

A Stirring Story of the Famous Outlaw of Sherwood Forest and His Merry Men

THE FIRST CHAPTER The Footprint of an Enemy

For three days the snow had fallen without ceasing, filling up the dells, smoothing out the hollows, and making Sherwood look like a huge Twelfth Night cake, covered with white sugar fully four feet deep.

Three men came labouring through the snow, and two of them carried a deer slung on a branch between their shoulders. The third man led the way, prodding with his quarter-staff all the while, and every now and then they stopped, with the snow up to their middles.

"By my halidom!" said Leoffric of Leicester for the twentieth time that hour. "Was ever such a winter?"

His companions laid the deer down, and breathed upon their blue fingers as they rested. One of them was Will Scarlet, and the other Ulf, son of Gammel Goosefoot.

"Pardie!" said Will Scarlet. "Never have I seen the like. The oaks groan under the weight that bends their branches; an', i' faith, though I have known the forest, boy and man, methinks I should be hard put to it to find my way after nightfall."

"I wonder how it fares with Allan-a-Dale?" said Ulf. "He hath gone to Nottingham Town to see if there be any good cheer for we snow-bound outlaws. An' he find none, methinks this deer will be all the Christmas dinner we are likely to get, and none too fat at that." He pressed his knuckles into the carcase, and shook his head doubtfully. "The poor beasts suffer like their two-footed foes," he said. "But let us get forward; we have a good league yet."

They shouldered the deer again, and went on.

rested. One of them was Will Scarlet, and the other Ulf, son of Gammel Goosefoot. The afternoon sun, glowing like a ball of fire over the forest-top, made the glittering

particles of frost glint and gleam like diamonds

and rubies, and it was very still.

Sometimes a mass of snow would fall with a soft thud, and the branch, released from its weight, would sway backwards and forwards, sending a shower down upon them, but that was all.

"Mark ye that?" said Leoffric, pointing with his left hand. "A pack of wolves has been this way. They are fierce this season, and heaven help the poor forester who chances on them single-handed!"

A little farther on he stopped and raised his finger, and, lifting his keen nose, sniffed

the keen air like a hound.

"What is't, Leoffric?" said Will Scarlet in a low voice, for sound travels far in the frosty air.

"The smoke of a wood fire. Do you not

nose it for yourselves?" was the reply.

"Ay, marry that I do!" said Ulf and Will in a breath. "Now, who in wonderment can it be who makes his camp so far from the beaten track?"

"Robbers, belike," said Leoffric. "The scent comes from yonder copse. Tarry here

while I see into this matter."

They laid the deer down again, and, unslinging their bows, loosened each an arrow in the sheath, as men who take no chances and

must be ready for all things.

Bending low, Leoffric of Leicester stole forward, keeping in the shelter of certain white mounds, which were in reality bushes of blackthorn, and in a few minutes he had disappeared. Beyond the bushes lay a white hollow, around whose rim grew a thick copse of twisted hornbeams, sheltering a stunted oak, whose rough and crinkled rind looked as if it had turned all goose-flesh with the cold.

"Ho, ho!" quoth Leoffric to himself. "Whoever he is, he has chosen a snug roost. Well do I know this spot." And over the outlaw's face there showed a smile of some forgotten woodland memory connected with

that dell.

Among the gnarled roots of the oak a large hole yawned, within which Leoffric could see a heaped-up bed of dry leaves, and in front of it, on a tripod of sticks, hung a little iron pot, bubbling over a wood fire.

He stood immovable—dark and still as the trunk of the hornbeam against which he crouched, his quick eye taking in the circle of the dell, and peered into the branches overhead.

Whoever had chosen that desolate spot for a resting-place was evidently absent, and the outlaw was turning over in his mind how best to discover him without betraying his own approach, when his gaze fell on the track of a man leading from the oak-tree up into the hornbeams.

Stepping cautiously from root to root, Leoffric reached the spot where the trail left the dell, and this time the smile that came into his face stayed there, as, with flashing eyes, he looked down on the footprints, and knew who had made them.

Will Scarlet and Ulf were growing impatient at his absence, for the keen wind struck bitter chill upon them, when on a sudden they saw their comrade returning, still bending low under the shelter of the white heaps.

"Now, gramercy, what think ye of this?" he said in an excited whisper. "Thomas the Dog, the Sheriff of Nottingham's spy, hath made his quarters in the hollow yonder."

His companions started with astonishment,

and then looked grave.

"This thing can have but one meaning," said Will Scarlet. "The rogue knows that we make merry at Christmas-time, and he plans to bring the sheriff and his men upon us."

"Tis clear as yonder sun!" said Ulf, nodding his head wisely. "Come, we must make a wide detour lest we surprise him, for the sooner Robin hears this news the better for us all."

"And the worse for the Sheriff of Nottingham!" said Leoffric with a chuckle. "Take thou the staff, Ulf, and lead ahead; thou hast had more than thy fair share of the burden."

Ulf did as he was bid, and turning to the left, they went noiselessly on their way, searching every thicket's gloom as they passed it, but without a sign of the spy.

THE SECOND CHAPTER Robin Hood's Plan

The outlaws' camp was at the Red Thorns.

The dense mass of gnarled and twisted bushes — which in the summer-time was

all assame with scarlet may, scenting the forest far and near—formed in winter a capital bulwark against the keen east wind, and under its shelter they had made themselves snug.

They had not counted, however, upon that terrific snowfall, and in spite of the roaring fire in the centre of the glade, and the paths that had been shovelled away to the wattlehuts, there was a certain air of cheerlessness about the outlaws' lair as the three companions reached it and told their news.

At the outset it was received with moody silence, for, to say the truth, the Christmas

larder was very empty, the common purse was low, and this last piece of intelligence was not at all to their liking.

All looked at Robin, who bent his frown upon the fire and seemed to be thinking deeply.

There was a low whistle from the watcher at the edge of the glade, and then the lithe figure of Allan-a-Dale, disguised in a tunic of hodden grey cloth, with hood drawn well over his head, came leaping

through the snow, his cheeks all a-tingle with the keen wind.

"Egad!" he cried with a forced laugh.

"There is better cheer yonder in Nottingham than here. By my halidom, the sheriff's kitchen is a sight for sore eyes! Thirty geese hang ready for the spit, two fat bucks are even now a-cutting up for pasties; there is a chine of beef upon the cook's table as big round as Friar Tuck's paunch, which is no small matter! Everyone is all smiles from the sheriff himself to the scullion-boys; while you, my masters, have faces as long as a minstrel's rebeck!"

"Hark ye to this pup of ours, bringing hither such tales to make our mouths water!" cried Robin, throwing back his head as a bright light came into his eyes. "And this same sheriff, when he hath filled his belly full of good things, can find no better sport than to come a-baiting we poor folk, who have no roof to keep the cold out, and little enough lining for our hungry paunches!"

"Shame!" cried a score of voices; men looked solemn, and hands tightened on the long-bows.

"Ay, you may well cry shame, my good comrades! We have managed till this Christmas

Eve, and all the luck has been against us; but, mark ye, I have a plan, and so good a one that ye shall whoop for joy when ye hear it."

"A plan—a plan!" cried the outlaws. "What is't, good Robin? Say but the word, and we will roast the sheriff before his own fire!"

"Soft!" said
Robin, as he raised
his hands. "Beshrew me, but you
read my very
thoughts, only that
the sheriff shall lie

cold rather than be roasted! Tell me, Allan-a-Dale, what following hath he in his house?"

"Why, as for that," said Allan, frowning, "there are fifty men-at-arms clanking about the courtyard, all in their harness, casting longing glances through the kitchen door. Moreover, there is whispered talk of something a-foot, but what that may be I could not discover."

"By my halidom," cried Robin, "the two tales tally! Here have we Thomas the Dog, that vile, creeping serpent, spying out our lair, and the sheriff's men ready to swing



With a loud squeak, Madcap the Jester, tripped over the root of a birch tree and plunged headlong into the snow, full at the feet of Thomas the Dog. (See Chapter 3.)

leg over saddle when he hath found it. Fifty men you say, Allan? And we are sixty-five, without counting Friar Tuck, who is equal to five more any day in the week!"

