By MORTON PIKE

A Magnificent Long, Complete Tale of the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest, and the Sheriff of Nottingham Forest

THE FIRST CHAPTER

A Sack of Silver, and What Happened to It

It was ten of the clock, and quite dark, but in spite of the lateness of the hour the streets of the good town of Nottingham were very busy.

Carpenters hammered, lights flitted hither and thither, men shouted one to another, and the bustle and confusion denoted that something was taking place.

The Sheriff of Nottingham was dead. Folks said that Robin Hood and his merry men had broken his heart; be that as it may, a new sheriff had been appointed by the King, and would arrive early next day, and the citizens of Nottingham were doing their best to give him a good reception.

Through the bustle of busy work and men the crowds of idle onlookers, who ought to have been all a-bed, came half a dozen armed men, escorting two who carried a heavy burden between them, the group being headed by Robin's old enemy, Thomas the Dog, who, thanks to fawning on his late master, was now installed in the porter's lodge under the sheriff's gateway.

"Room, varlets, place, I say!" cried Thomas the Dog, in a tone of authority, motioning back the citizens with a wave of his drawn sword. And as the little band passed along the winding streets, scowling looks were cast upon the insolent Jack-in-office who put on as many airs as though he had been the sheriff himself.

It is very strange how things come about, and if the seneschal who had charge of the late sheriff's household had been at home when they reached the gateway, this story would never have been written.

Under the frowning shadow of the arch paced a soldier with a brown-bill on his shoulder, and to him spake Thomas the Dog:

"Hast seen Master Faulkner?" said he.

"Ay, marry," replied the guard. "He hath but lately gone forth."

"Now a plague upon it!" said the spy. "But no matter. Carry your burden into the lodge, men, until the seneschal returns. 'Twill be safer there than anywhere else with all this coming and going, and who knows what rogues finding their way about."

The men did as he bade them, and ducking their heads under the little door built in the side of the archway itself, they set their burden heavily down on the brick pavement, not sorry to be rid of its weight.

Then they went away with their companions to the buttery, and as Thomas the Dog closed the door of the stone room, his wife came forward, with curiosity in her eyes.

"What have you there, Thomas?" she said.

She was a hard-featured, thin-lipped woman with jet-black hair, and a crafty expression on her face.

"Hush, not so loud, wife!" said Thomas, pointing to the sack, which bulged with its contents. "I would not that folks should know what that bag holds."

A curious smile played about his mouth, raising her curiosity to boiling point.

"You must know," he said, "that our new sheriff hath the will to make himself popular in the town, and that sack holds silver marks, three thousand of them, wife, which he will fling by handsful to the crowd of gazers at the tourney to-morrow."

The woman's face turned very white, and her eyes gazed at the bag with a curious fascination.

"Good money," she said, in a low voice, "wasted on idle knaves, when we have worked hard to no purpose."

Thomas the Dog grew very still, and then began to tremble a little in the knees.

"A capful out of that sack would mean much to us," she continued, "and the new sheriff would never miss it."

"Nay, nay!" broke in Thomas the Dog quickly, all the same lowering his voice and glancing at the door. "I have just received it from the hands of Absolom, the usurer, in exchange for a parchment bond that was brought to the seneschal by a mounted man at sunset. I saw the money told out with my own eyes."

His wife looked at him sharply.

"Wert alone with the usurer?"

"Marry, that was I."

"Then thou art a fool, friend Thomas!" said his amiable spouse, with a cackling laugh. "Even supposing our new master had it counted again, is not thy word better than that of a Jew?"

"Hush, not so loud!" said Thomas the Dog. And, taking his evil chin in his dirty hand, he fell to pacing backwards and forwards in the little room, which was lit by one solitary candle that flickered in the draught.

The woman stood with her arms akimbo, her greedy eyes fixed in gloating on the sack, and it was at that moment that a little white face showed itself against the deeper darkness of an inner doorway, and two large, brown, hungry eyes fastened themselves on the pair.

"The risk is too great, Algitha," said Thomas the Dog. "Moreover, the sack is sealed."

"Thou tomfool!" sneered his dame. "Is it not also sewed? And who is to know that my needle fastened up the rent my scissors made? Thou art but a cowardly rascal all said and done!"

"The black death seize you! Your tongue tempts like the serpent in the garden!" said the spy, his voice not so low but that the listener could hear every word of it.

"Leave that to me," said the woman. "All is scurry and bustle, and what we take will never be missed, but we must wait until the gate is closed for the night. Meantime, go thou into the garden and bring me a horse-bucket full of earth and stones."

The spy's eyes glistened, but he still hesitated.

"Listen!" she hissed. "Thou art porter to-night, to-morrow the new sheriff may send thee packing, and not a penny saved!"

Thomas the Dog nodded.

"I will go," he whispered. And he hurriedly left the room.

It wanted little short of midnight before the great gate closed with a clang, and the disturbed household sank into a semblance of repose.

Then, when there was no sound without but the melancholy footfall of the sentinel pacing the courtyard, and the moan of the night wind under the archway, Thomas the Dog and his wife came stealthily into the little stone room once more, and set a lamp on the table.

Even then the spy stole on tiptoe to the door and felt the bolts and bars to make assurance doubly sure; but his wife lost no time in kneeling beside the sack of money, and for the second time that little white face with the hungry eyes peered out of the darkness of the recessed doorway behind them.

A few deft snips with her scissors, and the seam of the sack gaped into a rent through which one could have thrust both hands.

"Hist!" whispered Thomas. "Wait till

the sentinel has passed. And wert not well to peep and see that the whelp is safe a-bed!"

"The whelp!" said his wife, with a contemptuous sneer. "He will not stir forth, for I have beaten him black and blue, for that he did loiter on an errand to-day gaping no doubt at the gay cloths and floating banners instead of running there and back as I did tell him to." Nevertheless as she spoke she glanced over her shoulder, but the little white face shrank deeper into the shadow, and she saw him not.

Presently it emerged again, the eyes dilating with astonishment as Dame Algitha drew out handful after handful of silver pieces, which she laid in her apron spread upon the floor.

"Soft, wife—soft!" said the spy, laying his hand on her arm. "Thou must not be too greedy, else our lives may pay for it!"

"Nay, fool!" she whispered, in reply. "If any must suffer, it must be the Jew. Thou hast but to raise an outcry, and the citizens will burn him and his house."

"Thou art no fool!" said Thomas with a look of admiration.

"Save only when I married thee," she replied, withdrawing her hand for the last time, with a sigh. "It irks me sore to leave so much good money to be tossed among yonder fools. Now, then, fill up the space while I hold the rent open."

Thomas the Dog did as he was bid, and when he had emptied the contents of the bucket, and the sack once more swelled out to its original size, the crafty woman took needle and thread and sewed up the opening so cleverly that none could have told it had ever been touched.

The lamp threw their shadows in huge, black forms upon the walls and ceiling, as, kneeling side by side, they counted out the coins they had stolen.

"Six hundred and twenty silver marks!" said Algitha, with a triumphant smile. "And fools we were not to have made it a thousand!"

