. "Nevertheless," said Robin to himself, "I will baste thy hide right merrily, my good fellow"; then, aloud, "Lo, here is my good staff, lusty and tough. Now wait my coming, an thou darest, and meet me an thou fearest not. Then we will fight until one or the other of us tumble into the stream by dint of blows." "Marry, that meeteth my whole heart!" cried the stranger, twirling his staff above his head, betwixt his fingers and thumb, until it whistled again. Never did the Knights of Arthur's Round Table meet in a stouter fight than did these two. In a moment Robin stepped quickly upon the bridge where the stranger stood; first he made a feint, and then delivered a blow at the stranger's head that, had it met its mark, would have tumbled him speedily into the water. But the stranger turned the blow right deftly and in return gave one as stout, which Robin also turned as the stranger had done. So they stood, each in his place, neither moving a finger's-breadth back, for one good hour, and many blows were given and received by each in that time, till here and there were sore bones and bumps, yet neither thought of crying "Enough," nor seemed likely to fall from off the bridge. Now and then they stopped to rest, and each thought that he never had seen in all his life before such a hand at quarterstaff. At last Robin gave the stranger a blow upon the ribs that made his jacket smoke like a damp straw thatch in the sun. So shrewd was the stroke that the stranger came within a hair's-breadth of falling off the bridge, but he regained himself right quickly, and, by a dexterous blow, gave Robin a crack on the crown that caused the blood to flow. Then Robin grew mad with anger and smote with all his might at the other. But the stranger warded the blow and once again thwacked Robin, and this time so fairly that he fell heels over head into the water, as the queen pin falls in a game of bowls. "And where art thou now, my good lad?" shouted the stranger, roaring with laughter. "Oh, in the flood and floating adown with the tide," cried Robin, nor could he forbear laughing himself at his sorry plight. Then, gaining his feet, he waded to the bank, the little fish speeding hither and thither, all frightened at his splashing. "Give me thy hand," cried he, when he had reached the bank. "I must needs own thou art a brave and a sturdy soul and, withal, a good stout stroke with the cudgels. By this and by the, my head hummeth like to a hive of bees on a hot June day." Then he clapped his horn to his lips and winded a blast that went echoing sweetly down the forest paths. "Ay, marry," quoth he again, "thou art a tall lad, and eke a brave one, for ne'er, I bow, is there a man betwixt here and Canterbury Town could do the like to me that thou hast done." "And thou," quoth the stranger, laughing, "takest thy cudgeling like a brave heart and a stout yeoman." But now the distant twigs and branches rustled with the coming of men, and suddenly a score or two of good stout yeomen, all clad in Lincoln green, burst from out the covert, with merry Will Stutely at their head. "Good master," cried Will, "how is this? Truly thou art all wet from head to foot, and that to the very skin." "Why, marry," answered jolly Robin, "yon stout fellow hath tumbled me neck and crop into the water and hath given me a drubbing beside." "Then shall he not go without a ducking and eke a drubbing himself!" cried Will Stutely. "Have at him, lads!" Then Will and a score of yeomen leaped upon the stranger, but though they sprang quickly they found him ready and felt him strike right and left with his stout staff, so that, though he went down with press of numbers, some of them rubbed cracked crowns before he was overcome. "Nay, forbear!" cried Robin, laughing until his sore sides ached again. "He is a right good man and true, and no harm shall befall him. Now hark ye, good youth, wilt thou stay with me and be one of my band? Three suits of Lincoln green shalt thou have each year, beside forty marks in fee, and share with us whatsoever good shall befall us. Thou shalt eat sweet venison and quaff the stoutest ale, and mine own good right-hand man shalt thou be, for never did I see such a cudgel player in all my life before. Speak! Wilt thou be one of my good merry men?" "That know I not," quoth the stranger surlily, for he was angry at being so tumbled into the water. "Nay, quoth