"Thou mayest make it seven, Robin, on a Christmas Eve!" said the friar, with a twinkle in his eye. "Nay, if ten stood between me and my dinner to-morrow there would be meat for the crows and dinner for me!"

"Hark at the boaster!" laughed Robin fetching him a sounding smack upon the shoulder with his open hand. "But a truce to folly. How may we lure the sheriff and his men out here into the forest in such manner that we may come upon them and bind them safely?"

A sudden murmur of admiration went round the listening band, for the idea was one very

much to their liking.

Then a small dry voice like the chirp of a bird spake up, and Madcap the Jester stepped

in front of Robin Hood.

"Master," said he, with a mock bow, "I am thine own tom-fool, yet am I the man for this business. Cast me out, that I may go ashivering through the cold, my fool's garb torn and tattered, and my chest heaving with sobs. I warrant me that I will blubber so loud that Thomas the Dog shall hear it; then will I tell a tale to his greedy ear that shall make him moo like a moon-calf. No matter what I shall say—that I have still to inventbut I will miscall thee so vilely that he will never doubt me. Thou shalt have but twenty men here in the hollow; of those, eight shall be down with the scurvy, and five a-sickening for the plague-la, la, la !-but if the sheriff cometh not helter-skelter to make an end of you all, then set me down a very fool indeed!"

Friar Tuck made one stride towards the little man, and, lifting him up head-high in his brawny arms with as little effort as if he had been an acorn, he kissed him on both cheeks, and set him on the ground again

upside-down.

Madcap turned a somersault and righted himself, glaring furiously at the worthy man,

as all the outlaws laughed aloud.

"Thou great, fat, bulbous, bottle-nosed, over-eaten hog of a man," piped the little jester, "wouldst make an ass of me before all these grinning knaves?"

"Hark at the turkey-cock!" said Friar Tuck, laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks. "Why, thimblekin, I love thee, for the very prospect of roast goose and wardenpie thou holdest forth to my hungry nostrils!"

"Ay, ay, lads!" cried Robin. "Madcap is the wisest fool of us all. How say ye, shall we lure the sheriff to his own undoing; and when we have stripped them all to the skin, shall we clad them in our Lincoln green, and donning their garments, carry them prisoners into Nottingham? Gadzooks, but with a little trimming of my beard I flatter myself I should make a very good counterfeit of our old enemy; a swathing over one eye, as if I had got an arrow wound in the cheek, and I warrant me the sheriff's own wife would not know the difference!"

And a roar of laughter greeted the outlaw's plan, the band's yells of merriment ringing out over the frozen waste and echoing even to the ears of crouching Thomas the Dog.

"There is no time, master, like the present," said Madcap. "Make what plans you may, I will start at once, and 'twill not be my fault if you see not the glint of steel cap and sword blade ere the bell of yonder monastery tolls midnight."

"Beware the wolves!" cried several voices.
"Leave that to me, my children!"—look-

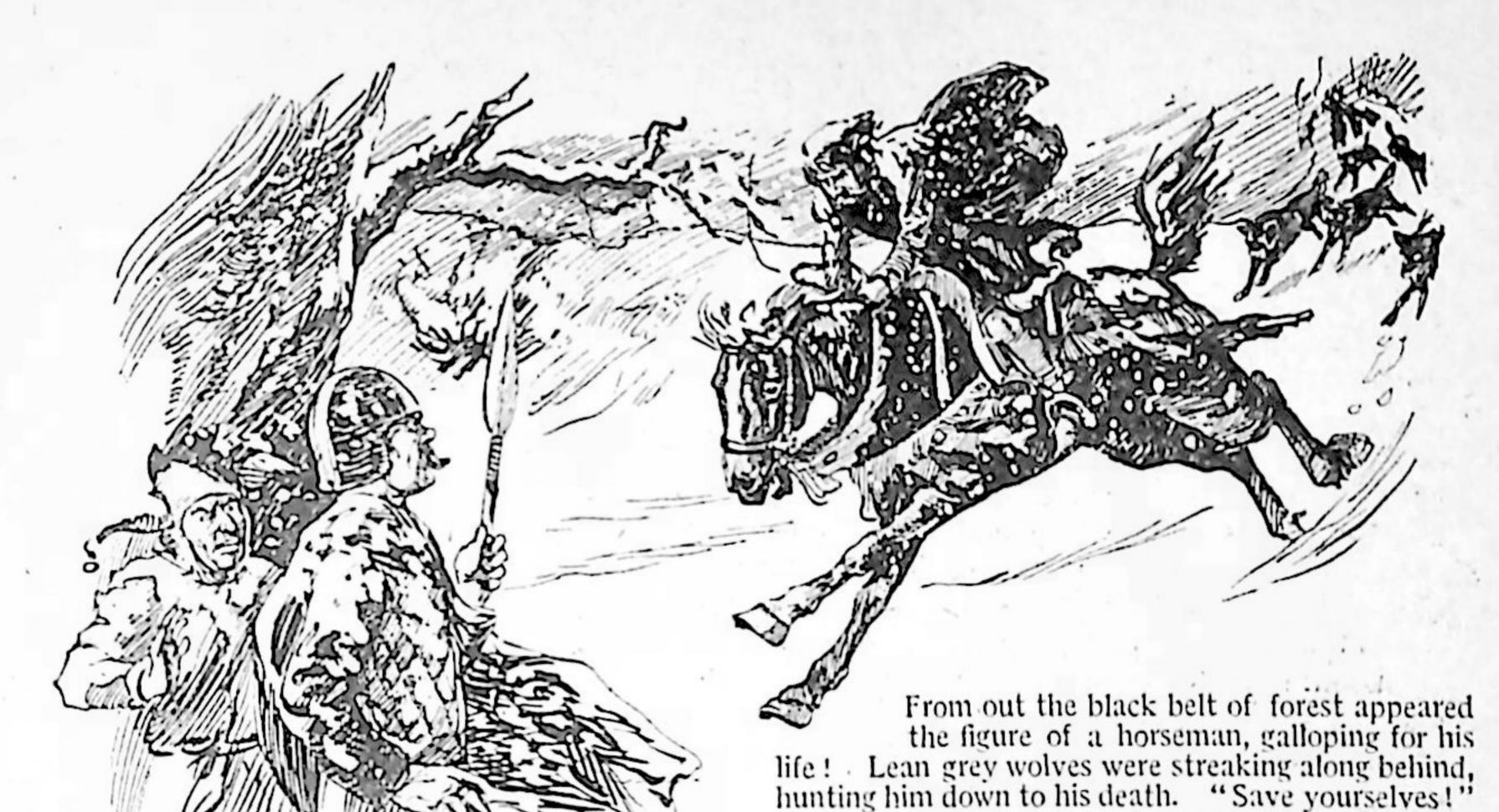
ing round with a sly smile. "When I have hoodwinked Thomas the Dog, all the other wolves in Sherwood may take care of themselves!" Saying which he darted up the bank, and vanished almost before they knew what he was about.

"Now, lads, look to your arms, for you will need them!" cried Robin. "Friar, Little John, and you, honest Will, come and hold counsel with me for the exact manner of the doing of this thing, for I would fain accomplish it without bloodshed this merry Christmastide!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER Madcap the Jester and Thomas the Dog

When the distant laughter rang over the silence and solitude of the snow-bound forest, Thomas the Dog remained motionless for some minutes.

With his low brow and projecting fangs he



looked more like a dog than ever, and a bad one at that, and there came into his evil face a wolfish expression that heightened the resemblance still more.

His first impulse was to seize the long-shafted spear that stood propped up against the oak-tree beside him, and slink away in the direction of the sound.

He marked that it came on the wind, and that the wind was blowing due east, but he listened in vain for a repetition; and just then the seething pot on the tripod bubbled over, and the smell of the stew made him pause.

Thomas the Dog was very hungry, and he

shivered with cold and excitement.

"Tis the outlaws, right enough!" he growled, baring his red gums in a hideous grin. "I know now where I shall find them. They are not at the White Oak after all, but in the glade of the red thorns. Soft, Friend Thomas! Eat thy supper now; thou wilt be a better man for it to-morrow."