Gathering the apron up by the four corners very cautiously, lest the chink of money should reach the ears of the sentinel, she took the lamp and led the way to their sleeping chamber, pausing as she passed the open door of a bare stone cupboard, for it was little more, where a straw bed lay among a litter of brooms and kindling.

As the terrified palfrey plunged up the bank, Robin sprang out upon it, caught the red velvet reins in both hands, and forced the runaway on to its haunches. (See page 30)

The owner of the white face was curled up, and, to all appearances, sound asleep, and as she bent over him the face of the woman seemed to grow more than usually evil.

"Thou little whelp!" she muttered. "If thou had opened so much as an eye I would have killed thee!" But when she had gone, and the bolt of their sleeping chamber had creaked noisily into its socket, the half-starved boy opened both eyes, and lay there for a long time gazing into the darkness, and trembling.

The whimper of a hound, a restless neigh

from the stables, the shuffling footfall of the sentinel outside, those were all the sounds that disturbed the night, and presently the hungry eyes closed, and the motherless lad dropped into a troubled slumber.

When morning broke, Thomas the Dog came out of his lodge, and looked at all the bustle in the courtyard with a furtive twinkling of his red eyes.

The men-at-arms were busy brightening their harness; the grooms were rubbing down the horses with wisps of straw; cooks and scullions ran hither and thither, kicking the dogs that got under their feet, and sometimes one of them would resent it and fasten his white teeth in a tempting calf, and there would be a yell and a commotion, and if the dog were wise he bolted out of the gateway, and joined the outlaw dogs in the town.

"Now then, whelp!" snapped Dame Algitha, "break thy fast on this crust, and get thee to thy kennel! We are too poor to waste money on new clothes for such as thou, who art but an encumbrance, and our new lord must not see thee all rags and tatters. Set not thy nose outside this day, else will I flay thy back with a strap when thy uncle and I return from the sports in the meadow."

The poor little chap took the crust mechanically, and stood like one half dazed.

So he was not to see the knights and the ladies, and the archery and the tilting at the quintain, and all the merry frolic that would be held in honour of the Sheriff's coming.

Cuffed, beaten, and half starved since his cruel aunt had taken him under her charge on his mother's death, the lad's life had been a misery to him, and he envied the dogs, who, at any rate, found bones enough in plenty amid the rushes in the big hall, and could come and go at will.

As a great sob came into his throat, and the unbidden tears welled up into the brown eyes, one of his four-footed friends shot past the open door of the room to seek refuge among the crowd that even then was streaming towards the meadows, and all at once a great resolve came into the boy's heart, and, bare-headed as he was, with the hard crust of black bread tightly clutched in his hand, he watched his opportunity, and, slipping out into the archway, dived into the throng of merry-makers, and ran as hard as his legs would carry him.

When he had passed the town gate he slackened his pace, and began to munch his breakfast.

He had no idea whither to go, but the worm had turned at last. This much he knew, he would see the sights and the entry of the sheriff, and after that he would never return to that cold, stone room under the archway, where the wind howled at night, and his aunt Algitha scolded all the day.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

How FitzAlwyn, the New Sheriff, met Martin of Ilkley in the Forest

THERE were high doings in Nottingham town, and all the world was agog to see them.

Sir Alwyn FitzAlwyn, the new sheriff, was expected to arrive in the early forenoon, and the townsfolk had prepared to give him a reception befitting his dignity.

The streets were hung with garlands, gay ribbons fluttered from the maypole. Lists had been erected, covered with crimson cloth, for there was to be tilting of the knights, and a gay city of booths and stalls had grown up round the meadow without the walls.

From east and west, and north and south, people were journeying to see the pageant, and partake of all "the fun of the fair."

It was a lovely morning. Fleecy clouds rolled on the wings of a soft south wind across a sky of brilliant blue, as sundry figures wended their way through the glades of Sherwood Forest in the direction of Nottingham Town.

The outlaws were determined that they would not be left out of it, and disguising themselves as countrymen, they trudged blithely in small groups towards the scene of the coming revels.

Robin had trimmed his beard close, and attired himself in a close-fitting jerkin and hood of Coventry blue, and with his bow slung at his back, and a stout cudgel in his hand, he strode out alone with a thoughtful smile on his handsome face.

"Well, well," he mused, muttering half aloud, "I wonder what manner of man our new sheriff will prove? We led the old one a fine dance, and if Alwyn FitzAlwyn meddles with us, beshrew me, but he will burn his fingers! Pah! Alwyn FitzAlwyn, a Norman to the backbone, no doubt, and a tyrant, which follows in due course. But soft! What do I hear?"

The distant sound of a horse's neigh came on the wind as Robin approached the highway, and, pausing on the edge of a thicket, he looked keenly in that direction.

At that point the forest fell back in a wide clearing where the green grass sprung strongly, and through it the narrow bridle track wound like a white thread.

"Ho, ho!" said the outlaw. "A goodly train of spears, though too far away to read the device that flaunts on the white silk banner. Some nobles, forsooth, come to mock at the sports of the common folk, and since the trees thin out, methinks I will stay where I am and let my lords ride by."

He flung himself down on the flower-bespangled turf in the cool shade of the young saplings, and leaning on his elbow, watched the approaching party.

At their head rode several gentlemen clad in armour that gleamed and glinted like silver in the sun's rays, and beside them caracoled a young girl on a cream-coloured palfrey.

As Robin watched, his eyes grew bright, for out of the forest on a sudden there swooped a head of red deer, at sight of which the oncomers gave a shout.

The timid creatures, already startled, swerved away and bounded back into the trees again, but then a strange thing happened.

Already restive, the cream-coloured palfrey reared and plunged, and taking the bit in its teeth, broke away at full gallop towards the outlaw. A cry of alarm went up from the girl's companions, and, spurring their horses, they galloped in pursuit, the sound of their hoofs like muffled thunder on the turf.

"Pardie, the child rides well," said Robin, "and if the frightened beast keeps to the clearing she will come to no hurt." But the muttered words had scarcely passed his lips when the palfrey swerved to the left and dashed into the forest.

A hoarse yell of horror came from the horsemen, and, though he had little love for lords and nobles, honest Robin saw only a fellow-creature in danger, and, springing to his feet, darted towards the thick beechwood for which the runaway was making.

Looking over his shoulder as he ran, he saw the girl bend her head as they shot beneath some low branches, and exerting all his speed, he leapt up a sandy bank and bounded to the edge of the wood.

"Now, my beauty," he said, between his set teeth, "an' thou keepest as thou art going now, thou and I wilt meet, and we will see what a pair of strong arms may do to curb thy mad flight."

Crouching behind a trunk, whose smooth, grey bark was dappled with emerald moss, Robin braced himself, and as the terrified palfrey plunged up the bank he sprang out upon it, caught the red velvet reins in both hands, and forced the runaway on to its haunches.

In an instant he had plucked the child from her saddle, and 'twas well he did so, for, as she sank fainting on to his shoulder, the palfrey sprang forward once more, and, charging headlong against a tree, fell dead among the twisted roots.

