CORNCRAKE

JULY 2025
ISSUE 17

TDJ Snelling
AR Duncan
AR Green

William Morris
Nathan C J Hood
Edmund Spencer
Walter de la Mare
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

NESTING IN THE OAK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

Nathan Hood hosts The Merry Corncrakes Podcast

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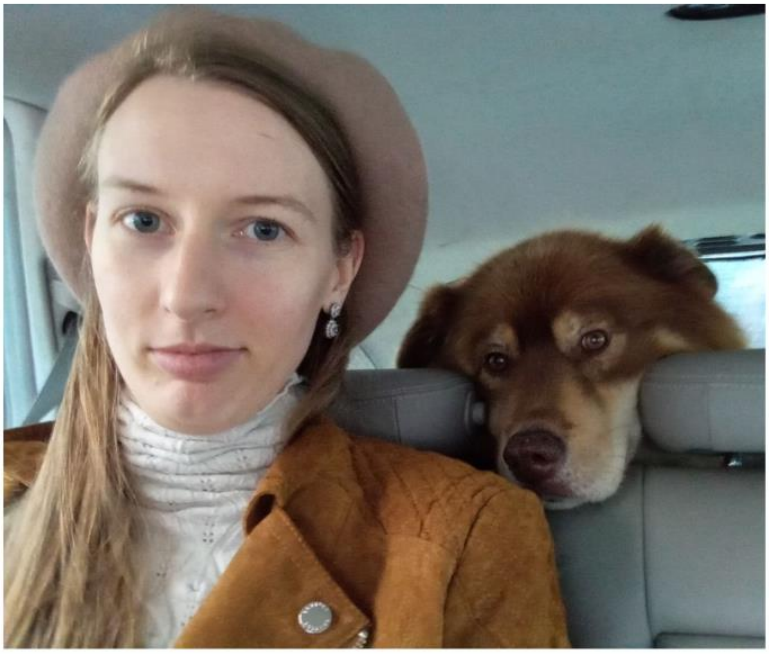
ISSUE 17

“Not the bee upon the blossom,
In the pride o' sunny noon;
Not the little sporting fairy,
All beneath the simmer moon;
Not the poet, in the moment
Fancy lightens in his e'e,
Kens the pleasure, feels the rapture,
That thy presence gi'es to me.”
— Robert Burns



Editor’s Note

Greetings, Kentish folk and others. Our county of the month is Kent, so we shall have the magnificent opportunity to look upon the flag of Kent. But first, my face.

In July we celebrate Boadicea, famous for chariot spiking and roman bashing. My good self has prepared a piece on St Swithin, the saint who messes with the weather.

TDJ Snellling is a young poet dipping his toes into the pool of public approbation. William Morris, well known for his patterns, was better known as poet back in his day, both his art and poetry is here for your perusal. To all this we add a piece or two by Walter de la Mare.

AR Duncan is back with part 7 of *Eagles Flight*, this eagle will not stop. AR Green too is battling on with his story of war and knights.

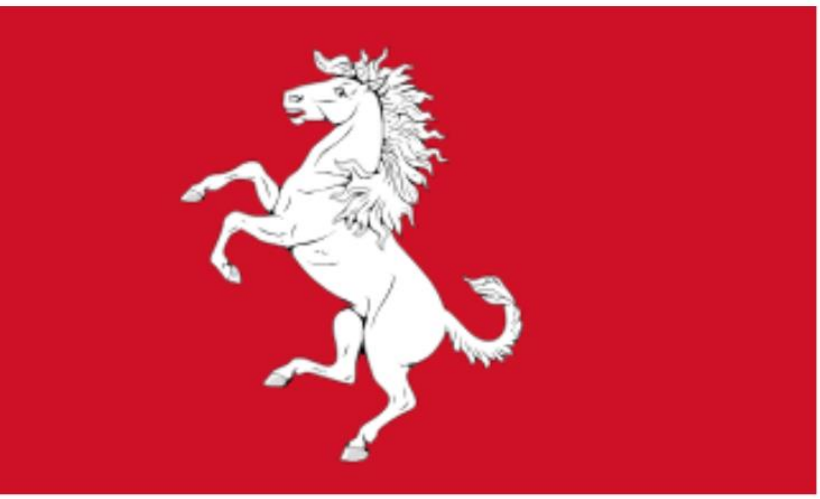
An introduction to Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* has been specially prepared by Nathan CJ Hood, along with a selection of the poem.

How Robin Hood Came to be an Outlaw by Howard Pyle. I’m not telling you how, you have to read it. *The Reigate Squires* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle brings us some Sherlock. Joseph Jacobs provides us a fairy tale *The History of Tom Thumb*.

Call of the Shieldmaiden
Editor-in-Chief

KENT

A county more full of history than any other. The famous White Cliffs look out over the Straits of Dover, just 22 miles from the French coast. Kent is therefore the land which has greeted visitors for millennia, whether in war or in peace. Kent's name is also the oldest. It derives from the Cantii, an ancient British tribe known to the Romans long before Caesar. Kent was a British kingdom before the Romans came and after them it soon became a Jutish kingdom. The county is known as the "Garden of England" for the richness and variety of its arable farming. Hop growing has been the traditional major agriculture of Kent, as the oast houses found throughout the county testify. In contrast, there was once coal mining in the east of the county. Greenwich, home of the Greenwich observatory, the crosshairs of whose telescope define the prime meridian of the world. Until recently Greenwich was the home of the Royal Naval College (still a magnificent building) and its naval heritage is strong. Rural Kent holds a great variety of landscape, from the North Downs, to the delightful Weald, down to the fertile solitudes of Romney, Denge, and Walland Marshes stretching inland from the south coast, and the Isle of Thanet in the northeast. Kent has numerous noteworthy castles, and more modern defensive works along the coast facing Europe. The Cathedral City of Canterbury, whose name means 'town of the men of Kent' is where St Augustine established himself in 597, and is the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primate of All England. Towns are Maidstone, Bromley, Canterbury, Chatham, Dover, Folkestone, Greenwich, Lewisham, Maidstone, Orpington, Ramsgate, Rochester, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Whitstable, Woolwich. Rivers are Darent, Medway, Great Stour, Little Stour.



The ancient symbol of Kent is the white horse: displayed as gules a horse rampant argent, and this has in latter days formed the county flag. The traditional badge of Kent is supposedly based on that of Hengest and Horsa, the two Jutish brothers who founded the Kingdom of Kent in. The names "Hengest" and "Horsa" both mean "stallion". Some say that the white horse was an emblem known in the days of the Kings of Kent, and others that it was a heraldic fancy of the sixteenth century.

Dates of Importance

1st July. St. Oliver Plunkett was the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland and the last victim of the Popish Plot. He was beatified in 1920 and canonized in 1975, becoming the first new Irish saint in almost seven hundred years.1 He was born on 1 November 1625 in Loughcrew, County Meath, Ireland, to well-to-do parents with Hiberno-Norman ancestors. St. Oliver Plunkett's relevance to England is primarily historical, as he was executed in England in 1681 and his martyrdom is part of the history of anti-Catholic persecution in England during the 17th century. His legacy is remembered in various places in England, including the Church of Our Lady St Mary of Glastonbury, Somerset, which contains relics from him.