He lifted the pot from its hook, and, sitting there on his nest of leaves, drew a wooden spoon from the breast of his greasy jerkin, and began to ladle the savoury mess, all red-hot as it was, between his slavering jaws, alternately blowing on his scalded

the stranger shouted to Madcap and Thomas the Dog. An instant later and he had gone. (See Chapter 3.) tongue and grinning hideously as he thought of the news he would carry to his master, the sheriff. Six spoonfuls in all had he swallowed

"Twas naught but the sighing of the wind in the branches," he muttered half aloud, and then he proceeded with his meal.

when he suddenly paused and listened

He had found a half-frozen hare on the snow that noontide, and, coming upon the hindquarters in the process of his ladling, he drew them forth with his fingers, looking more than ever like a starving cur, as he tore the flesh greedily and scrunched the bones with his dog's teeth.

An unmistakable snarl came out of his throat as he paused again, and this time there was no mistaking it.

There was someone out in the woods not far away—someone in trouble, too; and, putting his half-picked bone into the pot, the spy grasped his spear, thrust his knife tighter into his girdle, and slunk up the dellside.

Among the hornbeams within two feet of the spot where Leoffric of Leicester had recognised his footprints, by the inward drag of his right foot, which had once been caught in a man-trap, Thomas the Dog stood stockstill and looked across the white mantle that clothed the forest floor.

Sharp as his eyes were, it was a few moments before he descried a quaint little bunched-up figure blundering across an open patch of clearing, although he had distinctly heard before the sobbing of someone in distress.

"Now, what in Heaven's name is this!" he thought, bending down to get the figure

outlined against the sky.

As he did so the figure tripped over the root of a beech-tree, and, plunging headlong into a drift full three feet deep, gave a loud squeal, and with many a weird and piping oath belaboured the snow with arms and legs as though it had done him an injury.

"Odds!" muttered Thomas the Dog. "Methinks I should know that voice. 'Tis surely that little viper, Madcap the Jester, who maketh foolery for Robin Hood and his men, and should be scourged to death if I

had my way!"

The little man in the snowdrift suddenly ceased his struggles, and stood upright, with

the snow to his neck.

"I shall die—I shall die —I shall die! May the foul fiend seize that twenty-seven times accursed miscreant who has driven me forth with stripes to pass the night in a wolf's belly! Stars in the sky fall down and burn him!" he screamed, shaking his fists in impotent wrath above his head, and his voice increased in shrill treble fury. "Trees of the forest crush Robin Hood the Outlaw, and roll him flat. Wild boars, sharpen your tusks and—"

"Here, my friend, what's the matter with you?" said a harsh voice, interrupting his frenzied raving. And Madcap the Jester squealed a piteous squeal as he received a hard prod in the back from the butt of the spear-shaft, and, looking up, he gazed, petrified with terror, at the uncouth figure of Thomas the Dog, who looked down upon him

with a glitter in his eye.

"Come out of it!" said the spy, hauling him up by the neck of his hood, which was of parti-coloured cloth, pale-blue on one side and scarlet on the other. "What has Robin Hood done that thou cursest him, as surely no mitred abbot ever cursed yet with bell, book, and candle?"

"Oh, sweet Thomas—oh, dear Thomas, I will give thee the five groats I have in my pouch if you will but befriend me! I have been whipped with rods till I am black and blue, and spurned from the camp yonder by the very men who have laughed at my jests. Oh, woe is me; but hunger maketh folk do strange things!"

The tears tolled down the little man's cheeks, his mouth worked convulsively, and he shook his little fists in the direction of the Red Thorns with a vehemence so comical that the spy would have laughed outright had he not had far more serious thoughts in his dark mind.

"Stop your snivelling, thou misshapen little vermin! You've got to come with me!" And without more ado he seized the trembling jester by the arm, lifted him up on to his shoulder, and strode away with him towards the screen of hornbeams that hid his camping

dell.

"One pair of feet tell less than two," said Thomas the Dog. "I must have some words with thee, thou saucy malapert! If they're to my liking, thou shalt have some supper; if not——" He did not finish the sentence, but made a significant motion with his glittering spearhead as he strode down the bank towards the hollow oak.

"Now, sit ye there," he said, tossing him down by the fireside, "and try to escape at

your peril!"

Thomas the Dog settled himself on his bed of leaves, placed his spear beside him, and set the pot once more on the ground between his legs.

"Your story, jester," he said roughly. "You and I have old scores to settle, and many a crow to pluck; for I mind me thou wert overfree with thy jests such times as I marched with the outlaws."

Madcap looked alternately from the spy to the stew-pot and from the stew-pot to the spy, for the little man was really hungry.

But Madcap had a part to play, and he was

a great actor.

It was a simple tale he told, in the passionate accents of an angry child, mingled with all

the venom of a grown man, and as he proceeded Thomas the Dog laid down the wooden spoon, and his very hair rose, quivering with the joy he was at no pains to conceal.

At last the outlaws were within his grip, and already he felt his pouch bulging with the hundred golden angels which the sheriff had promised him on the day Robin Hood should be laid by the heels.

From the depths of the forest came the howling of wolves as Madcap told how sick and sorry were all that remained of the once

formidable band.

"Thou hast earned thy supper," said Thomas the Dog, passing the pot across to the little rogue, who cowered trembling over the fire, and, seizing it with avidity, Madcap dipped the spoon into the savoury mess.

If he had contented himself with leaving his story where it stood for the present he might have ate his supper in peace, but, pausing with the ladle half-way to his lips, he ventured on a closing statement:

"Friend Thomas," said he, blowing upon the great spoonful to cool it, "how standeth your master, the sheriff, with the White Abbot of Merly?"

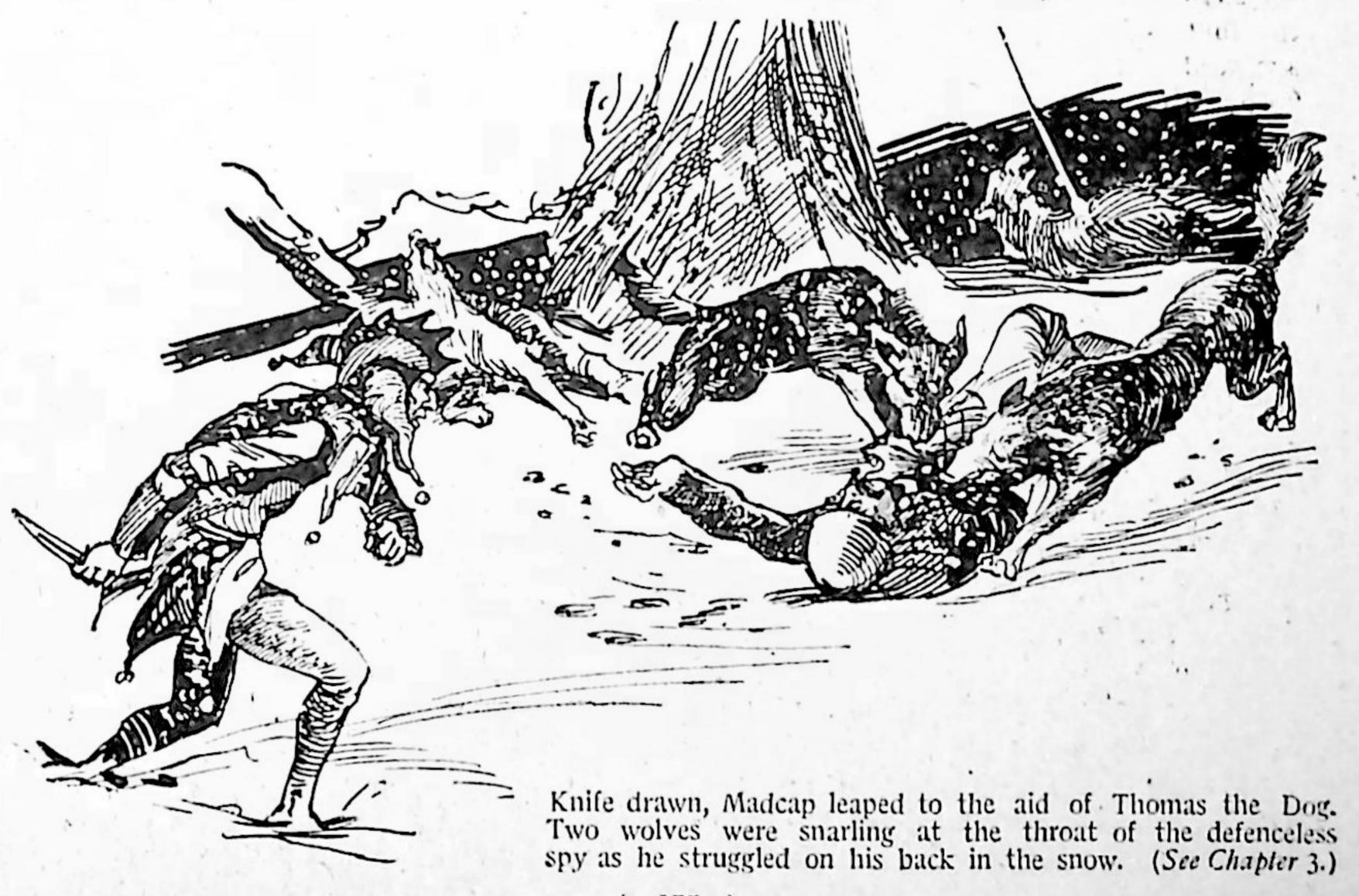
"None too well," replied the spy. "Tis said the outlaws did him some service in the old days when Abbot Anselm was hanged at Bollingwood, and the White Abbot is known to have a secret kindness for Robin Hood."