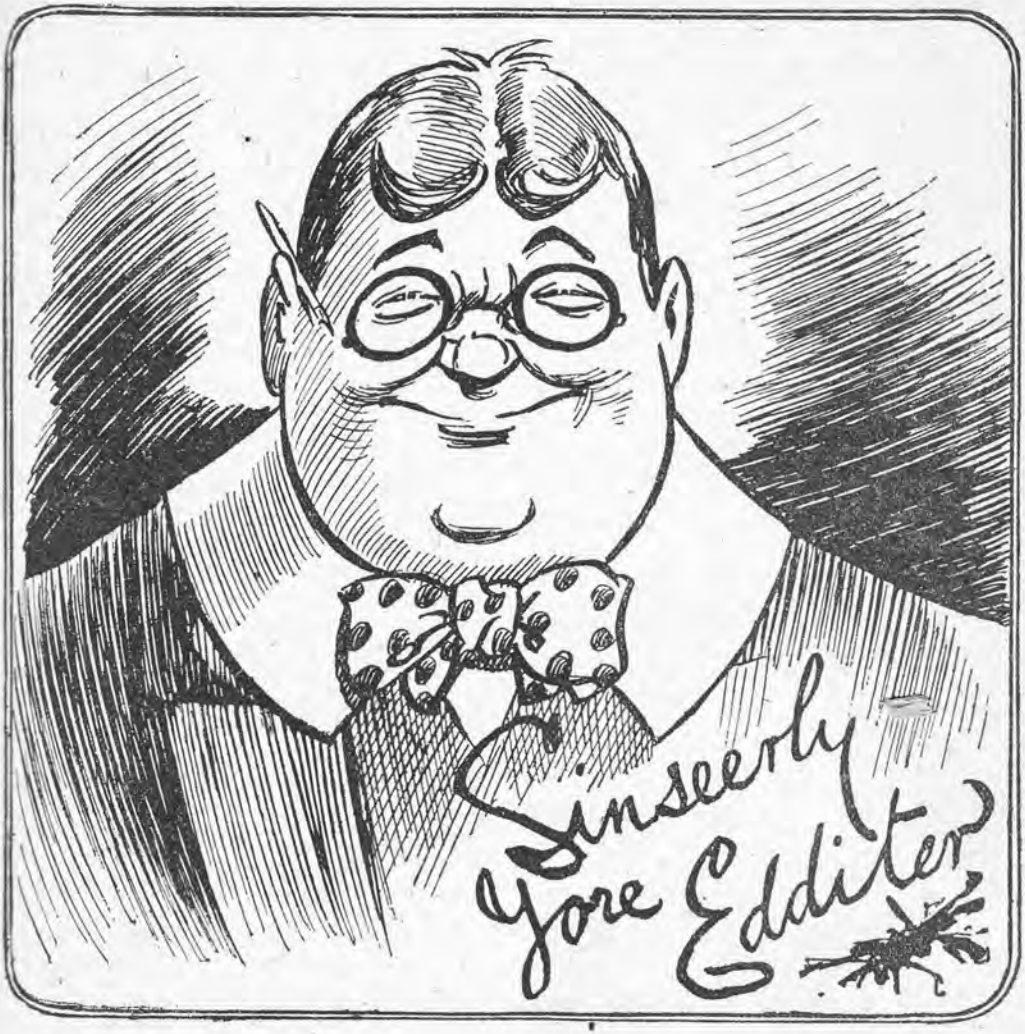
"The saints be thanked!" said Robin. "Another moment and this pretty poppet had shared the fate of her horse!" And, paying no heed to the riders behind him, he ran to a brook, that trickled out of the wood, and, laying the girl down on the crisp leaves, laved her face with water which he scooped up in the hollow of his hands.

The first to arrive was a soldierly-looking man of about fifty, wearing a white surcoat over his armour, on the breast of which was painted a black lion; and, reigning up beside him, he sprang from his saddle with a strange mixture of pious exclamation and Norman oath.

"Gramercy, good fellow!" he cried, sinking on one knee. "I thank thee from the bottom of my heart! Is the child hurt?"

"Nay, sir, I trow not," said Robin. "Methinks she is but affrighted, and even now her eyes begin to open."

PORTRAIT OF AN EDITOR!



The above "studio portrait" of the editor of "Billy Bunter's Weekly" is W. G. Bunter's favourite picture of himself. He says it's exactly like him—and he ought to know! He further declares that it is by a "grate artist," but it is strongly suspected that his young brother, Sammy Bunter, is responsible for it.

He rose slowly to his feet as the soldier took the slim figure in his arms.

It was easy to see that they were father and daughter, for the likeness between them was very strong. True, the man's hair was grizzled, what little could be seen where the line of chain-mail framed his strong face, but it had once been black as the two long plaits that fell about the child's shoulders.

"Father," she whispered, "he saved me!"

And she pointed to Robin, who had crossed his arms on his chest, and stood looking down on them with a strange smile.

"I know it, little one," he replied. "Thou hast my thanks and more, good varlet. What is thy name, and whose man art thou? Thou shalt learn that Alwyn FitzAlwyn is not ungrateful."

Robin started in spite of himself.

"Then, my lord, thou art the new Sheriff of Nottingham?" he said.

"You say truly," replied the soldier; "though but for your timely aid I had cursed the day the King conferred that honour upon me. Thy hand and thy name, good fellow?"

And their fingers closed in a firm clasp as Sir Alwyn's companions came riding up in great haste.

"They call me Martin of Ilkley," said the outlaw. "I am a herdman to whom my master hath given a holiday that I might shoot in a shaft yonder, having some skill with the bow."

"Then, Martin of Ilkley, thou shalt journey with us, and thou shalt carry back with thee a guerdon that shall make thee glad of this day. Come, chérie, thou must be content to ride behind me, and friend Martin shall show us the way to Nottingham. I doubt not even now the citizens are clamouring since we are over-late as it is."

Robin thrust his tongue in his cheek, made search for his bow, which he had flung aside, and then, with head bent and aspect of due humility, as became a poor man in the presence of the high and mighty sheriff, he set out with a long stride, thinking many things.

"Come hither, Martin of Ilkley!" said the sheriff. "I would fain have some speech with thee touching certain rogues who have their home in the forest. I have special mandate from our liege the King to hunt down Fitzooth, the outlaw, and I have sworn a solemn vow to do it. Tell me, what manner of man is he?"

"Nay, my lord," said Robin. "He differs not from most, seeing that he hath two legs, and a cool head on his shoulders. As for thy vow, 'tis said the late sheriff died of nothing less than a broken heart, for the outlaw bears a charmed life, and is slippery as an eel."

"Eel or no eel," said the sheriff sternly, "a vow is a vow, and the dogs shall see that Alwyn FitzAlwyn will keep it!"

"Who is Fitzooth, father," said the girl, who rode with her arms entwined in the sheriff's belt, "and what hath he done?"