11th July. Saint Benedict, also known as Saint Benedict of Nursia, was a Christian monk born in 480 AD in Nursia, now known as Norcia, in Umbria, Italy. He is renowned for founding twelve communities for monks at Subiaco and later establishing the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino, where he wrote the "Rule of Saint Benedict," a set of guidelines for monastic life that became influential throughout Western Christendom. The Rule emphasized balance, moderation, and reasonableness, and it shaped the development of Western monasticism. Saint Benedict is considered the founder of Western Christian monasticism and is revered in the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Churches, the Anglican Communion, and Old Catholic Churches. He was declared a patron saint of Europe by Pope Paul VI in 1964 and co-patron with Cyril and Methodius by Pope John Paul II in 1980. Saint Benedict's influence extended beyond monastic communities. His Rule and the principles of monastic life contributed to the preservation of classical learning and the development of Christian culture in Europe. The Benedictine monasteries became centers of education, agriculture, and spiritual life, playing a significant role in the transformation of Europe during the Middle Ages. While Saint Benedict's direct connection to England is not explicitly direct, the Benedictine Order's influence on England is well-documented. Benedictine monks were instrumental in evangelizing and civilizing England during the sixth to ninth/tenth centuries, contributing to the spread of Christianity and the establishment of educational institutions. Therefore, Saint Benedict's legacy and the principles of his Rule are relevant to England through the impact of the Benedictine Order.

13th July. Boudicca Day, also known as Boudica or Boadicea, was a queen of the Iceni people of eastern England who led a major uprising against the Roman occupation. She became a national heroine of England and inspired numerous books and movies. The Iceni tribe rebelled against the Romans after the death of their king, Prasutagus, who had left his kingdom to his daughters and the Roman emperor. The Romans ignored his wishes and took over his kingdom, leading to Boudicca's rebellion. Her armies destroyed Colchester, London, and St Albans. The Romans eventually overcame the Iceni and their allies at the Battle of Watling Street, and Boudicca killed herself. Boudicca's story has been referenced in various works, including plays and poems, and she remains a significant figure in English history. There is no official day to celebrate her, but there should be, so lets make a start.

July 15. St Swithin, also known as Swithun, was the Bishop of Winchester and a royal counselor during the 9th century. He served under Kings Egbert and Aethelwulf of the West Saxons and was responsible for the education of Ethelwulf, the son of King Egbert. He was born around 800 and died on July 2, 862, in Winchester, Hampshire, England. St Swithin is revered as the patron saint of Winchester Cathedral. He is associated with a weather pattern that suggests the weather on his feast day will continue for the next 40 days. The day is also significant in British history and folklore, with references in literature and popular culture. For instance, the Netflix series "One Day" features the day prominently, with the characters often meeting on this date. Additionally, the day has been mentioned in poems and songs, including a poem by Jane Austen and a song by Billy Bragg.

20th July. Saint Margaret of Scotland was Queen of Alba from 1070 to 1093 as the wife of King Malcolm III. She was a member of the House of Wessex and was born in the Kingdom of Hungary to the expatriate English prince Edward the Exile. She was the granddaughter of Edmund Ironside, King of England, and her brother Edgar Ætheling was considered a possible successor to the English throne. Margaret and her family returned to England in 1057, but after the death of Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, her brother Edgar was elected as King of England but never crowned. Following the family's flight north, Margaret married Malcolm III of Scotland by the end of 1070. Margaret was a pious Christian and was known for her charitable works, including establishing a ferry across the Firth of Forth in Scotland for pilgrims traveling to St Andrews in Fife.

She was the mother of three kings of Scotland, or four if Edmund of Scotland is counted, and of Matilda of Scotland, queen consort of England. Her influence on the Scottish court was significant, as she promoted the interests of the church and of the English population conquered by the Scots. Margaret's impact on the future direction of the Scottish crown and of Scotland more widely can be seen by comparing the Gaelic names of the three children from Malcolm's first marriage and the absence of Gaelic names among the eight from his second.5 She was canonized in 1250 by Pope Innocent IV, and her remains were reinterred in a shrine in Dunfermline Abbey in Fife. Saint Margaret is relevant to England due to her Anglo-Saxon royal lineage and her role in the English succession. Her brother Edgar Ætheling had a strong claim to the English throne, and her daughter Matilda became queen consort of England. Additionally, Margaret's influence on the Scottish court and her efforts to reform the church in Scotland had lasting effects on the region's religious and cultural development.

22nd July. St. Mary Magdalene was a woman who, according to the four canonical gospels, traveled with Jesus as one of his followers and was a witness to his crucifixion and resurrection. She is mentioned in the Gospels as having been healed by Jesus of seven demons, and she financially supported his ministry. She was present at the crucifixion and was the first person to see the resurrected Christ, making her the first to preach the "Good News" of the resurrection. St. Mary Magdalene is relevant to England as she is remembered in the Church of England with a Festival and in the Episcopal Church with a Major Feast on July 22. Additionally, she is venerated in the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodox Church, Anglican Communion, Lutheranism, and other Protestant churches.

25th July. St. James, also known as James the Great, was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus and is venerated in various Christian traditions. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome and the brother of John the Apostle. He was martyred in 44 AD by King Herod Agrippa, and his remains are believed to be in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. While St. James is not directly relevant to England in terms of his life and ministry, he is recognized as a patron saint in some contexts. For instance, St. James's Piccadilly is a Church of England church in London that is named after him. Additionally, St. James is celebrated in the liturgical calendars of several Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. However, his primary significance is in Spain and other parts of Europe, rather than England.

BOADICEA,
AN ODE.
William Cowper

WHEN the British warrior queen,
Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought with an indignant mien,
Counsel of her country's gods,

Sage beneath a spreading oak
Sat the Druid, hoary chief,
Ev'ry burning word he spoke,
Full of rage and full of grief.

Princess! if our aged eyes
Weep upon thy matchless wrongs,
'Tis because resentment ties
All the terrors of our tongues.

Rome shall perish — write that word
In the blood that she has spilt;
Perish hopeless and abhorr'd,
Deep in ruin as in guilt.

Rome for empire far renown'd,
Tramples on a thousand states,
Soon her pride shall kiss the ground —
Hark! the Gaul is at her gates.

Other Romans shall arise,
Heedless of a soldier's name,
Sounds, not arms, shall win the prize,
Harmony the path to fame.