"Then, my friend, I fear that thou art undone," said the Madcap, "and I am robbed of my revenge, for the starveling pack will crave the hospitality of Merly at sunrise, disguised as homeless beggars."

Thomas the Dog leapt to his feet, snatched spoon and pot from the jester's hands, and overturned the contents of the latter into the fire.

"Thou fool of fools!" he cried, as the stew hissed among the hot embers, and a great waft of burning filled their nostrils. "Why didst thou not tell me this before? Tis a good three leagues to Nottingham, and the snow up to a saddle-girth most of the way. Come on, ass, dolt, blockhead, gluttonous, greedy beast! We must get us instantly to the sheriff, even an we spoil his night's rest."

He gripped his spear while Madcap, open-



mouthed, and gazing ruefully at the food so cruelly snatched from his very lips, rose to his feet, and was bundled without more ado out of the dell.

Madcap the Jester began to cry.

"Stop that snivelling!" said Thomas the Dog angrily, hauling him along by the sleeve. "By my halidom, even these cursed woods have ears!"

"Yes, and eyes, too," thought Madcap to himself, as he spied a motionless figure watching them from a little distance.

He recognised the stalwart form of Leoffric of Leicester, and the knowledge that Robin would soon know that his plan was so far successful warmed the little jester's heart, and almost compensated for the loss of his

supper.

Under the overarching bows they went, making such good progress by choosing the sheltered spots where the thick trees had warded off the snowfalls, although they sometimes landed in a drift well-nigh up to their armpits, that in a little more than an hour they had accomplished the first league of their journey.

Once or twice the spy stopped, and, raising a warning finger, set his head on one side.

The howl of a lone wolf seemed to follow them always away to their left hand, and both men drew closer together as the same fear filled their hearts.

"I like not that fellow's note," said Madcap, loosening the long Sheffield whittle in his belt.

"Nor I," said Thomas the Dog. "One wolf or two we may face, but a pack is another matter."

"If we meet them in a clearing, yes," said Madcap, shifting his hood back that he might hear the better; "but there are trees in plenty that will give us shelter."

"And a pretty pair should we look perched up the long night through on a beech-bough, and our prey safely housed within the abbey wall. No, my friend, the thought is not to

my liking."

They had reached a spot where the high road wound through the forest, hidden now by the snow, but 'twas easier going now, for the oaks had sheltered it, and the white carpet was little more than a foot deep.

Still away on the left that long-drawn, hungry howl broke, echoing through the silence of the forest, and for some time neither man spoke.

"Hist!" said Madcap, all on a sudden. "Is not that the muffled beat of hoofs ap-

proaching?"

The spy threw his head forward, bending down until his ear was on a level with the snow.

"Surely no man is abroad to-night?" he muttered, as they crouched there listening, their hot breath floating like a cloud about their heads.

"Alack, I fear me, 'tis so," said Madcap.

"And dost not hear another sound on the wind like the clamour of dogs a-hunting?"

"Yes, I hear it," said the spy, in an awestricken voice. "Tis some poor wight who rides this way, with the wolf-pack at his heels."

Both men gave a simultaneous cry of horror as out of the black belt of forest beyond a little clearing which they had reached the figure of a man on horseback came in sight, galloping for his life.

He held a rein in each hand. He was bare-headed, his long hair streamed out over his shoulders, and close behind from the same black belt of trees there burst the lean, grey wolves, hunting him down to his death.

An agonised wail burst from the rider's lips as he saw the pair against the whiteness

of the snow.

"Save yourselves!" he shouted in Norman French. And then he was gone down the wind of the track, and the grey wolves were upon them.

"Quick!" cried Thomas the Dog, snatching up his companion and lifting him to the bough overhead, and, springing half his own height into the air, he caught it himself, and scrambled up beside him.

The pack went by—there must have been a hundred of them at the very least—and it seemed as though a flash of red, gleaming eyes shot for a moment upon them, and then

they were gone.

"Heaven save him!" murmured Madcap, crossing himself devoutly. "If he sticks to his horse he is done!"

The spy, sitting astride the bough, made no answer, but listened intently, dreading lest the death-cry should come too soon, for then the wolves, having made short work of the unhappy horseman, would return and besiege them in their place of refuge.

It came at last, a long way off—one agonised scream from the good beast that had carried



"Yield thee, sheriff, or you die, and every man with you!" cried Robin Hood. The Sheriff of Notting-ham's blood froze in his veins as he saw clothyard shafts menacing him and his band; he was trapped and surrounded—taken by surprise by the doughty lads in Lincoln green. Resistance was useless.

(See Chapter 4.)

his master so well, and Madcap the Jester shivered as he pictured the unknown rider battling for a brief moment against those fatal odds, and then torn sinew from sinew and limb from limb beneath the bright stars that looked coldly down from the blue-black vault of heaven.

"Now, while they are busy!" exclaimed Thomas the Dog. "Tis our only chance to reach the sheriff."

Already he had swung his legs clear of the bough, and in another second he would have dropped into the snow, when the howl which had followed them, and had ceased at the passing of the pack, was suddenly repeated close at hand, and out of the bushes sprang a huge lean wolf, followed by four others.

Thomas the Dog was so startled that he well-nigh dropped his spear, but fortunately he managed to draw himself up again, and

get astride the bough.

"The plague upon it!" he hissed. "Wait a moment, my masters!" And, spitting on the palm of his hand, he took a firm hold of the butt-end of his weapon and, twining himself securely round the bough of the beech he made a circular sweep at the leaping brutes immediately beneath him.

"Ha, there is one of ye!" he laughed, as the sharp spearhead ripped its way from shoulder to haunch, and hurled one of the

brutes bleeding on the snow.

In an instant its companions fell upon it. There was the horrible wrangle of a concentrated dog-fight, and a sickening stench rose

up to them.

In a few minutes nothing remained but the steaming bones and the thick pelt, and then the four came under the bough again, licking their chops and ready for the second course.

"Come out to the end of the bough," said Thomas the Dog: "they will be better within my reach." And Madcap followed him. "It must be death," said the spy. "Twere easy enough to shred off a paw, but the howls would bring those others down upon us. Come on, farther—farther!"

"Have a care," said Madcap; "the frost maketh the branches brittle." But Thomas the Dog paid no heed, and, waiting until

the leaping brutes were immediately beneath him, he thrust his weapon between the shoulder-blades of the largest wolf, and pinned him to the ground.

Before he could withdraw the spear Madcap gave a startled cry. There was an ominous crack behind them, and the overloaded bough, snapping without warning, precipitated them headlong among the wolves beneath!

Madcap had the presence of mind to turn a somersault, and he landed a couple of yards off, where the snow luckily came no higher than his knees.

He drew his knife in an instant, and with the keen blade in his hand, the little man sprang pluckily to the rescue of his strange companion.

One of the wolves, pinned by the fallen beech-bough, was struggling to free himself; the other writhed in agony, like a cockchafer on a pin; but the two that remained had already sprung upon the defenceless spy and borne him over in the snow.