"The man is a robber, sweetheart," replied FitzAlwyn, "who steals men's purses on the highway—a very rogue, for whom hanging is too good."

"And where doth he live?" said the little maid.

"He maketh his lair in the forest," said the sheriff, "shooting the King's deer for meat—but what is this? I see great concourse of horsemen, who, having espied us, are coming forward with music and banners waving."

"They be the mayor and aldermen, my lord, come to bid you welcome," said Robin, and he fell back a few paces, not wishing to attract the eyes of some among the wealthy merchants whose purses he had lightened more than once.

There was great braying of trumpets and doffing of caps, and the mayor, dismounting, kissed the stirrup of the King's officer in token of obedience, and then the two parties joined and rode forward to the town amid the shouts of the vast multitude that lined the road, all agape to see their new master.

At the first opportunity, Robin mingled with the crowd, and was joined by Will Scarlet and Little John, who, like himself, was clad in Coventry blue, and when Robin had told them of the adventure that had befallen him, the three companions fell to laughing heartily.

"'Tis one thing to make vows, and another to keep them," said Will Scarlet, "as Fitz Alwyn will find to his cost—but listen, Robin, we, too, have news, for scarce had we come

hither when we chanced upon the servant of the old Jew, Absolom, who told us that his master received a mysterious warning last night, bidding him not to stir forth to-day, if he values his life, and to see that his bolts and bars be well secured."

"Ho, ho, what means that, I wonder?" said Robin thoughtfully. "Absolom is a right worthy man. Is it possible that there will be a Jew-baiting to honour the coming of the new sheriff? To say truth, this FitzAlwyn pleases me, but he will be a hard opponent. Bid some of our lads keep watch from time to time on Master Absolom's dwelling, which is in the narrow lane leading from the market-place, and now let us mingle with the frolic. Gramercy! Look at poor Friar Tuck; 'tis a judgment on his fat sides that an old wife's kirtle and hood is the only disguise that will hide him from his enemies!"

It was a motley throng that had assembled to take its simple pleasures and its rough-and-tumble frolic in that broad meadow by the swift Trent.

Merchant and trader, weaver and butcher, master-man and apprentice jostled each other good-humouredly under the blue sky, and through the throng stole the little lad Edgar, his eyes wide open with delight, and the half eaten crust still tightly gripped in his hand.

True, from time to time he kept a wary eye for sight of Dame Algitha, who, arrayed in a kirtle of Kendal green, had adorned herself with bunches of bright yellow ribbon, so that she looked for all the world like a bad bilious attack out for a holiday.

And now Sir Alwyn FitzAlwyn rode on to the ground attended by his retinue of sturdy men-at-arms and the principal burgesses of the town, and dismounting from his horse, he seated himself upon a low platform that had been erected, draped with cloth of crimson, his little daughter, who had recovered from her fright of the morning, sitting on a cushion by his side.

"Now, Master Herald," cried the new sheriff, as two men deposited a heavy sack at his feet, "let your trumpets sound, these gallant knights are dying to break a lance in the gentle joust, and these good citizens and their buxom dames would fain be merry, I trow; so fall to it, and may nothing mar our happiness to-day!"

"I am Robin Hood, the Outlaw, my lord, and methinks that Alwyn FitzAlwyn is not like to forget our meeting!" (See page 42.)

He passed his arm round his little daughter as he spoke, and as she nestled close to her father's side, FitzAlwyn gained golden opinions from the onlookers.

"La-la!" cried one motherly dame, clapping her fat hands. "Look how he loveth the sweet maid! Like any ordinary father of a child! He hath a tender heart, for certain!"

" And a strong hand, I warrant me," said her husband, who was a flesher from the market. " Methinks 'twill go hard with poor Robin Goodfellow now."

A hand squeezed the man's arm, and, looking up, the sturdy butcher started.

" Hush, friend Nicholas, not a word ! " said a tall man in Coventry blue, with his forefinger raised to his lips. " Robin Goodfellow hath a way of taking care of himself ! "

" Ay ! " said the butcher, with a gleam of gratitude in his eyes. " And of poor folk, too ! Never shall I forget, Robin, how thou didst befriend me——"

He did not finish the sentence, for the man in Coventry blue was already working his way through the throng, followed by two others, and a little ragged boy, who had been fascinated by the tall stature and manly bearing of the disguised outlaws, and had attached himself to them at a respectful distance.

" The plague on thee ! " snapped Master Nicholas, the butcher, as an enormous woman jostled by him. " Have a look where thou goest, mother ! "

The stout woman turned her huge frying-pan face upon him for an instant, and gave him a wink which made the honest man gasp with astonishment, for he recognised Friar Tuck in spite of the wimple and hood that hid as much of his features as any wimple and hood might.

" Out upon it ! " muttered Master Nicholas to himself, as his own stout dame looked daggers after the retreating " giantess." " So the rogues are here. Gadzooks ! I trust the day will pass without bloodshed ! "

The trumpets were sounding now, and then the town herald, in a brand new tabard, proclaimed a solemn joust, and, amid great acclamation from the spectators, half a dozen mounted knights rode their horses toward Sir Alwyn's post of vantage.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

How Thomas the Dog repented him in the Morning, and Martin of Ilkley shot a Good Shoot.

Now, Thomas the Dog missed the jousting of the knights for a very good reason, having other fish to fry. To say the truth, when morning dawned, the spy began to bitterly repent that tampering with the sack of silver over-night, and he and his wife almost came to blows about the matter.

The nearer drew the time for the coming of the new sheriff, the more anxious became Thomas the Dog, for, so well hated was he in the old household, that he was very desirous to curry favour with Sir Alwyn FitzAlwyn before anyone could put a spoke in his wheel.

He breakfasted at daybreak, and his first act was to summon a brace of servitors to carry the sack into the seneschal's room, where he delivered it over with a sigh of relief.

Still, he was far from happy in his mind, and he hung about the gate, turning over how best to destroy all trace of the theft, and how to perform some deed that should bring him prominently before the sheriff's eye.

" Ha, fool that I am ! " he exclaimed at last. " There is only one thing for it—the Jew must die—Black Wynkyn is the man to my hand, and after that, why, if the outlaws come to the sports in the great meadow, I may lay grip on Robin Hood himself, if I am in luck, and here be I letting the moments slip away—ass, dolt, pig ! "

I know not how many more choice epithets he would have bestowed on himself—all of them very well deserved, by the way—for at that moment he chanced to see the very man he wanted, crossing the narrow street beyond the gate, and giving a peculiar whistle, he lounged carelessly forth, having marked that Black Wynkyn had heard and understood the signal.

There was no rascality under the sun at which Black Wynkyn would hesitate, and as Thomas the Dog had put many a silver mark in his pouch, he was his to command, body and soul.

At a bend in the lane stood a little ale-house, and Black Wynkyn went straight towards it without looking to right or left.

As his tall figure darkened the doorway, the landlord reached to the wall for a cross-bow that hung there, meaning to use it, too ; but behind him came the spy, and at sight of him mine host paused.