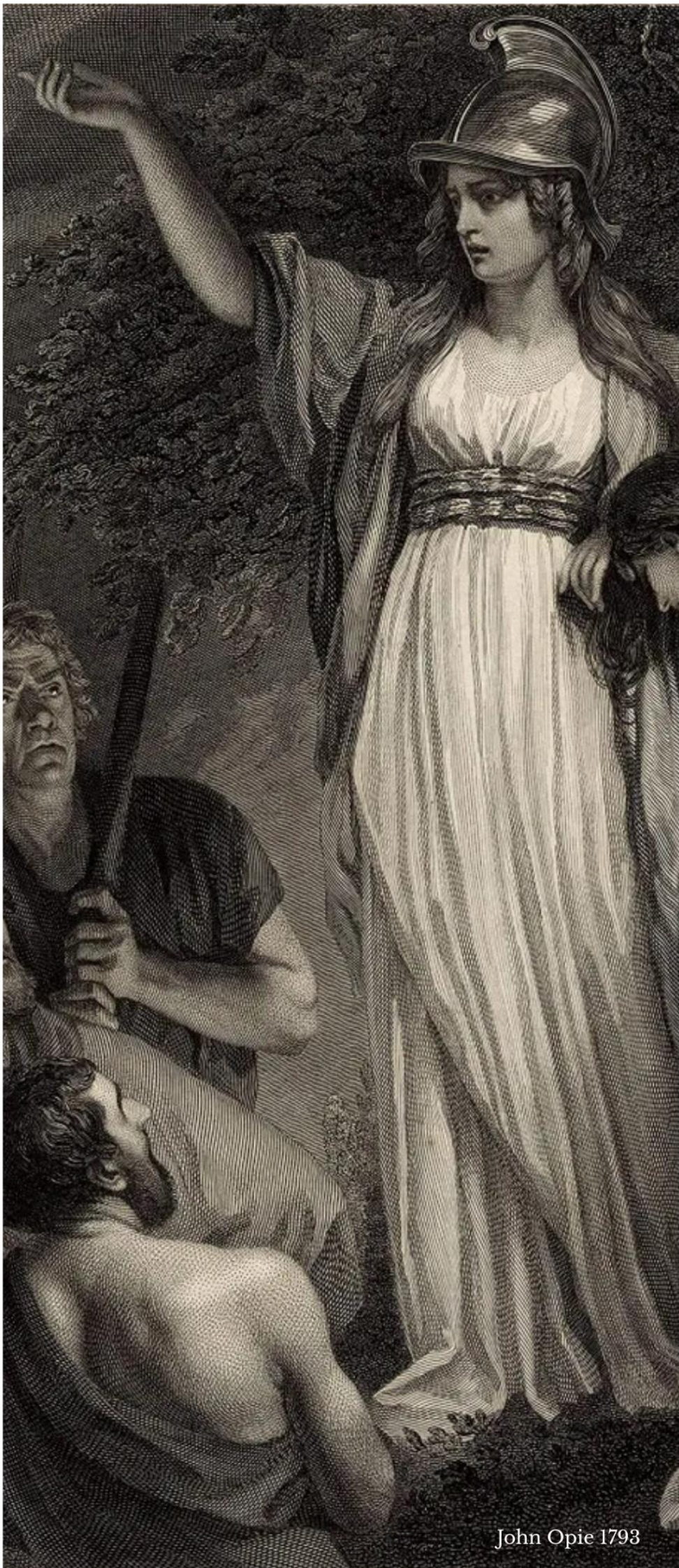
Then the progeny that springs
From the forests of our land,
Arm'd with thunder, clad with wings,
Shall a wider world command.

Regions Caesar never knew,
Thy posterity shall sway,
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they.

Such the bards prophetic words,
Pregnant with celestial fire,
Bending as he swept the chords
Of his sweet but awful lyre.

She with all a monarch's pride,
Felt them in her bosom glow,
Rush'd to battle, fought and died,
Dying, hurl'd them at the foe.

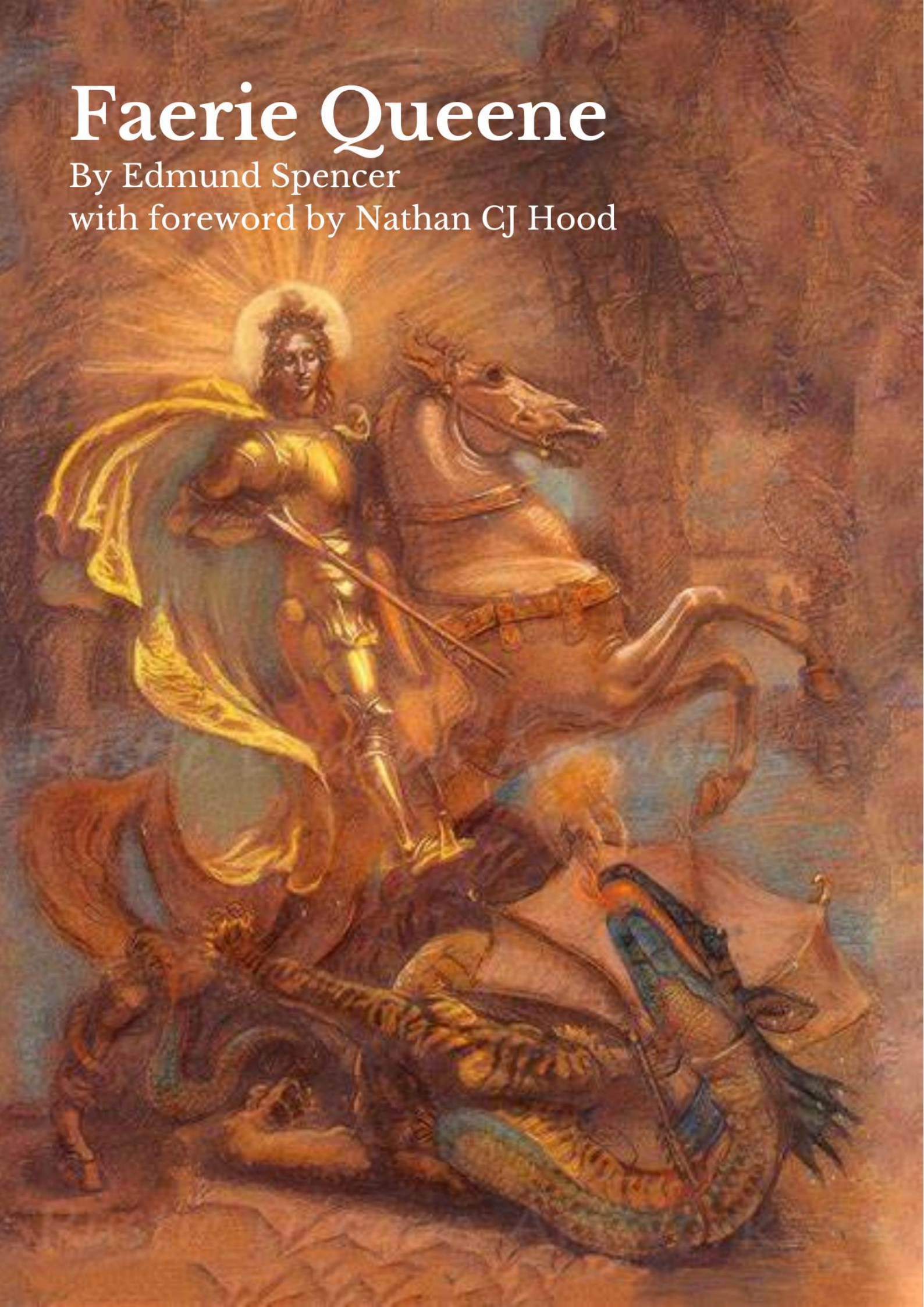
Ruffians, pittiless as proud,
Heav'n awards the vengeance due,
Empire is on us bestow'd,
Shame and ruin wait for you.