Nimble as an eel, Madcap passed his keen whittle into the heart of the first of them, and smote the other upon the muzzle as the yellow fangs were within an inch of the spy's throat, which so astonished the creature that he leapt away with a snarl of terror, and enabled Thomas the Dog to regain his feet.

Maddened with rage, Thomas the Dog drew his knife and rushed upon the wolf, who thereupon turned tail with a howl and bounded away into the depths of the forest.

The spy was torn and bleeding from the sharp claws; but he paid no heed to that, and despatching the other two wolves, with Madcap's help, he recovered his spear, and looked at the jester with a heaving breast.

"I owe thee thanks for your aid, Master Mountebank!" he panted hoarsely. "But that must wait. Meantime let us be off hot-foot. If the pack returns this feast will keep them busy awhile."

And, nothing loth to leave the spot, Madcap picked up his fool's bauble, and the pair plunged in the direction of Nottingham

Town.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER The Turning of the Tables

T wanted ten minutes of midnight, but notwithstanding the lateness of the hour the house of the Sheriff of Nottingham showed many lights, and there was great bustle, more especially in the kitchen.

It was Christmas Eve, and the joy-bells were ringing, and busy cooks still ran to and fro, basting and larding and turning, drawing bread from the ovens, and putting the finish-

"Be of good cheer, sheriff! " called Robin Hood, as he paused on the steps of the dungeon. "One day in the dark will not hurt you!" (See Chapter 4.)

ing touches to the crust of innumerable huge pies.

The yard was still thronged with groups of men-at-arms, who lounged in the open windows, jesting with the cooks within, and licking their lips in anticipation of the great feast that would be held on the morrow.

Now and then a surreptitious jar of ale found its way out, and was passed from lip to lip, and there was rough horseplay and good-humour everywhere.

Under the spikes of the portcullis in the archway that led to the street, the porter

lounged, leaning upon his glaive.

"Methinks there will be no riding forth to-night, and I had best be getting the keys, since the orders are to close the gates at the

first sound of midnight."

He looked right and left along the silent thoroughfare. The snow lay thick on the roofs of the town. Not a soul was in sight. And the porter was turning under the archway -for the east wind swept keenly down the street-when he heard someone approaching, and spied two figures blundering along, holding each other's arms.

"Ho, ho! The old ale worketh!" said the porter with a smile. "Twere good sport to fill their jerkins with snow, and roll them

down the hill yonder!"

He was on the point of turning to summon some of the men-at-arms, when the figures

staggered up to him, and he say that one of them was Thomas the Dog.

The other was a little man in jester's garb, and both reeled with absolute

exhaustion.

"Wine, Simon-wine!" gasped the spy. "A draught that will set the heart beating and the tongue to its work. For, by my halidom, I have news for our master to-night!"

"Thou must e'en quick in the telling," said Simon, "for yonder goes the first stroke of the bell from the abbey tower. Get ye to

the buttery, and when I have closed the gates

I will myself to our lord the sheriff."

"Hold," said the spy, "and leave the gate open! There is work for man and horse tonight! We have the outlaw in a trap at last!"

Half stumbling with the fatigue of those terrible snowy leagues, Thomas the Dog dragged Madcap through the men at arms who had clustered round, and so into the kitchen.

A hush seemed suddenly to fall over the house, broken after a few minutes by the voice of the sheriff.

"Ho, there, Gilbert! Bring me my headpiece and my furred mantle, and bid the

knaves below to horse!"

Instantly every man ran to the stables, and in less than ten minutes Simon the porter stood once more at the gate listening to the clatter of iron hoofs growing fainter in the direction of the open country.

"Yield thee, sheriff, or you die, and every man with you!" cried a rich voice; and, looking up, the Sheriff of Nottingham's blood froze in his veins, and he knew that he had been betrayed.

At the earnest entreaty of Thomas the Dog, he had divided his band of fifty men in two halves, that they might surround the glade of the Red Thorns, and capture the miserable band of sick outlaws without losing a man.

The sheriff and twenty-five sturdy retainers at his back were ploughing their way through a sunken lane, where the snow came up to the knees of a mounted man, and their progress was reduced to a scrambling walk.

Then in the middle of it came that dread summons, and from the height of the bank-top overhead fifty clothyard shafts menaced them, and in place of the sick and sorry stood the lads in Lincoln green, strong and sturdy as ever.

"Be wise, sheriff!" said Robin. "I would fain shed no blood at this season, and it will be your own rash fault if a single hair of you

and your men be harmed!"

So completely taken by surprise were they that they had no time to draw sword or level spear, and in the twinkle of an eye every man of the party was disarmed, and a noose

of untanned deerskin bound his elbows to his sides.

Then there rose a yell of triumph such as even the oaks of Sherwood had never heard, and from some little distance away to northward an answering shout told the outlaws that the sheriff's second party had also fallen into the ambuscade.

Not a word spake the sheriff as Robin, with a mocking smile upon his face, took the bridle of his tired horse and led it away to the glade, which he reached in time to see Friar Tuck and the rest of the band bringing in their prisoners.

Peal upon peal of laughter, roar upon roar of mirth, rang far and wide on the bitter winter wind; and when at last those joyous free-booters wiped the tears from their eyes and held their aching sides, a strange thing happened.

"Thou hast the whip-hand, Robin Hood!" said the sheriff bitterly. "Name your ransom, and I will give you my hand on it that

it shall be paid."

"Nay, not so fast!" cried Robin, as Will Scarlett and Little John smote Friar Tuck lustily on his broad back—for the worthy man had laughed himself to coughing, and from coughing well-nigh into a fit. "Tis no case of ransom. I am in the mind to see what it feels like to be Sheriff of Nottingham for one night and a day. Therefore, get thee nearer to the blaze lest the frost chills thee, for thou and thy men art going to strip to the very skin!"

"This is too much, outlaw!" thundered the sheriff, struggling to free his bonds.

But Robin smiled sweetly.

"Thou wilt find my fellows but poor tiringmaids, and I fear me if they have to take thy shirt off, some of the skin may come with it. Be wise, my friend—be wise, and the longer thou delayest learning wisdom the worse it will be for thee in the end!"

How the outlaws laughed to see the unfortunate sheriff, after vainly expostulating, take off his garments one by one, while Robin, sitting beside him on a fallen log, doffed his tunic of Lincoln green and put on the sheriff's chain-mail and furred mantle!

Some of the men resisted stoutly; but in

spite of it all, they were peeled like oranges. Soon they stood, a crestfallen band, with arms tightly pinioned, in the firelight.

A complete change had taken place.

Some twenty or more whose beards, red, flaxen, or black, might have betrayed the ruse, had been roughly shaved by their laughing captors; and now, had you peeped from behind one of the sentinel oaks, you would have seen to all appearance the Sheriff of Nottingham returning in triumph with his chain of prisoners.

And there rode bold Robin at their head, looking every inch the sheriff—his beard trimmed, and white cloth tied about his head, as though he had taken some hurt in the fray,

the better to disguise him.

Simon Burleigh, the sheriff's right-hand man, was none other than Friar Tuck, for they were much of a size; Will Scarlett made an excellent John of Trent—and so on. Not a soul would have recognised them on the road; and it all depended on their reception at the sheriff's house how the thing would go.

They seemed to have little fear of that, for they sang lusty ditties in chorus to scare away the wolves; in spite of the snow, the leagues were soon passed, and the dark outline of Nottingham Town showed before

them.

"Halt!" said Robin sternly; and the band came to a stand, the prisoners in the centre.

"Now, sheriff, and all the rest of you, listen to my words, for they are spoken in all seriousness!" he said, with a ring of iron in his voice not often heard there. "We are going to spend Christmas at your expense. We are going to eat you out of house and home. "Tis a bold venture; but we have bold hearts, and how you fare will rest with yourselves."

His brow grew sterner, and the discomfited men-at-arms, shivering in their unaccustomed garb, gazed at him with a species of strange fascination.

"Do not tempt death—'twill come soon enough to us all," he said. "One shout, one sign, one whispered word when you reach the town, and you shall die to a man. Be mum, and ye shall live to laugh at the jest. Nor shall you, sheriff, be the poorer for

one silver-mounted drinking-horn when we have gone."

A solemn silence followed, and then Robin, adjusting the bandage over his eye, set his horse going once more, and they soon reached the outskirts of Nottingham Town.