" Ale," said Thomas the Dog ; and without

so much as a second glance at him, he led the way into the fenced garden behind the inn.

"What want you?" said Black Wynkyn, tapping his whittle significantly.

"The life of Absolom, the usurer, and that soon!" replied the spy. "He must die ere he can have speech with FitzAlwyn, or 'twill spoil all."

"Who hath Absolom in the house with him?" questioned the ruffian.

"His brother Jacob, whom those accursed outlaws helped to flee from London a year agone, Jacob's daughter, Miriam, and one serving-maid," said Thomas the Dog.

Black Wynkyn drank his ale slowly, wiped his mouth on the back of his dirty hand, and nodded.

"Go thy way, Thomas," he said, "and leave everything to me. But hold! One word. These Jews are passing rich, unless report lies. What I find I shall keep. Is it a bargain?"

Thomas the Dog started and ground his fangs. In his anxiety to remove all traces of his evil-doing of the previous night, he had overlooked the possibilities of plunder at the Jew's house, and for the moment he was greatly tempted to make one of the party.

A blare of trumpets, however, recalled him to the fact that the new sheriff was even then approaching, and, knowing that he must not be seen in the affair, he waved his arm with a despairing gesture of assent, and hurried away.

Before Black Wynkyn had entered the inn, however, the spy was back again.

"I have bethought me," he said, in a low voice. "How thou can come at the Jew's house without raising an alarm. Follow me to the porter's lodge and wait outside. I will give thee a coat of the sheriff's livery and a roll of parchment too large to pass through Absolom's grille."

"'Tis a good thought," said Black Wynkyn, "but be speedy about it."

The spy hurried off, and the ruffian, sauntering slowly up the street, now almost emptied of the crowd that had made its way to the meadow, saw a bundle flung through the archway, which bundle he pounced upon and carried off to his own lair.

. . . . . .

Thomas the Dog reached the meadow as the last pair of knights ran their course under the eye of the new sheriff.

He was just in time to see the flash of steel on either side the crimson barrier, and to witness the splintering of the blunt lances.

As he wormed his way into the crowd, a deafening shout of applause went up to the skies, and as FitzAlwyn looked round the sea of faces and the forest of waving arms, his gaze fell on the blue jerkin of his acquaintance of the morning, "Martin of Ilkley," who was standing a few yards away.

Their eyes met, and the sheriff beckoned Martin to approach.

"Ho, there, my bold bowman!" he cried. "Come hither, and we will make a match wherein thou shalt try the skill with the long-bow of which thou spake."

Robin's face flushed scarlet under his hood, for, to tell the truth, he had not wished to attract the sheriff's attention so early in the day.

As for the promised guerdon, he had no thought of that, nor could he guess the reward he was destined to receive from FitzAlwyn's hands ere long.

"Keep watch," whispered Robin to Allan-a-Dale. "Methought I saw the ill visage of Thomas the Dog hard by yonder men-at-arms." And, obedient to FitzAlywn's request, Robin strode fearlessly forward through the crowd, which opened to let him pass.

"Now, worthy citizens," said the sheriff, who was in the mind to win the favour of the men he had come to rule, "here stands Martin of Ilkley, who hath done me a greater service to-day than any of you know. Yonder I see set up a fair mark, and Martin of Ilkley shall be my champion. Stand forth all you knights of the bow-string, and for every arrow in the butt's eye will I give a silver penny."

Among the forty or fifty archers who sprang forward to try their skill, the foremost was a stalwart man-at-arms from the sheriff's own bodyguard, and as if by common consent, he and Robin stood side by side, and looked at one another.

Then they compared their bows, which were both made of English yew, each one the height of its owner.

Robin drew three arrows from this quiver and thrust them into his girdle, the man-at-arms doing the same, and then they spun a coin as to who should shoot first.

"'Tis a long range," said Robin, as he won the toss—"nine score yards if it is an ell."

"Ten score would not daunt me," said the man-at-arms, with a smile of superiority.

"That we shall soon see," laughed Robin. "Now for it."

He took up his position, standing fair and upright with his legs stretched apart, and drawing the grey goose feather to the tip of his ear, let fly the first shot.

"A hit, a hit!" cried the crowd; but the man-at-arms smiled triumphantly, for Martin's arrow, while it had struck the butt, had pierced it a few inches below the centre.

"'Tis my turn now," said his opponent; and, drawing quickly, he penetrated the centre of the target.

"Good for you," said Robin; and, discharging again, he this time planted his arrow as far above the mark as his first shot had been beneath it.

"I win!" cried the man-at-arms.

"Unless, perchance," said Master Martin of Ilkley, "thou will concede me another shot?"

Cocksure of his own skill, the man-at-arms made a gesture with his hand, and stepped aside; and Robin, scarce seeming to take aim at all, let fly a third shaft.

His arrow struck that of the man-at-arms straight on the notch, and, splitting it in twain so that it fell in two halves, remained quivering in the exact centre of the white mark!

The onlookers raised a lusty shout, the sheriff's little daughter clapped her hands with glee.

"Not so fast, Master Bluecoat!" cried the man-at-arms. "I did give thee one more shot, now thou must give me this much grace. Step back with me a good twenty paces, for I am best of all at a long flight."

"Right willingly," said Robin, disregarding the warning glance that Will Scarlet and Little John threw at him.

The crowd moved aside, and, carefully measuring out the distance, the two opponents once more stood side by side.

"Now shoot ye first, my friend," said Robin. And the man-at-arms' arrow again pierced the centre of the target.

Twang! went Robin's bow-string, his shaft lodging beside his adversary's.

"Then black death seize thee!" exclaimed the soldier angrily. "Now what say ye to this?" And his arrow flew far beyond the butt, so that men who did measure the distance proclaimed it eleven score and two yards—a right mighty shoot.

When, however, the triumphant soldier turned with a laugh to look for his opponent, Martin of Ilkley was nowhere to be seen.

At the same moment Will Scarlet, Alan-a-Dale, and Little John had also moved quietly away and disappeared in the crowd, for secret word had come to them that they were badly wanted elsewhere.

"How now, my doughty champion?" cried FitzAlwyn, rising to his feet, and looking round. "Where is the rogue?"

But though the herald called aloud, and everybody clamoured for the archer in the blue jerkin, he was gone, and the sheriff frowned with evident annoyance.

"Well, well, my lusty man-at-arms," said he, "think not I grudge thee the prize, you won it worthily; yet am I sore displeased with Martin of Ilkley that he has not assayed a parting shot. Now, good fellows"—and, drawing a jewelled dagger, he cut the cord that bound the mouth of the sack—"here is largesse for thee!"

And, plunging both hands deep into the sack, FitzAlwyn flung their contents among the expectant crowd.

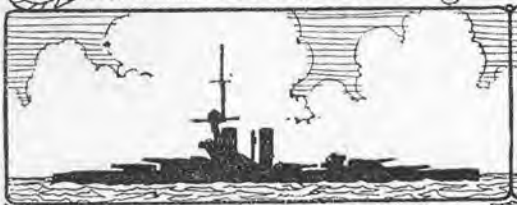
"Gadzooks! Oddslife! How now! Marry a plague on you, master, that playeth a rough jest! My mouth is full of dirt!" spluttered a stout citizen.