John Opie 1793

Faerie Queene

By Edmund Spencer
with foreword by Nathan CJ Hood



The Faerie Queene (1596) is one of English literature's hidden gems. Written by Edmund Spender in the height of the Elizabethan age, it weaves together Arthurian romance, national epic, religious instruction and contemporary politics into a compelling and vivacious read. Most of all, it is stirring and invigorating poetry that entertains and moves the soul with equal measure.

Spenser was a militant Anglican. He believed that the Church of England, governed by Elizabeth I, was the true church and purest form of Christianity in the world. Moreover, he had strong Puritan sympathies, embracing the idea that faith is an emotional and intellectual journey from sin to a life lived for Christ. This 'spiritual pilgrimage' involved the transformation of the mind and heart, from wicked desires to love for God.

The Faerie Queene was written as an allegorical text. Spenser explained that the poem was intended to 'fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline'. It does so through allegorising the 'private virtues'. Each of the six books follows a knight who symbolises and represents a virtue: holiness, temperance, chastity, friendship, justice and courtesy. Their interactions with the characters and world around them, which are also allegories of virtues and vices, teaches the reader how a virtue, like holiness, relates to good and wicked things.

Yet it also shows how these virtues are acquired. For example, while the Red Crosse Knight (the protagonist of the passage below) is an allegory for holiness, at the start of the tale he is easily deceived by liars and corrupted by the temptations of pride. It is only once he has gone through the process of repentance and forgiveness that he is ready to live a life of holiness able to conquer the dragon of sin. He is holiness and demonstrates the way it is born in the soul.

Spenser's text is also a political commentary. Gloriana, Queen of the Faerie (magical) folk, is like Elizabeth. Both send their knights out to defend the Christian faith from the monsters of the world, ogres, giants, wizards and dragons. These enemies are themselves allegories of vices and historical agents, such as the Pope, the Roman Catholic Church, the Spanish and so on. Tied in with these is a celebration of Englishness drawing on 'Prince Arthur', the symbol of Britain, searching throughout the story for the land of Faerie Queene.

The focus of Canto I in the extract below is the Red Crosse Knight, St George. The patron saint of England was a significant figure in Elizabethan England. Pageants were held across the nation wherein actors would perform the story of George and the dragon. Elizabeth tapped into this with her Order of the Garter ceremonies. Spenser's work reinforced the transformation of this medieval catholic saint into an emblem of English nationalism.

In the extract below, he the princess Una and her dwarf are on their way to defeat a dragon. Red Crosse goes into a cave for shelter and finds Errour, a half-woman half-snake monster (inspired by Echidna from Greek mythology). The holy George engages the monstrous and unnatural Errour, she attempting to blind and suffocate him with poisonous fumes (and books!). She allegorises the heresy that leads holiness astray, and George so nearly succumbs to her grasp. Perhaps he would have been best to leave her alone! Nonetheless, the Red Cross Knight's battle with Errour is a thrilling encounter of virtue against vice that sets the heart aflame.

At last resolving forward still to fare,

Till that some end they finde or in or out,

That path they take, that beaten seemd most bare,

And like to lead the labyrinth about;

Which when by tract they hunted had throughout,

At length it brought them to a hollow cave

Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout

Eftsoones dismounted from his courser brave,

And to the Dwarfe awhile his needlesse spere he gave.

Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde,

Least suddaine mischiefe ye too rash provoke:

The danger hid, the place unknowne and wilde,

Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,

And perill without show: therefore your stroke,

Sir Knight, with-hold, till further triall made.

Ah Ladie, (said he) shame were to revoke

The forward footing for an hidden shade:

Vertue gives her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade.

Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place

I better wot then you, though now too late

To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace,

Yet wisedome warnes, whilest foot is in the gate,

To stay the steppe, ere forced to retrate.

This is the wandring wood, this Errours den,

A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:

Therefore I read beware. Fly fly (quoth then

The fearefull Dwarfe) this is no place for living men.

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
But forth unto the darksome hole he went,
And looked in: his glistring armor made
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,
By which he saw the ugly monster° plaine,
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

And as she lay upon the durtie ground,
Her huge long taile her den all overspred,
Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound,
Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred
A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
Sucking upon her poisnous dugs, eachone
Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favored:
Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone,
Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

Their dam upstart, out of her den effraide,
And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile
About her cursed head, whose folds displaid
Were stretcht now forth at length without entraile.
She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle
Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe;
For light she hated as the deadly bale,
Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine,
Where plain none might her see, nor she see any plaine.

Which when the valiant Elfe perceiv'd, he lept
As Lyon fierce upon the flying pray,
And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept
From turning backe, and forced her to stay:
Therewith enrag'd she loudly gan to bray,
And turning fierce, her speckled taile advaunst,
Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay:
Who nought aghast his mightie hand enhaunst:
The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glaunst.

Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd,
Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round,
And all attonce her beastly body raizd
With doubled forces high above the ground:
Tho wrapping up her wrethed sterne arownd,
Lept fierce upon his shield, and her huge traine
All suddenly about his body wound,
That hand or foot to stirre he strove in vaine:
God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine.

His Lady sad to see his sore constraint,
Cride out, Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee,
Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:
Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee.
That when he heard, in great perplexitie,
His gall did grate for griefe and high disdaine,
And knitting all his force got one hand free,
Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine,
That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has.

As when old father Nilus gins to swell
With timely pride above the Aegyptian vale,
His fattie waves do fertile slime outwell,
And overflow each plaine and lowly dale:
But when his later spring gins to avale,
Huge heapes of mudd he leaves, wherein there breed
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male
And partly female of his fruitful seed;
Such ugly monstrous shapes elswhere may no man reed.

The same so sore annoyed has the knight,
That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke,
His forces faile, ne can no lenger fight.
Whose corage when the feend perceiv'd to shrinke,
She poured forth out of her hellish sinke
Her fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small,
Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,
With swarming all about his legs did crall,
And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

As gentle Shepheard in sweete even-tide,
When ruddy Phoebus gins to welke in west,
High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,
Markes which do byte their hasty supper best,
A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest,
All striving to infixe their feeble stings,
That from their noyance he no where can rest,
But with his clownish hands their tender wings
He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

Thus ill bestedd, and fearefull more of shame,
Then of the certeine perill he stood in,
Halfe furious unto his foe he came,
Resolv'd in minde all suddenly to win,
Or soone to lose, before he once would lin
And strooke at her with more then manly force,
That from her body full of filthie sin
He raft her hatefull head without remorse;
A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse.

Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent deare
They saw so rudely falling to the ground,
Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare,
Gathred themselves about her body round,
Weening their wonted entrance to have found
At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
And sucked up their dying mothers blood,
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.

That detestable sight him much amazde,
To see th' unkindly Impes, of heaven accurst,
Devoure their dam; on whom while so he gazd,
Having all satisfide their bloudy thurst,
Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,
And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end
Of such as drunke her life, the which them nurst;
Now needeth him no lenger labour spend,
His foes have slaine themselves, with whom he should contend.

His Ladie seeing all that chaunst, from farre
Approcht in hast to greet his victorie,
And said, Faire knight, borne under happy starre,
Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye:
Well worthie be you of that Armorie,
Wherin ye have great glory wonne this day,
And proov'd your strength on a strong enimie,
Your first adventure: many such I pray,
And henceforth ever wish that like succeed it may.

The History of Tom Thumb

Fairy tale collected by Joseph Jacobs

In the days of the great Prince Arthur, there lived a mighty magician, called Merlin, the most learned and skilful enchanter the world has ever seen.

This famous magician, who could take any form he pleased, was travelling about as a poor beggar, and being very tired, he stopped at the cottage of a ploughman to rest himself, and asked for some food.

The countryman bade him welcome, and his wife, who was a very good-hearted woman, soon brought him some milk in a wooden bowl, and some coarse brown bread on a platter.

Merlin was much pleased with the kindness of the ploughman and his wife; but he could not help noticing that though everything was neat and comfortable in the cottage, they seemed both to be very unhappy. He therefore asked them why they were so melancholy, and learned that they were miserable because they had no children.

The poor woman said, with tears in her eyes: "I should be the happiest creature in the world if I had a son; although he was no bigger than my husband's thumb, I would be satisfied."

Merlin was so much amused with the idea of a boy no bigger than a man's thumb, that he determined to grant the poor woman's wish. Accordingly, in a short time after, the ploughman's wife had a son, who, wonderful to relate! was not a bit bigger than his father's thumb.

The queen of the fairies, wishing to see the little fellow, came in at the window while the mother was sitting up in the bed admiring him. The queen kissed the child, and, giving it the name of Tom Thumb, sent for some of the fairies, who dressed her little godson according to her orders:

"An oak-leaf hat he had for his crown;

His shirt of web by spiders spun;

With jacket wove of thistle's down;

His trowsers were of feathers done.

His stockings, of apple-rind, they tie

With eyelash from his mother's eye

His shoes were made of mouse's skin,

Tann'd with the downy hair within."

Tom never grew any larger than his father's thumb, which was only of ordinary size; but as he got older he became very cunning and full of tricks. When he was old enough to play with the boys, and had lost all his own cherry-stones, he used to creep into the bags of his playfellows, fill his pockets, and, getting out without their noticing him, would again join in the game.

One day, however, as he was coming out of a bag of cherry-stones, where he had been stealing as usual, the boy to whom it belonged chanced to see him. "Ah, ah! my little Tommy," said the boy, "so I have caught you stealing my cherry-stones at last, and you shall be rewarded for your thievish tricks." On saying this, he drew the string tight round his neck, and gave the bag such a hearty shake, that poor little Tom's legs, thighs, and body were sadly bruised. He roared out with pain, and begged to be let out, promising never to steal again.

A short time afterwards his mother was making a batter-pudding, and Tom, being very anxious to see how it was made, climbed up to the edge of the bowl; but his foot slipped, and he plumped over head and ears into the batter, without his mother noticing him, who stirred him into the pudding-bag, and put him in the pot to boil.

The batter filled Tom's mouth, and prevented him from crying; but, on feeling the hot water, he kicked and struggled so much in the pot, that his mother thought that the pudding was bewitched, and, pulling it out of the pot, she threw it outside the door. A poor tinker, who was passing by, lifted up the pudding, and, putting it into his budget, he then walked off. As Tom had now got his mouth cleared of the batter, he then began to cry aloud, which so frightened the tinker that he flung down the pudding and ran away. The pudding being broke to pieces by the fall, Tom crept out covered all over with the batter, and walked home. His mother, who was very sorry to see her darling in such a woeful state, put him into a teacup, and soon washed off the batter; after which she kissed him, and laid him in bed.

Soon after the adventure of the pudding, Tom's mother went to milk her cow in the meadow, and she took him along with her. As the wind was very high, for fear of being blown away, she tied him to a thistle with a piece of fine thread. The cow soon observed Tom's oak-leaf hat, and liking the appearance of it, took poor Tom and the thistle at one mouthful. While the cow was chewing the thistle Tom was afraid of her great teeth, which threatened to crush him in pieces, and he roared out as loud as he could: "Mother, mother!"

"Where are you, Tommy, my dear Tommy?" said his mother.

"Here, mother," replied he, "in the red cow's mouth."

His mother began to cry and wring her hands; but the cow, surprised at the odd noise in her throat, opened her mouth and let Tom drop out.

Fortunately his mother caught him in her apron as he was falling to the ground, or he would have been dreadfully hurt. She then put Tom in her bosom and ran home with him.

Tom's father made him a whip of a barley straw to drive the cattle with, and having one day gone into the fields, he slipped a foot and rolled into the furrow. A raven, which was flying over, picked him up, and flew with him over the sea, and there dropped him.

A large fish swallowed Tom the moment he fell into the sea, which was soon after caught, and bought for the table of King Arthur. When they opened the fish in order to cook it, every one was astonished at finding such a little boy, and Tom was quite delighted at being free again. They carried him to the king, who made Tom his dwarf, and he soon grew a great favourite at court; for by his tricks and gambols he not only amused the king and queen, but also all the Knights of the Round Table.

It is said that when the king rode out on horseback, he often took Tom along with him, and if a shower came on, he used to creep into his majesty's waistcoat-pocket, where he slept till the rain was over.

King Arthur one day asked Tom about his parents, wishing to know if they were as small as he was, and whether they were well off. Tom told the king that his father and mother were as tall as anybody about the court, but in rather poor circumstances. On hearing this, the king carried Tom to his treasury, the place where he kept all his money, and told him to take as much money as he could carry home to his parents, which made the poor little fellow caper with joy. Tom went immediately to procure a purse, which was made of a water-bubble, and then returned to the treasury, where he received a silver threepenny-piece to put into it.

Our little hero had some difficulty in lifting the burden upon his back; but he at last succeeded in getting it placed to his mind, and set forward on his journey. However, without meeting with any accident, and after resting himself more than a hundred times by the way, in two days and two nights he reached his father's house in safety.

Tom had travelled forty-eight hours with a huge silver-piece on his back, and was almost tired to death, when his mother ran out to meet him, and carried him into the house. But he soon returned to Court.

As Tom's clothes had suffered much in the batter-pudding, and the inside of the fish, his majesty ordered him a new suit of clothes, and to be mounted as a knight on a mouse.