Robin, laughing, "and in height and build and age nigh the same; and he hath blue eyes, too." "Nay," quoth the Tinker, "thou art but a green youth. I thought him to be a great bearded man. Nottingham men feared him so." "Truly, he is not so old nor so stout as thou art," said Robin. "But men do call him a right deft hand at quarterstaff." "That may be," said the Tinker right sturdily, "but I am more deft than he, for did I not overcome Simon of Ely in a fair bout in the ring at Hertford Town? But if thou knowest him, my jolly blade, wilt thou go with me and bring me to him? Fourscore bright angels hath the Sheriff promised me if I serve the warrant upon the knave's body, and ten of them will I give to thee if thou showest me him." "Ay, that will I," quoth Robin, "but show me thy warrant, man, until I see whether it be good or no." "That will I not do, even to mine own brother," answered the Tinker. "No man shall see my warrant till I serve it upon yon fellow's own body." "So be it," quoth Robin. "And thou show it not to me I know not to whom thou wilt show it. But here we are at the Sign of the Blue Boar, so let us in and taste his brown October." No sweeter inn could be found in all Nottinghamshire than that of the Blue Boar. None had such lovely trees standing around, or was so covered with trailing clematis and sweet woodbine; none had such good beer and such humming ale; nor, in wintertime, when the north wind howled and snow drifted around the hedges, was there to be found, elsewhere, such a roaring fire as blazed upon the hearth of the Blue Boar. At such times might be found a goodly company of yeomen or country folk seated around the blazing hearth, bandying merry jests, while roasted crabs[Small sour apples] bobbed in bowls of ale upon the hearthstone. Well known was the inn to Robin Hood and his band, for there had he and such merry companions as Little John or Will Stutely or young David of Doncaster often gathered when all the forest was filled with snow. As for mine host, he knew how to keep a still tongue in his head, and to swallow his words before they passed his teeth, for he knew very well which side of his bread was spread with butter, for Robin and his band were the best of customers and paid their scores without having them chalked up behind the door. So now, when Robin Hood and the Tinker came thereto and called aloud for two great pots of ale, none would have known from look or speech that the host had ever set eyes upon the outlaw before. "Bide thou here," quoth Robin to the Tinker, "while I go and see that mine host draweth ale from the right butt, for he hath good October, I know, and that brewed by Withold of Tamworth." So saying, he went within and whispered to the host to add a measure of Flemish strong waters to the good English ale; which the latter did and brought it to them. "By Our Lady," said the Tinker, after a long draught of the ale, "yon same Withold of Tamworth--a right good Saxon name, too, I would have thee know--breweth the most humming ale that e'er passed the lips of Wat o' the Crabstaff." "Drink, man, drink," cried Robin, only wetting his own lips meanwhile. "Ho, la utest bow among them all, next to Robin's own, and a straight gray goose shaft, well-feathered and smooth, and stepping to the mark-while even the yeomen clapped their hands at so fair a shot. "That is a keen shot indeed," quoth Robin. "Mend it I can--wh ile all the tranger's shaft and split it into splinters. Then all the yeomen leaped to their feet and shouted for joy that their master had shot so well. "Now by the lusty yew bo straight down the path that it clove the mark in the very center. "Aha!" cried he, "mend thou that if thou canst!" ! Now truly will I be thy man henceforth and forever." "Ay, marry, that will I abide thy coming, and joyously, too," quoth the stranger; whereupon he leaned sturdily bow and nocking an arrow with care, he shot with his very greatest skill. Straight flew the arrow, and so true that I gained a right good m an this day," quoth jolly Robin. "Now, by my troth, I am right glad that it otherwise. Little art thou indeed, and small of body; but, by the good Saint Withold," cried the stranger, "that is a shot indeed, and never saw I the like in all my life before. hou wilt have sore bones and little pay, and that i ted north-country bowmen whose names have been celebrated in many ballads