"And I have a stone in my eye, pardie!" cried another. And from all sides an angry murmur rose, stifling the smothered laughter that some of them had set up.

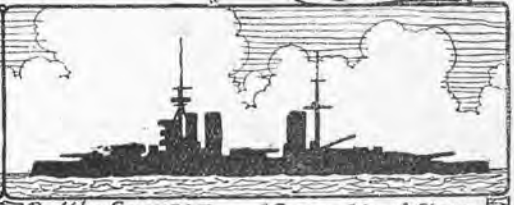
Thomas the Dog, wedged tightly in among the men-at-arms, caught his breath and held it. The terrible moment had come, and a quiver ran through his limbs.

The sheriff himself had discovered that something was wrong, and, looking first at his hands, bent down to examine the sack,

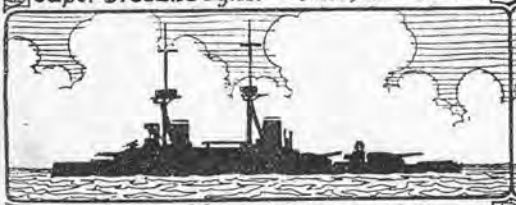
Can You Identify a Warship at Sea?



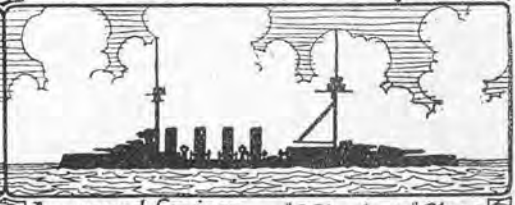
Super-Dreadnought. "Iron Duke" Class.



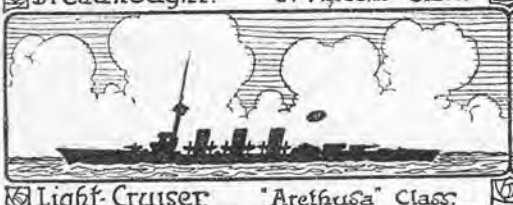
Battle-Cruiser. "Queen Mary" Class.



Dreadnought. "St. Vincent" Class.



Armoured-Cruiser. "Minotaur" Class.



Light-Cruiser. "Arethusa" Class.

Torpedo-Boat-Destroyer. "Swift" Class.

Torpedo-Boat.

Monitor. "Mersey" Type.

Torpedo-Gunboat.

If you see a warship in the distance, can you tell what it is? It is fairly easy to pick out warships from merchant vessels or liners, but not so simple to identify one type of warship from another. The silhouettes on this page illustrate the chief characteristics of the most important vessels in the British Navy. It will be seen that the Super-Dreadnought has one mast only, and two funnels behind the mast, whereas the Battle-Cruiser has two masts with three funnels between, and so on. The Armoured-Cruiser shown has four funnels, although many have only three. But, of course, the type is quite distinctive, and it is impossible to confuse a Cruiser with a Dreadnought. Then again, many Light-Cruisers (notably the "TOWN" class) have four funnels, although the one illustrated has only three. Monitors (of which the "Mersey" type is shown) are chiefly notable for their light draft and big guns. They played a most important part on the Flanders coast during the Great War.

Gunboats and Torpedo-Gunboats are craft of light tonnage, and as a class have been superseded by the Light-Cruiser and Destroyer. They are mainly employed now on fisheries protection, patrol and surveying.

There are, of course, many other types of ships in the Navy, such as Repair Ships, Submarines, Depot Ships, Seaplane Carriers, etc., but the above silhouettes represent the warships most commonly seen around the coast.

his handsome face glowing a dull crimson as he did so.

"By my sword, what knavery is this!" he thundered, as his eye caught the glitter of silver coins mixed up with earth and ashes.

"Ho, there, Master Seneschal, stand forth! What means this thing, I say?"

A dead silence fell upon the crowd, for everyone saw that something was amiss. Of the two handfuls that their lord had scattered among them, five silver coins alone had rewarded their greedy scramble. As for the rest, you know what it was!

The seneschal, a grave man who had grown white in the service of the late sheriff, came forward with a face of bewilderment.

He bent low and examined the two seals of yellow wax that had been affixed to the cord, and saw that they were perfect.

"In truth, it is a mystery beyond my solving," he muttered. "Ho, there, Thomas Needham, if thou art within earshot, stand forth!"

Master Needham, better known to our readers by the nickname that fitted his countenance so well, struggled out of the press of the men-at-arms and doffed his cap humbly.

"I am here, Master Gregory," said the spy. "What would'st thou have with me?"

The seneschal took him by the wrist, jerked him up the two shallow steps that led to the platform, and pointed to the sack.

It had come at last, and Thomas the Dog saw his way out of the difficulty.

"Gramercy!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands and regarding the spectacle with a look of horror. "This is the Jew's work! I swear no hand hath touched it since thou sentest me yestereve with Sir Alwyn's bond!"

"For which you took his true receipt, varlet," demanded FitzAlwyn, "and that after duly seeing the pieces counted?"

"Alack, no, my lord," said Thomas the Dog, cringing before his master. "'Twas ready wrapped and sealed when I reached the usurer's house, and the time being so short, I bade the men bring it straightway thence, having no thought that the old rascal would dare play falsely with the King's officer."

"Who is this man?" said FitzAlwyn sternly, with a contemptuous gesture of his mail-clad arm in the direction of the spy, whose face pleased him not.

"One who served our late lord with some zeal," replied the seneschal.

"More zeal than discretion, if one may judge from results," said a mocking voice, whose owner was not seen.

Whereupon Thomas the Dog, casting a furious glance in the direction of the unknown speaker, fell into a mighty rage, and, holding up his hands, protested that he had suffered stripes, and risked his neck on twenty different occasions, and offered very valiantly to do battle with whoever should gainsay him.

"Methinks he speaks truly, my lord," said the seneschal, in a low voice. "I did dispatch him as one who might be trusted, and by all the saints, I swear that this is what he delivered into my hands."

It wanted but a word in those dark ages to turn the tide against the Israelites, whose thrift and fine business qualities brought them riches, and immediately a great shout rose up:

"Death to the Jews! Will my lord let this pass unpunished?"

"That will I not!" said the stern Norman. "Bring this fellow before me without loss of time!"

"I fear me, lord," said the seneschal, "an thou leavest it to the common folk, they will bring the Jew in little pieces."

"True," said FitzAlwyn. "My horse there! Keep back the crowd, soldiers, and do thou lead me to the Jew's house."

Thomas the Dog, raising his hands in an ecstasy of delight at the success of his stratagem, seized the sheriff's bridle as he mounted, and shouting lustily:

"Room for the noble FitzAlwyn, Lord High Sheriff of Nottingham! Back, base varlets! Back, ye mangy curs!" sped beside the horse as fast as his long legs could carry him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Sheriff and a Man.