Of Butterfly's wings his shirt was made,

His boots of chicken's hide;

And by a nimble fairy blade,

Well learned in the tailoring trade,

His clothing was supplied.

A needle dangled by his side;

A dapper mouse he used to ride,

Thus strutted Tom in stately pride!

It was certainly very diverting to see Tom in this dress and mounted on the mouse, as he rode out a-hunting with the king and nobility, who were all ready to expire with laughter at Tom and his fine prancing charger.

The king was so charmed with his address that he ordered a little chair to be made, in order that Tom might sit upon his table, and also a palace of gold, a span high, with a door an inch wide, to live in. He also gave him a coach, drawn by six small mice.

The queen was so enraged at the honours conferred on Sir Thomas that she resolved to ruin him, and told the king that the little knight had been saucy to her.

The king sent for Tom in great haste, but being fully aware of the danger of royal anger, he crept into an empty snail-shell, where he lay for a long time until he was almost starved with hunger; but at last he ventured to peep out, and seeing a fine large butterfly on the ground, near the place of his concealment, he got close to it and jumping astride on it, was carried up into the air. The butterfly flew with him from tree to tree and from field to field, and at last returned to the court, where the king and nobility all strove to catch him; but at last poor Tom fell from his seat into a watering-pot, in which he was almost drowned.

When the queen saw him she was in a rage, and said he should be beheaded; and he was again put into a mouse trap until the time of his execution.

However a cat, observing something alive in the trap, patted it about till the wires broke, and set Thomas at liberty.

The king received Tom again into favour, which he did not live to enjoy, for a large spider one day attacked him; and although he drew his sword and fought well, yet the spider's poisonous breath at last overcame him.

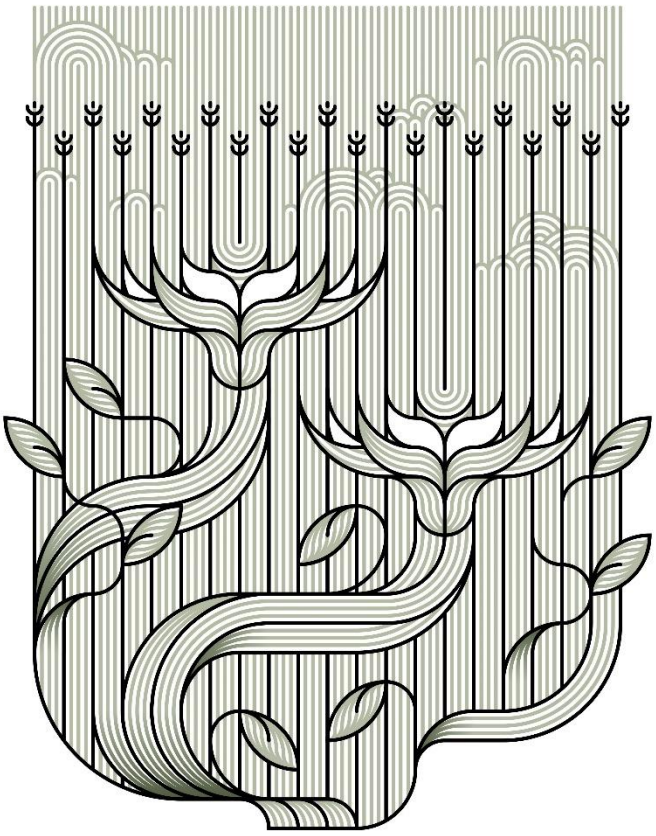
He fell dead on the ground where he stood,

And the spider suck'd every drop of his blood.

King Arthur and his whole court were so sorry at the loss of their little favourite that they went into

mourning and raised a fine white marble monument over his grave with the following epitaph:

Here lies Tom Thumb, King Arthur's knight,
Who died by a spider's cruel bite.
He was well known in Arthur's court,
Where he afforded gallant sport;
He rode at tilt and tournament,
And on a mouse a-hunting went.
Alive he filled the court with mirth;
His death to sorrow soon gave birth.
Wipe, wipe your eyes, and shake your head
And cry,—Alas! Tom Thumb is dead!



How Robin Hood Came to Be an Outlaw

Extract from *THE MERRY ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD* by Howard Pyle

In merry England, in the time of old, when good King Henry the Second ruled the land, there lived within the green glades of Sherwood Forest, near Nottingham Town, a famous outlaw whose name was Robin Hood. No archer ever lived that could speed a gray goose shaft with such skill and cunning as his, nor were there ever such yeomen as the sevenscore merry men that roamed with him through the greenwood shades. Right merrily they dwelled within the depths of Sherwood Forest, suffering neither care nor want, but passing the time in merry games of archery or bouts of cudgel play, living upon the King's venison, washed down with draughts of ale of October brewing.

Not only Robin himself but all the band were outlaws and dwelled apart from other men, yet they were beloved by the country people round about, for no one ever came to jolly Robin for help in time of need and went away again with an empty fist.

And now I will tell how it came about that Robin Hood fell afoul of the law.

When Robin was a youth of eighteen, stout of sinew and bold of heart, the Sheriff of Nottingham proclaimed a shooting match and offered a prize of a butt of ale to whosoever should shoot the best shaft in Nottinghamshire. "Now," quoth Robin, "will I go too, for fain would I draw a string for the bright eyes of my lass and a butt of good October brewing." So up he got and took his good stout yew bow and a score or more of broad clothyard arrows, and started off from Locksley Town through Sherwood Forest to Nottingham.

It was at the dawn of day in the merry Maytime, when hedgerows are green and flowers bedeck the meadows; daisies pied and yellow cuckoo buds and fair primroses all along the briery hedges; when apple buds blossom and sweet birds sing, the lark at dawn of day, the throstle cock and cuckoo; when lads and lasses look upon each other with sweet thoughts; when busy housewives spread their linen to bleach upon the bright green grass. Sweet was the greenwood as he walked along its paths, and bright the green and rustling leaves, amid which the little birds sang with might and main: and blithely Robin whistled as he trudged along, thinking of Maid Marian and her bright eyes, for at such times a youth's thoughts are wont to turn pleasantly upon the lass that he loves the best.

As thus he walked along with a brisk step and a merry whistle, he came suddenly upon some foresters seated beneath a great oak tree. Fifteen there were in all, making themselves merry with feasting and drinking as they sat around a huge pasty, to which each man helped himself, thrusting his hands into the pie, and washing down that which they ate with great horns of ale which they drew all foaming from a barrel that stood nigh. Each man was clad in Lincoln green, and a fine show they made, seated upon the sward beneath that fair, spreading tree. Then one of them, with his mouth full, called out to Robin, "Hulloa, where goest thou, little lad, with thy one-penny bow and thy farthing shafts?"

Then Robin grew angry, for no stripling likes to be taunted with his green years.