Robin waved his right arm, and on the instant his merry men set up a shout of

triumph.

It rose and fell, increasing to a roar as they swung into the narrow street, and Nottingham awoke, marvelling what this thing could mean.

Startled citizens peered through their shutters, but were none the wiser.

A tumultuous crowd of horse and foot poured by, with the glint of the starlight on helm and hauberk; and then they had gone.

Robin swung the sheriff's steel mace and smote a bow upon the closed portals that made it boom like a cannon-shot. The dent was there full three inches deep when the stout oak door was sold for firewood in the days of Henry VII.

Out to the wicket ran Simon the porter, and, looking through the grill, he gave a glad shout, and turned the key in all haste.

"God save us, master!" he cried. "Have

you taken the rogue at last?"

The only answer Simon got was a hand on his windpipe, a rough gag forced into his mouth, and a cord trussed him like a fowl.

The half-dozen men-at-arms who had been left behind were treated in the same manner, and then the sheriff's gate closed to with a clang. And surely, never had that fortified mansion held such strange Christmas guests before!

Torches were lighted, and poor Simon the porter, pricked behind by a sharp arrow, led them to the deepest dungeons carved in the sandstone rock, where the sheriff and his men-at-arms were left to their own devices.

"Be of good cheer, sheriff!" said Robin.

"One day in the dark will not hurt you.

And I promise we will do full justice to your larder above-stairs. A merry Christmastide to you all!"

And the great bolts shot on the outside of

the door.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER The King I

THE sun rose red and smiling on that joyous Christmas morning. How the snow-clad roofs glittered under its cheery rays, and what laughter and what uproar filled the house of the Sheriff of Nottingham!

"Gadzooks!" cried Allan-a-Dale, stretching his arms. "There are worse shelters than a roof-tree on a winter's night. I have slept

like a top!"

"Which is more than the sheriff hath," grinned Ulf, son of Gammel. " Marry gap with a winion, but I'll wager he is just as warm as an icicle on an oaktree!"

"He should leave honest rogues alone," l Friar Tuck, said loosening his belt and lifting a great stone jar of brown ale to his lips for a morning draught. "Ah, the dog, he knoweth good liquor when he sees it!"

They were early astir, and found much merriment in each other's appearance, and taking it in turns to watch at the gateway; some groomed the horses; others set forth the

trestle-tables in the banqueting-hall; while the rest set the spits a-turning and prepared the good things.

Presently there came a clamour at the outer gate, and one of the outlaws came running to

Robin. "Master," said he, his face grinning from ear to ear, "we are in somewhat of a plight. The good people of Nottingham have heard of our capture, and have come to ask the sheriff to set us free, it being Christmas Day, when

peace and goodwill should be for all men."

"By my halidom!" cried Robin, pulling a long face. "The friendship of these good folk is likely to be troublesome, I fear me. Muffle me in that mantle. I must speak them fair from the window over the gateway. Methinks I have the trick of the sheriff's voice, which is somewhat solemn and rather pompous."

There was, indeed, quite a tumult in the

street outside. The rumour had spread. And Robin Hood, by his rough justice and kindness of heart, had so endeared himself to the common folk, that the weavers and butchers of Nottingham came in angry deputation to give the sheriff a bit of their minday, and, if needs be, to batter his door down and release their favourite!

Suddenly the leathern curtain that covered the thurlehole overhead was drawn back, and the Sheriff of Nottingham stood before them.

"Greeting, good people! Greeting, this Christmas morn!" said Robin.

"But why this clamour at my gate so early? What do you here, Perkin Winkel, and you, Gregory Loom, and Simeon Saltmarsh, too, frowning like a thundercloud? How now, knaves-how now?"

"Worshipful sir," said Master Saltmarsh, a stalwart butcher, who carried his cleaver in his hand, "is't true that thou hast taken Robin Hood and his band, and hath them now in durance vile?"

"Friend Simeon," said the mock sheriff,



Half-a-dozen of his laughing comrades grabbed the protesting Friar Tuck and forced him towards the outer gate, despite his furious struggles. (See Chapter 5.)

"thou hast been dreaming, or thou art in drink! What cock-and-bull tale is this that thou hast got hold of?"

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd, and the good citizens looked from one

to another, very much taken aback.

"But, my lord sheriff," said Simeon Saltmarsh, returning to the charge, "surely thou did'st ride in 'twixt midnight and sunrise

with a great string of prisoners?"

"True for you, Simeon," replied the mock sheriff, driving Allan-a-Dale back from the window with a nudge of his elbow that his delighted grins should not be seen by those below, "we did ride in with fifty of the greatest rogues and rascals the world has ever seen! They are even now shivering in the dungeons. But I pledge you my word as a man that neither Robin himself nor yet one if his band is amongst them. Tut, tut, Simeon Saltmarsh! Methinks thou are getting turbulent. This is not the respect due to my position, thou saucy caitiff! Away with you to your homes!"

Considerably crestfallen, the crowd fell back, but while they were still hesitating a red-faced woman struggled through the throng, and, setting her arms a-kimbo, looked up with a mixture of anxiety and defiance at

the window.

"Rogues or no rogues, my lord sheriff," she cried, "thou hast had a fight, for thou art thyself wounded. Pray tell me of my man, Simon Burleigh, the stoutest of all your riders! Thou thyself"—and she raised her arms—"gave him leave to spend this Christmas Day with me and our little ones."

Robin, remembering that Friar Tuck was masquerading as this redoubtable Simon Burleigh, could not keep a straight face, and the dame's anger rose.

"It is well for thee to laugh, Sheriff of Nottingham," she cried; "but where is my man? By all the saints, if he be slain——"

"He is not exactly slain," said Robin, pulling his beard. "Quick, Will! Allan!" he said, in a low voice. "What am I to say to this termagant? An she smelleth a rat it may spoil all."

"to send our worthy friar home to his

family."

"Nay, nay!" laughed Allan, peering behind the leathern curtain. "An Simon Burleigh's dinner were not large enough he would eat the children!"

Down below, at the gateway, half a dozen of the outlaws had taken Friar Tuck by the arms and were forcing him towards the gate, in spite of his struggles. Fortunately, Robin's voice rang out, and rescued his worthy chaplain from a very serious position.

"What mean you?" cried the distressed spouse. "What mean you by not exactly dead? My man is maimed; he is sick!"

"Nay, dame; he would be better an he were, methinks," said Robin, "for, to say truth, thy good man did drink so much strong ale that he will not awake this good twelve hours."

Dame Burleigh's distress instantly turned

to fury.

"Oh, the besotted hog!" she cried. "Wait till I get thee home, my pig! Marry come up, a merry Christmas thou hast made for me and mine!"

" Poor Simon Burleigh!" said Friar Tuck, with a twinkle in his eye, as the crowd disappeared. "There is a rod in pickle for thee."