THE house of Absolom, of Nottingham, was situated in a narrow, winding lane of dwellings hard by the market-place.

It was built round a paved courtyard,

along whose sides ran a carved gallery on the first floor, not unlike some of the old coaching inns that one may still see in country places.

A low, arched doorway communicated with the street—a door strong as a castle gate, with a small grating in the postern wicket, through which you could scarce thrust your little finger, much less a pike-head or a sword-point; and upon that wicket Black Wynkyn, in a tabard of the sheriff's livery, knocked loudly.

Not content with this, he seized a wrought-iron handle that dangled in the corner, and, in response to a violent tug, there came the muffled sound of a bell somewhere in the interior of the house.

"Stand back well out of sight," he said in a low voice. And the four ragged ruffians who had come at his bidding glued themselves to the wall, and waited.

Presently the iron panel behind the grating slid noiselessly back, and a pair of dark eyes regarded Black Wynkyn intently.

He had put on an iron headpiece that hid his features, and that, together with the tabard and the brown bill in his hand, gave him quite an official appearance.

Through the corner of his eye Black Wynkyn had seen the panel open, but for the moment he stood there drumming impatiently upon the ground with his foot.

"Now, the plague on these folk!" he muttered, loud enough for the watcher to hear. "And all the folk at the sports, too, while I am kept cooling my heels!"

"What is thine errand, friend?" said a solemn voice from behind the grating. "Far be it from me to keep thee from thy frolics."

"Gramercy!" said the ruffian, affecting to start. "If thou be Master Absolom the Jew, then thou art he I seek. My master, Sir Alwyn FitzAlwyn, hath dispatched me with this scroll, which I am charged to deliver into thy keeping." The villain lifted his hand and showed a long roll of parchment, tightly tied with a ribbon. "Unbar the grating, Jew, and I will pass it in to thee."

"Nay, my friend," replied the old usurer; "I must fain unhook the door itself. Yet I marvel what my lord, the sheriff, can want with me further."

For an instant he pressed his face against the grille of bars, but saw only one man, and, deceived by the livery coat he wore, Absolom drew back the bolts that secured the wicket.

The little door, clamped on the inside with iron until it was well-nigh a foot thick, opened just wide enough for the passage of a thin hand that protruded from the sleeve of a yellow gabardine, and then the supposed messenger gave a low whistle, and, seizing the wrist, flung himself against the door, only to find it held by a strong chain.

"Quick, Tancred, your axe!" said Black Wynkyn. And, drawing aside, still keeping tight hold of the wretched man's hand, he allowed room for another ruffian to deal a heavy blow upon the chain—a blow that snapped the links asunder, and let them all tumble in with a rush.

It was done in an instant, and the house of Absolom the Jew was at the mercy of men who knew not what mercy meant.

Tancred raised his long whittle, and the life of the old man with the fine features and patriarchal beard that reached to his girdle trembled in the balance.

"Put up your knife, fool!" thundered Black Wynkyn. "The old man shall show us where his treasures lie hid, before we slay him." And, still grasping him by throat and wrist, the leader of the ruffians pushed the usurer before him, the other four following until they reached the courtyard at the other end of the passage, leaving the wicket ajar in their haste.

The passage had been dark, and they blinked with astonishment as they came into the full blaze of the sunlight, for the courtyard was open to the sky.

Flowers grew in profusion in pots of curious workmanship brought by traders from across the seas, and hangings of rich colour, adorned with glistening threads of gold, draped the carved galleries here and there.

At the sound of coarse laughter that welled up from the courtyard, a door on the gallery opened, and from the room where she had been attending her sick grandfather, Miriam, the dark-eyed Jewish girl, whom our old friend Dick Quintain had rescued in London Town, glided out with questioning in her face, and, looking down, started back in

horror, clutching at her own throat lest she should scream aloud.

One glance was enough to tell her all she needed, and, slipping back, she approached the couch on which old Jacob lay.

Her first impulse was to tell him all; but what could that frail old man do against the five ruffians in the courtyard below?

Her second thought was best, and hastening, lest the ribald laughter should reach his ears, she bent down and whispered:

"Grandfather, I am going down to the well, and shall not be long; lie still until I return to thee." And, smoothing the old man's pillow, she glided from the room, locked the door noiselessly on the outside, and, slipping the key in her girdle, crept along the gallery behind the hangings until she had gained a stair that led into the interior of the house.

Unknown to the ruffians, as, indeed, it was the Israelites' nearest neighbours, there was another exit from the house of Absolom the Jew, a small door that folk imagined was part of the house of Master Nicholas, the butcher.

Master Nicholas kept the secret well. He could afford to be silent when twenty golden marks were paid him every year to hold his tongue!

Once outside, Miriam ran like the wind; over the empty market-place, down the winding streets, past the gateway of the sheriff's house, and so into the meadow by the river, where all the citizens were shouting at the success of Robin's third arrow.

On the outskirts of the throng she stopped, and her wildly beating heart turned cold.

Who should she ask to help her? The Jews were a despised race, and the citizens were more than likely to side with the robbers in those dark times.

Then, on a sudden, her roving eye lighted on a woman of such gigantic proportions as to stand a good head above the rest of her folk.

As luck would have it, the giantess had raised herself on tiptoe, the better to see what was going on forward, and, catching sight of the massive profile beneath the hood of Kendal green, the Jewess recognised Friar Tuck, and clasped her hands in a prayer of thankfulness.

"Pardie, thou malapert!" exclaimed the friar, suddenly looking down and grasping his kirtle with his leg-of-mutton fist. "Art after my purse?" Then he stopped short, and, bending down, his face changed as the terrified girl clung to him and whispered in his ear:

"Await us at the market-place," he said quickly. "By my halidom, we are well met, pretty Miriam!"

A mysterious word passed to a man in blue, and was passed on to a minstrel gay in red and yellow motley, who in turn whispered again to his neighbour, and so on, and so on; and so keen was the excitement of the crowd as the sheriff's man-at-arms drew his bow for the long shot, that none noticed how here and there a man disengaged himself and sped away through the willows towards the town.

One pair of eyes alone witnessed that strange departure, and those were in the head of the little ragged boy, Edgar, who had kept very close to Robin all the while.

He was too small and insignificant to attract the attention even of the outlaws, and he reached the market-place in time to see a slim figure, whom he recognised as Miriam the Jewess, set open a door in the wall of Master Nicholas's shop.

In a moment they had glided in, the archers in blue, and the countrymen in hodden grey, the red and yellow mountebank, and, most surprising of all, a huge female who, gathering up her skirts, betrayed a pair of the most unfeminine ankles that surely ever crossed Nottingham market-place.

They left the door ajar, and curiosity burned strongly in the breast of the little waif.

He was afraid of nothing, but his cruel aunt, and, somehow, those archers in blue had seemed so big and kindly, and one had patted him on his brown curls.

Edgar went in.

The passage was dark and narrow; steps succeeded steps, and making no more noise than a mouse, the boy mounted them, and came so suddenly into the daylight that he stopped, wondering.