"Now," quoth he, "my bow and eke mine arrows are as good as shine; and moreover, I go to the shooting match at Nottingham Town, which same has been proclaimed by our good Sheriff of Nottinghamshire; there I will shoot with other stout yeomen, for a prize has been offered of a fine butt of ale."

Then one who held a horn of ale in his hand said, "Ho! listen to the lad! Why, boy, thy mother's milk is yet scarce dry upon thy lips, and yet thou pratest of standing up with good stout men at Nottingham butts, thou who art scarce able to draw one string of a two-stone bow."

"I'll hold the best of you twenty marks," quoth bold Robin, "that I hit the clout at threescore rods, by the good help of Our Lady fair."

At this all laughed aloud, and one said, "Well boasted, thou fair infant, well boasted! And well thou knowest that no target is nigh to make good thy wager."

And another cried, "He will be taking ale with his milk next."

At this Robin grew right mad. "Hark ye," said he, "yonder, at the glade's end, I see a herd of deer, even more than threescore rods distant. I'll hold you twenty marks that, by leave of Our Lady, I cause the best hart among them to die."

"Now done!" cried he who had spoken first. "And here are twenty marks. I wager that thou causest no beast to die, with or without the aid of Our Lady."

Then Robin took his good yew bow in his hand, and placing the tip at his instep, he strung it right deftly; then he nocked a broad clothyard arrow and, raising the bow, drew the gray goose feather to his ear; the next moment the bowstring rang and the arrow sped down the glade as a sparrowhawk skims in a northern wind. High leaped the noblest hart of all the herd, only to fall dead, reddening the green path with his heart's blood.

"Ha!" cried Robin, "how likest thou that shot, good fellow? I wot the wager were mine, an it were three hundred pounds."

Then all the foresters were filled with rage, and he who had spoken the first and had lost the wager was more angry than all.

"Nay," cried he, "the wager is none of thine, and get thee gone, straightway, or, by all the saints of heaven,

I'll baste thy sides until thou wilt ne'er be able to walk again." "Knowest thou not," said another, "that thou hast killed the King's deer, and, by the laws of our gracious lord and sovereign King Harry, thine ears should be shaven close to thy head?"

"Catch him!" cried a third.

"Nay," said a fourth, "let him e'en go because of his tender years."

Never a word said Robin Hood, but he looked at the foresters with a grim face; then, turning on his heel, strode away from them down the forest glade. But his heart was bitterly angry, for his blood was hot and youthful and prone to boil.

Now, well would it have been for him who had first spoken had he left Robin Hood alone; but his anger was hot, both because the youth had gotten the better of him and because of the deep draughts of ale that he had been quaffing. So, of a sudden, without any warning, he sprang to his feet, and seized upon his bow and fitted it to a shaft. "Ay," cried he, "and I'll hurry thee anon." And he sent the arrow whistling after Robin.

It was well for Robin Hood that that same forester's head was spinning with ale, or else he would never have taken another step. As it was, the arrow whistled within three inches of his head. Then he turned around and quickly drew his own bow, and sent an arrow back in return.

"Ye said I was no archer," cried he aloud, "but say so now again!"

The shaft flew straight; the archer fell forward with a cry, and lay on his face upon the ground, his arrows rattling about him from out of his quiver, the gray goose shaft wet with his; heart's blood. Then, before the others could gather their wits about them, Robin Hood was gone into the depths of the greenwood. Some started after him, but not with much heart, for each feared to suffer the death of his fellow; so presently they all came and lifted the dead man up and bore him away to Nottingham Town.

Meanwhile Robin Hood ran through the greenwood. Gone was all the joy and brightness from everything, for his heart was sick within him, and it was borne in upon his soul that he had slain a man.

"Alas!" cried he, "thou hast found me an archer that will make thy wife to wring! I would that thou hadst ne'er said one word to me, or that I had never passed thy way, or e'en that my right forefinger had been stricken off ere that this had happened! In haste I smote, but grieve I sore at leisure!" And then, even in his trouble, he remembered the old saw that "What is done is done; and the egg cracked cannot be cured."

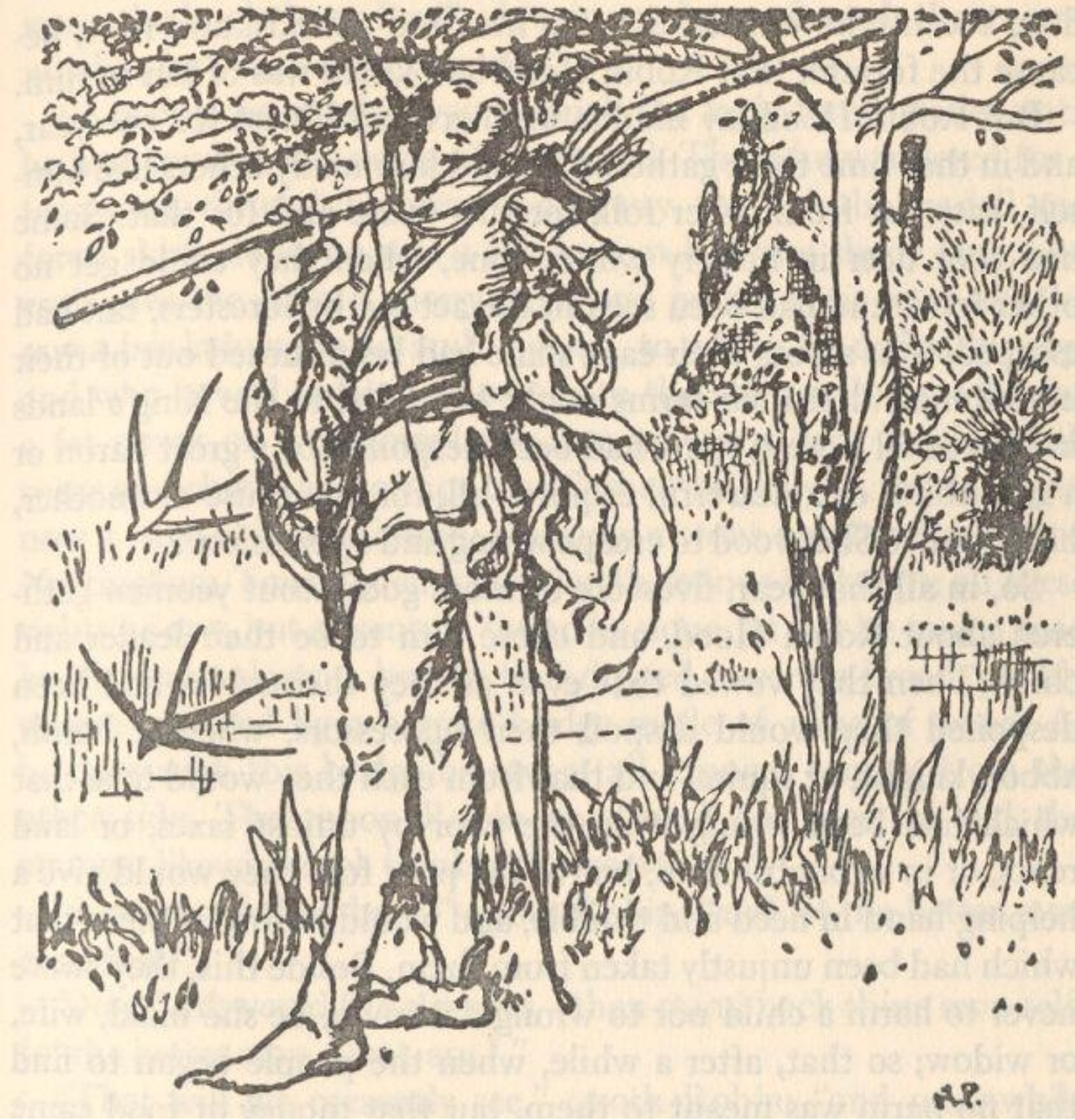
And so he came to dwell in the greenwood that was to be his home for many a year to come, never again to see the happy days with the lads and lasses of sweet Locksley Town; for he was outlawed, not only because he had killed a man, but also because he had poached upon the King's deer, and two hundred pounds were set upon his head, as a reward for whoever would bring him to the court of the King.