of the olden time. "Then have ast for this fair infant." So turning their backs upon the merry greenwood shade, the merry men all, with their bows and cudgels, and with who loved a good jest, spoke up. "Nay, fair little stranger," said he, "I like not thy name and fain would know it, and eke mine own name, that thou may know it, and eke the name of the merry band to which I belong. and made couches of s weet rushes spread alged aloud until the stranger began to grow angry. "An thou make a jest of me," quoth he to Will Stutely, "tell me thy name, and I will be thy godfather." Then Robin Hood and all his band lau u be called henceforth, and Little John shall it be. So come, my merry men, we will prepare a christening fe t men about him. Here the y found the r where they dwelled in the depths of the woodland. There had they built huts of bark and branches of trees, and in the middle of the band, some of whom had come in the wit h a brace of fat does. Then they all built great fires and after a time ch was a seat of green moss where Robin Hood was wont to sit at feast and at merrymaking with his stout , but Robin placed Little John on his left hand, for he was henceforth the second in the band. Then when the feast was done Will Stut oasted the does and broached a barrel of humming ale. Then when the feast was ready they all sat down ye!" cried all, laughing till the woods echoed with their mirth. "The ven sponsors shall we have," quoth Will Stutely, and hu ely spoke up. "It is now time, I ween, to christen our bonny babe, is it not so, merry boys?" And "Aye! A ittle John, springing to his feet, "more than one of you sh all r ue i t a n you lay finger upon me." But without a word they all ra nting among all the band, he chose the seven stoutest men of them all. "Now by Saint Dunstan," cried Little John, stood around to see the sport. The n on e ca me f orward who had been chosen to play the priest because he h n upon him at once, seizing him by his legs and arms and holding him lightly in spite of his struggles, y. "And what name callest t hou hi m?" "Little John call I him." "Now Little John," quoth the mock priest, "and what name callest thou, if I may ask? ad a bald crown, and in his hand he carried a brimming pot of ale. "Now, who bringeth this babe?" ask ohn Little, but now that tho u dost live indeed, Little John shalt thou be called, so christen I thee." A st, "thou hast not lived heretofore, but only got thee along through the world, but henceforth thou wilt ver Little Joh n's bear d and trickle from his nose and chin, while his eyes blinked with the smart of nd at these last words he emptied the pot of ale upon Little John's head. Then all shouted with laughter en Rob in too k t his sweet, pretty babe, clothed him all anew from top to toe in Lincoln green, and gave him a good stout bow, and so made him a member of the merry band. And thus it was that Robin Hood ed; thus a band of mer ry companions gathered about him, and thus he gained his right-hand man, Little John; and so ve him a prologue ends. And now I will tell how the Sheriff of Nottingham three times sought to take ow he failed each time. PART FIRST Telling how the Sheriff of Nottingham swore that he would deal dole to Robing Hood. Also, how he made three trials thereat, but missed each time by a good bow's length. Robin Hood and the WAS TO LD BEFORE how two hundred pounds were set upon Robin Hood's head, and how the Sheriff of Nottingham swore that he himself would seize Robin, both because he would fain have the two hundred pounds and because the slain man was wn. N ow the Sh eriff did not yet know what a force Robin had about him in Sherwood, but thought that he might serve a warrant for his arrest as he could upon any other man that had broken the laws; therefore he offered fourscore golden angels to anyone who o would serve this warrant. Bu t men of Nottingh am Town knew more of Robin Hood and his doings than the Sheriff did, and many laughed to think of serving a warrant upon the bold outlaw, knowing well that all they would get for such service would be cracked crowns; so that no one cam e forward to take the matter in han d. T hu s a f ortn ight passed, in which time none came forward to do the Sheriff's business. Then said he, "A right good reward have I offered to whosoever would serve my warrant upon Robin Hood, and I marvel that no one has come