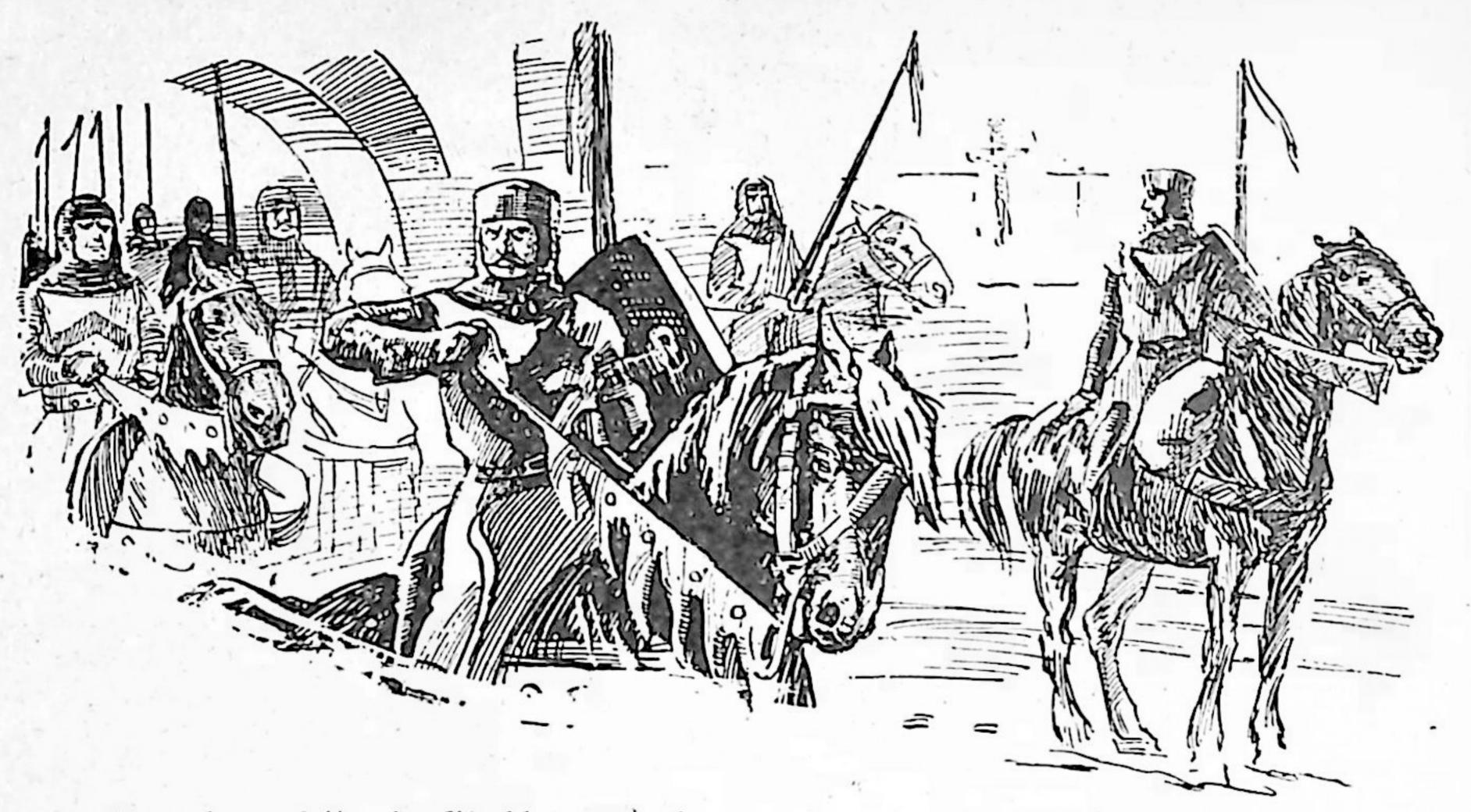
Then the outlaws, laughing right merrily, hied them into the hall, for the servers were carrying the meat from the kitchen, and the smell of good things was almost overpowering.

Goose, served with strong garlic sauce, mixed with wine; roast capons, basted with lard; boiled meat and baked, a boar's head, with a rosy-cheeked apple in his open mouth. By my halidom, it was a mighty feast!

Here a mammoth pie of deer's meat reared itself like a fortress from the planks of the table; there, a pike, soused in wine and water, showed his wicked teeth, just as Madcap the Jester whispered to Allan-a-Dale:

"Thomas the Dog would be showing his at that very moment in the dungeon below."

Forks there were none, but every man had his knife, and ate his meat from a flat, round cake of bread, marked with a cross and a "Twere a good jest," said Will Scarlet, flower. And-oh, the wine and the ale and



Under the archway clattered a file of horsemen, dissolute nobles with their men-at-arms. At the head of the cavalcade rode King John himself, and even stout Robin Hood's colour paled a little as—

the mead! Friar Tuck saw to that, and he made an excellent cellarman.

"God bless us all, and our meat upon place;

Sack is good to nourish the blood, And so I end my grace!"

he said, raising his hand to enforce silence.

And then they fell to as the bell of a distant abbey tolled tierce, which was nine o'clock of the morning, and the dinner-time of those days.

Sext tolled, and nones, which made it three o'clock in the afternoon, the short winter daylight already showing signs of drawing to an end, and still they were eating.

Robin sat in the big fald-stool, beaming with quiet merriment. Here and there down the long table a man was to be descried fast asleep, with his head on his hands; and one or two were down among the rushes on the floor.

But all were happy, their only regret being that the whole world could not know of that thing and laugh with them.

Robin had been in the mind to send some jars of ale down to the unfortunate sheriff

and his crew, but he had thought better of it.

"Twill not harm them," said Scarlet, "to keep Christmas fasting for once in their lives, and when we go we can carry a scullion with us a league of the way, who can return with the keys and release them."

"You say truly, Will," said Robin, laugh-

ing. "And now a song."

George-a-Green, who had a fine mellow voice, began to troll forth a seasonable ditty:

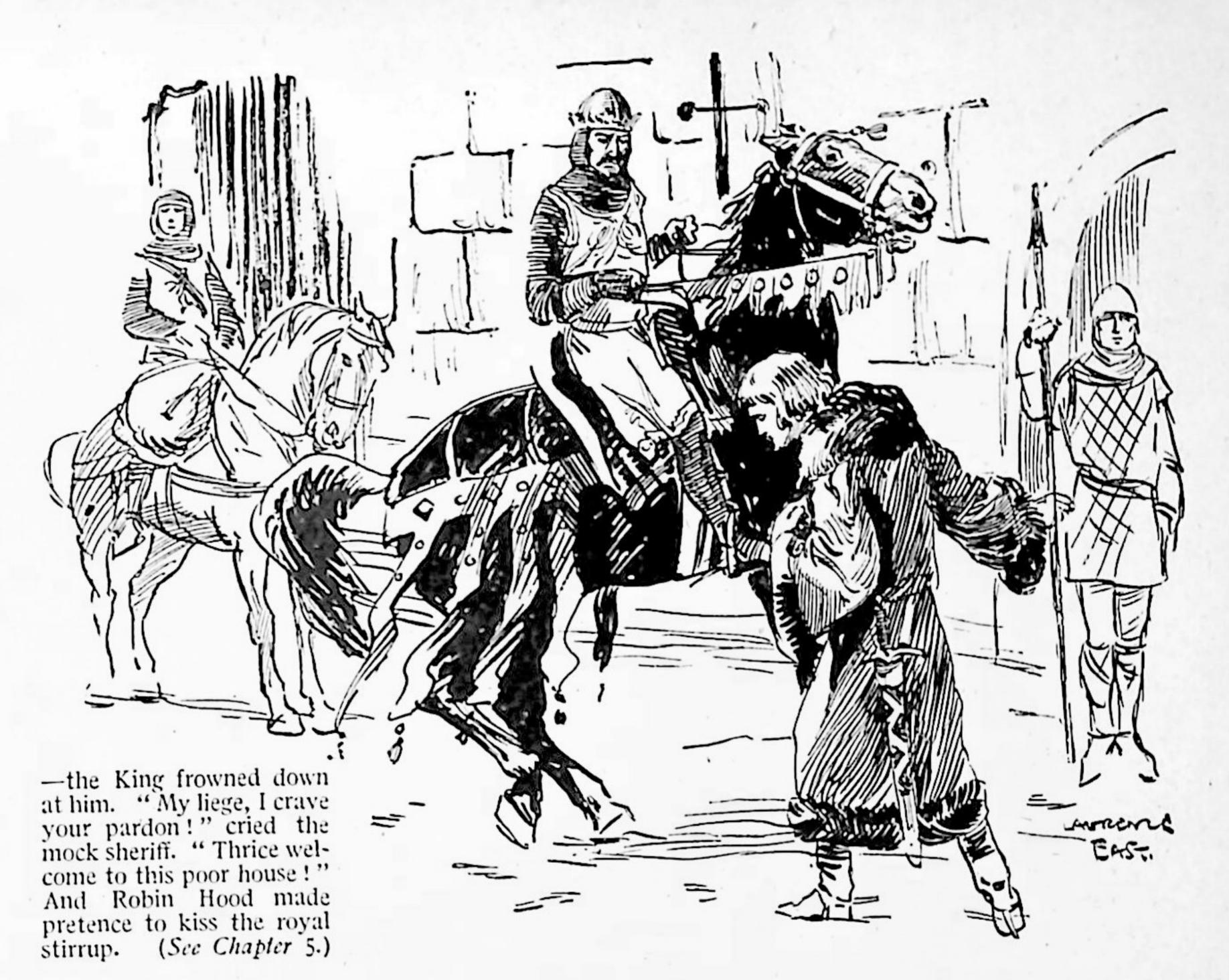
"Winter days are dark and drear, Christmas comes but once a year; Therefore, pass the festive cheer. Ho, the merry greenwood—ho!"