Before him was a rich tapestry of crimson and gold, hung over the edge of the carved railing. He had never seen anything so

ROBIN HOOD SCORES A BULLSEYE!

gorgeous in his life, but as he looked at it a shout of terror filled the air, and, running forward, he peered through the balusters, and saw a sight that made his blood grow cold.

An old man with a white beard knelt with his hands raised to Heaven, but it was not Absolom the Jew who had screamed, for, round the courtyard, vainly endeavouring to escape from the trap that enclosed them, sped Black Wynkyn and four other men, whom he knew by sight as bad characters in the town.

With a low cry of vengeance there had darted out of the shadow of the gallery those men in blue and brown and hodden-grey, and four of the ruffians were speedily overtaken and dispatched; but Black Wynkyn spied a staircase in one corner, up which he bounded five steps at a time, with all the pack after him, save one, "Martin of Ilkley," the archer who had shot shaft for shaft with the sheriff's man-at-arms.

He bent beside the old man, and raised him up, but Edgar shrank into the folds of the tapestry as Black Wynkyn came tearing along the gallery, green with terror.

Edgar was so frightened that he did not venture to peep forth until a hideous yell echoed through the courtyard. They had caught the ruffian, and flung him over the gallery on to the stone pavement below, where he alighted on his head, dead as a door-nail.

A cheer burst from the lips of the men who had pursued him, and one and all they leaned their arms upon the balustrade and looked down at their leader.

"Well done, lads!" cried the tall archer, his bronzed face all alive with laughter as he looked up at them. But, stopping in the midst of his speech, he started round, made a warning gesture to those in the gallery, and clapped his hand on the sheaf of arrows at his side.

Into the courtyard, their coming deadened by the outlaws' cheer, strode a posse of armed men, and foremost among them Sir Alwyn FitzAlwyn, the new sheriff.

"By St. Hubert!" cried the knight, knitting his brows, and pausing in astonishment as he recognised the archer, and at the same time saw the dead robbers strewn about the court.

"Now what in Heaven's name is this? And what do you here, Martin of Ilkley?" demanded the sheriff.

"You may well ask, my lord," said the archer, with a grave smile. "There had been murder done had I not come in the nick of time."

"Methinks there hath been murder done," said the sheriff. "Who are these men?" And he turned to the old seneschal, who had been looking at the faces of the five ruffians.

"Rogues that the town is well rid of, my lord," replied the seneschal.

"That we will inquire into anon," said FitzAlwyn. "This, from his appearance, should be Absolom the Jew."

"The greatest liar in Nottingham, my lord!" cried Thomas the Dog.

"Face against face I had given thee the palm!" said FitzAlwyn drily. "But tell me, Jew, thou hast my bond for three thousand silver marks?"

"My lord, it is true," said the old man, looking at the sheriff with quiet dignity. "And that sum did I count out in the presence of your servant here last night, who did give me also his receipt for the same."

"Dog of a Jew!" yelled the spy, starting forward to clutch him by the beard. "The sack was ready sealed, and proves half full of sand and stone!"

The tall archer in blue, who had stood immovable, interposed his arm between the spy and the old man.

"Not so fast, Thomas the Dog," said he. "The chances are that the stones and sand were of your own putting!"

"Ay, marry that were they!" piped a childish voice that turned every face to the gallery up above them. "I watched him and my Aunt Algitha take out three handfuls of silver pieces and sew the bag up again!"

"By my halidom!" said the sheriff, turning from one to another, "methinks there are some strange folk in this town of Nottingham!"

Then Thomas the Dog played his last card.

"My lord," he cried, pointing to the blue archer, "thou sayest truly indeed, and there

stands the strangest of all, for Martin of Ilkley is a false name, and that man is Robin Hood the Outlaw!"

"It has taken thee a long time to discover that fact," said Robin, with a smile; "but for once in thy life, thou craven, cringing hound, thou hast spoken truth! I am Robin Hood, the Outlaw; my lord, but methinks that Alwyn FitzAlwyn is not like to forget our meeting."

FitzAlwyn's hand fell away from his sword, and his broad chest heaved under the white surcoat with its black painted lion.

He saw only the man who had saved his child, and the Norman's heart was sore torn betwixt gratitude and duty.

They stood looking into each other's eyes amid a dead silence for some moments, only Robin Hood knowing that forty bows were bent in the gallery above, ready to avenge him at the first sign of his attempted capture.

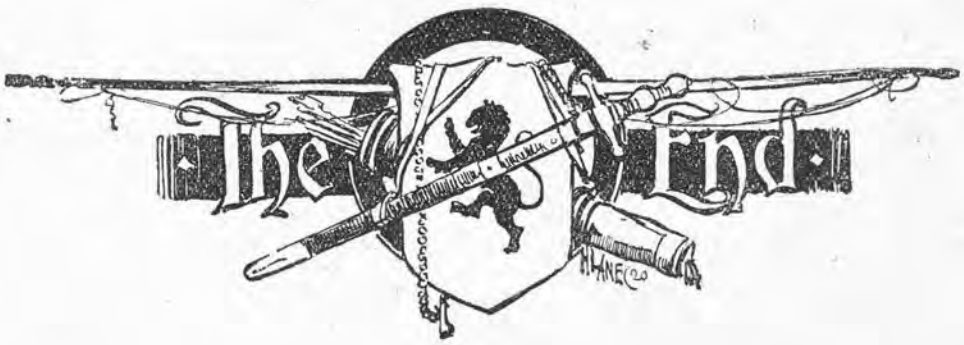
Then Sir Alwyn spoke, and his words rang clear as a bell through the sunlit courtyard.

"People of Nottingham," said he, "hearken. In one short twelve-month the plague has robbed me of all I held most dear—my lady and three sons, leaving me only my little daughter, Editha, whom that man saved this morning from certain death. Go, Robin Hood, back to your greenwood lair unscathed for once. Thou art a man whom I had been proud to call friend had not Fate and the laws made me your enemy. Think not again to meet with mercy if you fall into my hands, but to-day thou art free."

"My lord," cried Robin Hood, springing up the steps into the gallery, and appearing in the sunlight above them, "ere I go, forgive me if I settle one account which has been far too long outstanding." He made a sign with his hand, and the outlaws, unseen by their enemies, glided away out of the gallery, and left him standing there.

A pitiful squeal rang out as Robin fitted an arrow to his bow and drew the shaft to the tip of his right ear.

"Thou hast done too much mischief in thy evil life, Thomas, well named the Dog!" he said bitterly. And as the miserable coward leapt his length in the air in a frantic attempt to gain the safety of a pillow, the bow twanged out, and the shaft found a deadly target between his shoulder-blades.

"Oh, take me with you, Robin!" cried a childish voice, as Robin turned to go. And, looking down, he saw Edgar the Waif.

"Come then, child," said Robin, picking him up and sitting him on his shoulder. And, passing through the secret way, the outlaw and the boy disappeared in the direction of Sherwood Forest.