to undertake the ta sk." Then one of his men who w as near h im s aid, "Good master, thou wottest not the force that Robin Hood has about him and how little he cares for warrant of king or sheriff. Truly, no one likes to go on this service, for fear of cracked crowns and broken bones." "Then I hold all Not ting ham men to be cowards," said t he Sh eriff. "A nd let me see the man in all Nottinghamshire that dare disobey the warrant of our sovereign lord King Harry, for, by the shrine of Saint Edmund, I will hang him forty cubits high! But if no man in Nottingham dare win fourscore angels, I will se nd elsewhere, for there should be men of mettle somewhere in this land." Then he called up a messenger in whom he placed great trust, and bade him saddle his horse and make ready to go to Lincoln Town to see whether he could find anyone there that would do his bidding and d w in the reward. So that same morn i ng the messenger started forth upon his errand. Bright shone the sun upon the dusty highway that led from Nottingham to Lincoln, stretching away all white over hill and dale. Dusty was the highway and dusty the throat of the messenger, so th at his heart was glad when he sa w be fore him the Sign of the Blue Boar Inn, when somewhat more than half his journey was done. The inn looked fair to his eyes, and the shade of the oak trees that stood around it seemed cool and pleasant, so he alighted from his horse to re st h imself for a time, calling for a po t of ale to refr es h his thirsty throat. There he saw a party of right jovial fellows seated beneath the spreading oak that shaded the greensward in front of the door. There was a tinker, two barefoot friars, and a party of six of the King's foresters all clad in Lincoln green, and all of them were quaffing humming ale and singing merry ballads of the good old times. Loud laughed the foresters, as jests were bandied about between the singing, and louder laughed the friars, for they were lusty men with beards that curled like the wool of black rams; but loudest of all la ugh ed the Tin ker, and he sang more sw eetly t han any of the rest. His bag and his hammer hung upon a twig of the oak tree, and near by leaned his good stout cudgel, as thick as his wrist and knotted at the end. "Come," cried one of the foresters to the tired messenger, "come join us for this shot. Ho, landlord! Bring a fresh po t o f ale for each man." The messenger was glad enough to sit down along with the others who were there, for his limbs were weary and the ale was good. "Now what news bearest thou so fast?" quoth one, "and whither ridest thou today?" The mes senger was a chatty s oul a nd lo ved a bit of gossip dearly; besides, the pot of ale warmed his heart; so that, settling himself in an easy corner of the inn bench, while the host leaned upon the doorway and the hostess stood with her hands benea th her apron, he unfolded h is b udget of news with great comfort. He told all from the very first: how Robin Hood had slain the forester, and how he had hidden in the greenwood to escape the law; how that he lived therein, all against the la w, slayi ng His Majesty's deer and levying toll on fat abbot, knight, and esquire, so that none dare travel even on broad Watling Street or the Fosse Way for fear of him; how that the Sheriff had a mind to serve th e ki God wot ng's warran t u pon t his same rogue, though little would he mind warrant of either king or sheriff, for he was far from being a law- abiding man. Then he told how none could be found in all Nottingham Town to serve this warr an t, for f ea r of cracked pates and broken bones, and how that he, the messenger, was now upon his way to Lincoln Town to find of whom at mettle the Lincoln men might be. "Now come I, forsooth, from good Banbury To w n," sa i d the jolly Tinker, "and no one nigh Nottingham--nor Sherwood either, an that be the mark-- can hold cudgel with my grip. Why, lads, did I not meet that mad wag Simon of Ely, even at the famous fair at Hertford Town, and be at h im in the ring at that place before Sir Robert of Leslie and his lady? This same Robin Hood, of whom, I wot, I never heard before, is a right merry blade, but gin he be strong, am not I stronger? And gin he be sly, am not I slyer? Now by y th e bright eyes of Nan o' the Mill, and by mine own name and that's Wat o' the Crabstaff, and by mine own mother's son, and that's