The song had scarce echoed to the rafters of the high hall when it ceased suddenly.

A furious knocking resounded on the outer gate, and Ulf, son of Gammel Goosefoot, came speeding into the banqueting-chamber, crying:

"Alack-a-day, here are horsemen, twenty in number, and persons of high quality, from their speech!"

Every man rose to his feet, and Robin changed glances with Little John.



"Merry men all," he said, motioning them to sit down again, "keep up the jest, whoever it be, and play your parts well. Perchance, perhaps it is but some wandering baron who craves the sheriff's hospitality, and, by the rood, he shall have it!"

He followed Ulf, who, in corselet and steel cap, made a very presentable man-at-arms, and passed into the courtyard, followed by Will Scarlet and Little John, and, striding up to the gate on which the horsemen were still thundering, he opened the grille and looked forth.

Even stout Robin's colour paled a little, and he started as he looked into the face under the travelling hood that peered at him

scarcely a foot away.

"Now, how much longer am I to be kept waiting?" cried an angry voice. "Must John of England shiver in the snow to wait his subject's pleasure?" "Pardie!" whispered Robin. "We are in for it now. Open the gate!"

Under the archway clattered a file of horsemen, several of them bearing bundles upon their saddle-bows, and the King reined up beside the outlaw.

"My liege, I crave your pardon!" said the mock sheriff, making pretence to kiss the Royal stirrup. "I beg you hold me excused, for a sudden brawl drowned the sound of your knocking. Thrice welcome to my poor house: the more so that on a day like this we can treat our Sovereign right royally!"

"Enough, sheriff!" cried John dismounting. "And i' faith you will find me in a better humour than some we have left an hour agone. A word in thine ear, man." And he drew him aside, pointing to the bundles which his followers bore, and which clattered and chinked curiously. "We have paid the White Abbot of Merly a visit; and since he

had the insolence to preach us a sermon, I called to horse, and brought the abbey plate

with me to teach the rogue a lesson!"

Now, the White Abbot of Merly, being a good old man, greatly beloved, and in secret a friend to the outlaws, Robin's heart was sore at this news; but, remembering the part he played, he broke out into a great laugh.

"My liege has done well, as ever he does!" he cried. "Gadzooks, these fat monks are the ruin of the land. But ho, there; warm water in a silver ewer for our Lord the King!"

And, bowing low, he conducted John into the great hall, followed by his company, which consisted of half a dozen dissolute nobles and a clump of men-at-arms—luckily, all strangers to the sheriff's household.

The King was instantly recognised, and at a sign from the mock sheriff the disguised foresters sprang to their feet, and gave a roar of welcome that made John's eyes sparkle,

and brought his hands to his ears.

"Peace, good fellows," he cried, "and thank ye for your greeting! And now, sheriff, let us get to table, for, by my father's bones, the wind hath sharp set our appetites."

It was fortunate that there still remained roast geese as yet uncarved and a mound of other dainties, which were speedily served and set before the King and his companions.

"Sit ye here, good sheriff, by my right hand. Pardie, but 'tis good to feel the warmth once more. My legs well-nigh froze

to my saddle."

The men-at-arms mingled with the rest of the company, who plied them with meat and drink; and although a thrill of alarm had passed through the company when the King entered, the light-hearted fellows soon forgot all about it, and knew that Robin would turn

the situation to good account.

"An it please your liege," said the outlaw, whose eye had been watching the light fading from the west windows, in which the real sheriff had placed some of the new-fangled glass then coming into use in the houses of the wealthy, "I have something for thine ear which will make thy heart beat with great gladness. Your glass is empty; let me fill it to the brim, and we will drink to my news!"

John, if the old chroniclers are true, needed

little pressing to the wine-cup, and his bad

face was flushed already.

"Let me first," said the outlaw, "give some orders for the safer bestowal of the abbot's treasures, and then I will prepare a

joyful surprise for thee."

"Gadzooks!" cried the King, turning to his next neighbour, who was gnawing a drumstick of a goose like any dog, notwithstanding the fact that he was a belted earl. "Did I not tell thee, Montfaucom, that 'twould be worth the ride to house with my man of Nottingham?"

"The King can say no wrong," said the earl, laughing, and wiping his red moustache

with his greasy fingers.

And meantime Robin, with a wink here and a sign there, had passed down the hall and out into the courtyard, whither he was followed by Will Scarlet, Friar Tuck, and half a dozen of the others.

"Saddle every horse in the stable," said Robin, in a low voice, pointing to the bundles which had been laid inside the door. "When Allan gives you the signal, mount and away, carrying this plunder with you. Allan himself shall hold a horse for me, and we will join you ere you are a mile out of the town."

"But, good Robin," interposed the friar, what is in thy mind to do? Surely thou

art not going to kill the King?"

"Merry England would be the richer!" said the outlaw bitterly, as he thought of the crimes and tyrannies of the worst of the Plantagenets; "but I am no murderer. No; I have a better plan. John and his ruffians shall release our unfortunate sheriff and his men, who no doubt have untied themselves by this time, and are gentle of mood as a hunted boar. Pardie, I would give something to see the meeting before both sides discover their mistake. One of you pass the words to our lads within, and make haste, for in ten minutes you must all be off and away."

"Welcome again, good friend!" cried the King, as Robin strode up the hall and came behind the King's chair. "And now I mark me that thou art wounded. Gramercy, man,

the tale—the tale!"

The mock sheriff smiled.

"An I keep my liege waiting," said he,



"They are in the dungeon below!" exclaimed Robin Hood, producing the keys. King John started to his feet. "Thou shalt have an earldom for this!" he cried. "Lead me straightway to the dungeon that I may glut my eyes upon the outlaws' misery!" (See Chapter 5.)

"a moment's space, 'twill be all the sweeter when you hear it. 'Twas but an arrow, which nearly missed the eye—an arrow from the bow of the outlaw!"

He bent over the King, and gazed mean-

ingly at him.

"Sangdieu!" cried John, showing his teeth. "And has the scoundrel dared—"

"Soft, my liege!" said Robin, shaking his forefinger and pointing to the ground. "The band are in the dungeon beneath us, loaded with chains and drinking the cup of bitterness! What guerdon shall I claim for this?"

"Man," cried John, springing to his feet, "thou shalt have an earldom without the asking. Lead me straightway, that I may glut

mine eyes upon his misery!"

"Hold torches there!" cried the mock sheriff: And, jangling a bunch of heavy keys, he led the way to the head of the winding stairs that conducted them to the noisome prison below.

"On, varlets, on!" cried the King, snatching the keys with his own hands. And, standing aside with a bow, Robin let the eager tyrant descend the stair, followed by his companions and his men-at-arms, who crowded greedily to see that thing.

When the last man had gone, Robin bounded back into the hall, to find every

man on his feet.

At a wave of his hand they poured out into the courtyard and in a moment such as could find horses were riding into the street, while those on foot sped beside them, holding on to their stirrup-leathers.

Allan-a-Dale sat more less in his saddle, holding the bridle of Robin's horse.

"Hark! Do you hear them?" said the outlaw. And the sound that came up the staircase was the sound of a great battle, for no sooner was the dungeon door opened than the outraged sheriff and his men sprang out and fell upon their deliverers, the torches were overthrown and extinguished, and a free fight took place.

Overthrown and badly trampled, John of England came within an ace of death; but at length new torches were brought by the frightened servitors above-stairs, and a rush was made for the banqueting-chamber.

Alas for the vain hopes of the sheriff and his men! The hall was empty, and the stables,

too.

Far away in the distance, too far for any thought of pursuit, the frosty wind brought the sound of mighty laughter.

It was the outlaws, plunging deeper and deeper into the fastnesses of the snow-clad forest, well lined with good cheer, and never to forget the memorable Christmas Day.

Next morning the porter at Merly Abbey, opening his wicket with a heavy heart, tumbled over a leather sack lying across the threshold of the great gate, and on the scrap of parchment fastened to its neck he read the words:

"What bad kings steal,
Poor outlaws may restore.
Find Robin's offering
At your abbey door."