myself, will I, even I, Wat o' the Crabstaff, meet this same sturdy rogue, and gin he mind not the seal of o ur g lor iou s sovereign King Harry, and the warrant of the good Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, I will so bruise, beat, and bemaul his pate that he shall never move finger or toe again! Hear ye that, bully boys?" "Now art thou the man for my farthing, " cr ied t he messenger. "And back thou goest with me to Nottingham Town." "Nay," quoth the Tinker, shaking his head slowly from side to side. "Go I with no man gin it be not with mine own free will." "Nay, nay," said the messenger, "no man is t here in No tt inghamshire could make thee go against thy will, thou brave fellow." "Ay, that be I brave," said the Tinker. "Ay, marry," said the messenger, "thou art a brave lad; but our good Sheriff hath offered fourscore angels of bright gold to o wh oso ev er shall s erve the warrant upon Robin Hood; though little good will it do." "Then I will go with thee, lad. Do but wait till I get my bag and hammer, and my cudgel. Ay, let' me but meet this same Robin Hood, and let me see whether he will no t mi nd t he King's warran t." So, after having paid their score, the messenger, with the Tinker striding beside his nag, started back to Nottingham again. On e bright morning soon after this time, Robin Hood started off to Nottingham Town to find what was a -d oi ng th ere, walking merrily along the roadside where the grass was sweet with daisies, his eyes wandering and his thoughts also. His bugle horn hung at his hip and his bow and arrows at his back, while in his hand he bore a good stout oaken staff, which he twirled with h is fingers a s he strolled along. As thus he walked down a shady lane he saw a tinker coming, trolling a merry song as he drew nigh. On his back hung his bag and his hammer, and in his hand he carried a right stout crabstaff full six feet long, and thus sang he: "In peascod time, when hou nd to horn Giv es ear till buck be killed, And little lads with pipes of corn Sit keeping beasts afield--" "Halloa, good friend!" cried Robin. "I WENT TO GATHER STRAWBERRIES--" "Halloa! " cried Robin again. "BY WOODS AND GROVES FULL FAIR--" "Halloa! Art thou deaf, man? Good friend, say I!" "A nd who art thou dost so boldly check a fair song?" quoth the Tinker, stopping in his singing. "Halloa, shine own self, whether thou be good friend or no. But let me tell thee, thou stout fellow, gin thou be a good friend it were well for us both; but gin thou be no good friend it were ill for thee." "And w hence comest thou, my lusty blade?" quot h Robin . "I come from Banbury," answered the Tinker. "Alas!" quoth Robin, "I hear there is sad news this merry morn." "Ha! Is it indeed so?" cried the Tinker eagerly. "Prythee, tell it speedily, for I am a tinker by trade, as thou seest, and as I am in my trade I am greedy for news, even as a priest is greedy for farthings." "Well then," quoth Robin, "list thou and I will tell, but bear thyself up bravely, for the news is sad, I wot. Thus it is: I hear that two tinkers are in the stocks for drinking ale and beer!" "Now a murrain seize thee and thy news, thou scurvy dog," quoth the Tinker, "for thou speakest but ill of good men. But sad news it is indeed, gin there be two stout fellows in the stocks." "Nay," said Robin, "thou hast missed the mark and dost but weep for the wrong sow. The sadness of the news lieth in that there be but two in the stocks, for the others do roam the country at large." "Now by the pewter platter of Saint Dunstan," cried the Tinker, "I have a good part of a mind to baste thy hide for thine ill jest. But gin men be put in the stocks for drinking ale and beer, I trow thou wouldst not lose thy part." Loud laughed Robin and cried, "Now well taken, Tinker, well taken! Why, thy wits are like beer, and do froth up most when they grow sour! But right art thou, man, for I love ale and beer right well. Therefore come straightway with me hard by to the Sign of the Blue Boar, and if thou drinkest as thou appearest--and I wot thou wilt not belie thy looks--I will drench thy throat with as good homebrewed as ever was tapped in all broad Nottinghamshire." "Now by my faith," said the Tinker, "thou art a right good fellow in spite of thy scurvy jests. I love thee, my sweet chuck, and gin I go not with thee to that same Blue Boar thou mayst call me a heathen." "Tell me thy news, good friend, I prythee," quoth Robin as they trudged along together, "for tinkers, I ween, are all as full of news as an egg of meat." "Now I love thee as my brother, my bully blade," said the Tinker, "else I would not tell thee my news; for sly am I, man, and I have in hand a grave undertaking that doth call for all my wits, for I come to seek a bold outlaw that men, hereabouts, call Robin Hood. Within my pouch I have a warrant, all fairly written out on parchment, forsooth, with a great red seal for to make it lawful. Could I but meet this same Robin Hood I would serve it upon his dainty body, and if he minded it not I would beat him till every one of his ribs would cry Amen. But thou livest hereabouts, mayhap thou knowest Robin Hood thyself, good fellow." "Ay, marry, that I do somewhat," quoth Robin, "and I have seen him this very morn. But, Tinker, men say that he is but a sad, sly thief. Thou hadst better watch thy warrant, man, or else he may steal it out of thy very pouch." "Let him but try!" cried the Tinker. "Sly may he be, but sly am I, too. I would I had him here now, man to man!" And he made his heavy cudgel to spin again. "But what manner of man is he, lad? "Much like myself," said Robin, laughing, "and in height and build and age nigh the same; and he hath blue eyes, too." "Nay," quoth the Tinker, "thou art but a green youth. I thought him to be a great bearded man. Nottingham men feared him so." "Truly, he is not so old nor so stout as thou art," said Robin. "But men do call him a right deft hand at quarterstaff." "That may be," said the Tinker right sturdily, "but I am more deft than he, for did I not overcome Simon of Ely in a fair bout in the ring at Hertford Town? But if thou knowest him, my jolly blade, wilt thou go with me and bring me to him? Fourscore bright angels hath the Sheriff promised me if I serve the warrant upon the knave's body, and ten of them will I give to thee if thou showest me him." "Ay, that will I," quoth Robin, "but show me thy warrant, man, until I see whether it be good or no." "That will I not do, even to mine own brother," answered the Tinker. "No man shall see my warrant till I serve it upon yon fellow's own body." "So be it," quoth Robin. "And thou show it not to me I know not to whom thou wilt show it. But here we are at the Sign of the Blue Boar, so let us in and taste his brown October." No sweeter inn could be found in all Nottinghamshire than that of the Blue Boar. None had such lovely trees standing around, or was so covered with trailing clematis and sweet woodbine; none had such good beer and such humming ale; nor, in wintertime, when the north wind howled and snow drifted around the hedges, was there to be found, elsewhere, such a roaring fire as blazed upon the hearth of the Blue Boar. At such times might be found a goodly company of yeomen or country folk seated around the blazing hearth, bandying merry jests, while roasted crabs[Small sour apples] bobbed in bowls of ale upon the hearthstone. Well known was the inn to Robin Hood and his band, for there had he and such merry companions as Little John or Will Stutely or young David of Doncaster often gathered when all the forest was filled with snow. As for mine host, he knew how to keep a still tongue in his head, and to swallow his words before they passed his teeth, for he knew very well which side of his bread was spread with butter, for Robin and his band were the best of customers and paid their scores without having them chalked up behind the door. So now, when Robin Hood and the Tinker came thereto and called aloud for two great pots of ale, none would have known from look or speech that the host had ever set eyes upon the outlaw before. "Bide thou here," quoth Robin to the Tinker, "while I go and see that mine host draweth ale from the right butt, for he hath good October, I know, and that brewed by Withold of Tamworth." So saying, he went within and whispered to the host to add a measure of Flemish strong waters to the good English ale; which the latter did and brought it to them. "By Our Lady," said the Tinker, after a long draught of the ale, "yon same Withold of Tamworth--a right good Saxon name, too, I would have thee know--breweth the most humming ale that e'er passed the lips of Wat o' the Crabstaff." "Drink, man, drink," cried Robin, only wetting his own lips meanwhile. "Ho, la