Now the Sheriff of Nottingham swore that he himself would bring this knave Robin Hood to justice, and for two reasons: first, because he wanted the two hundred pounds, and next, because the forester that Robin Hood had killed was of kin to him.

But Robin Hood lay hidden in Sherwood Forest for one year, and in that time there gathered around him many others like himself, cast out from other folk for this cause and for that. Some had shot deer in hungry wintertime, when they could get no other food, and had been seen in the act by the foresters, but had escaped, thus saving their ears; some had been turned out of their inheritance, that their farms might be added to the King's lands in Sherwood Forest; some had been despoiled by a great baron or a rich abbot or a powerful esquire—all, for one cause or another, had come to Sherwood to escape wrong and oppression.

So, in all that year, fivescore or more good stout yeomen gathered about Robin Hood, and chose him to be their leader and chief. Then they vowed that even as they themselves had been despoiled they would despoil their oppressors, whether baron, abbot, knight, or squire, and that from each they would take that which had been wrung from the poor by unjust taxes, or land rents, or in wrongful fines. But to the poor folk they would give a helping hand in need and trouble, and would return to them that which had been unjustly taken from them. Besides this, they swore never to harm a child nor to wrong a woman, be she maid, wife, or widow; so that, after a while, when the people began to find that no harm was meant to them, but that money or food came in time of want to many a poor family, they came to praise Robin and his merry men, and to tell many tales of him and of his doings in Sherwood Forest, for they felt him to be one of themselves.

Up rose Robin Hood one merry morn when all the birds were singing blithely among the leaves, and up rose all his merry men, each fellow washing his head and hands in the cold brown brook that leaped laughing from stone to stone. Then said Robin, "For fourteen days have we seen no sport, so now I will go abroad to seek adventures forthwith. But tarry ye, my merry men all, here in the greenwood; only see that ye mind well my call. Three blasts upon the bugle horn I will blow in my hour of need; then come quickly, for I shall want your aid."



So saying, he strode away through the leafy forest glades until he had come to the verge of Sherwood. There he wandered for a long time, through highway and byway, through dingly dell and forest skirts. Now he met a fair buxom lass in a shady lane, and each gave the other a merry word and passed their way; now he saw a fair lady upon an ambling pad, to whom he doffed his cap, and who bowed sedately in return to the fair youth; now he saw a fat monk on a pannier-laden ass; now a gallant knight, with spear and shield and armor that flashed brightly in the sunlight; now a page clad in crimson; and now a stout burgher from good Nottingham Town, pacing along with serious footsteps; all these sights he saw, but adventure found he none. At last he took a road by the forest skirts, a bypath that dipped toward a broad, pebbly stream spanned by a narrow bridge made of a log of wood. As he drew nigh this bridge he saw a tall stranger coming from the other side. Thereupon Robin quickened his

pace, as did the stranger likewise, each thinking to cross first.

"Now stand thou back," quoth Robin, "and let the better man cross first."

"Nay," answered the stranger, "then stand back shine own self, for the better man, I wet, am I."

"That will we presently see," quoth Robin, "and meanwhile stand thou where thou art, or else, by the bright brow of Saint AElfrida, I will show thee right good Nottingham play with a clothyard shaft betwixt thy ribs."

"Now," quoth the stranger, "I will tan thy hide till it be as many colors as a beggar's cloak, if thou darest so much as touch a string of that same bow that thou holdest in thy hands."

"Thou pratest like an ass," said Robin, "for I could send this shaft clean through thy proud heart before a curtal friar could say grace over a roast goose at Michaelmastide."

"And thou pratest like a coward," answered the stranger, "for thou standest there with a good yew bow to shoot at my heart, while I have nought in my hand but a plain blackthorn staff wherewith to meet thee."

"Now," quoth Robin, "by the faith of my heart, never have I had a coward's name in all my life before. I will lay by my trusty bow and eke my arrows, and if thou darest abide my coming, I will go and cut a cudgel to test thy manhood withal."

"Ay, marry, that will I abide thy coming, and joyously, too," quoth the stranger; whereupon he leaned sturdily upon his staff to await Robin.

Then Robin Hood stepped quickly to the coverside and cut a good staff of ground oak, straight, without new, and six feet in length, and came back trimming away the tender stems from it, while the stranger waited for him, leaning upon his staff, and whistling as he gazed round about. Robin observed him furtively as he trimmed his staff, measuring him from top to toe from out the corner of his eye, and thought that he had never seen a lustier or a stouter man. Tall was Robin, but taller was the stranger by a head and a neck, for he was seven feet in height. Broad was Robin across the shoulders, but broader was the stranger by twice the breadth of a palm, while he measured at least an ell around the waist.

"Nevertheless," said Robin to himself, "I will baste thy hide right merrily, my good fellow"; then, aloud, "Lo, here is my good staff, lusty and tough. Now wait my coming, an thou darest, and meet me an thou fearest not. Then we will fight until one or the other of us tumble into the stream by dint of blows."

"Marry, that meeteth my whole heart!" cried the stranger, twirling his staff above his head, betwixt his fingers and thumb, until it whistled again.

Never did the Knights of Arthur's Round Table meet in a stouter fight than did these two. In a moment Robin stepped quickly upon the bridge where the stranger stood; first he made a feint, and then delivered a blow at the stranger's head that, had it met its mark, would have tumbled him speedily into the water. But the stranger turned the blow right deftly and in return gave one as stout, which Robin also turned as the stranger had done. So they stood, each in his place, neither moving a finger's-breadth back, for one good hour, and many blows were given and received by each in that time, till here and there were sore bones and bumps, yet neither thought of crying "Enough," nor seemed likely to fall from off the bridge. Now and then they stopped to rest, and each thought that he never had seen in all his life before such a hand at quarterstaff. At last Robin gave the stranger a blow upon the ribs that made his jacket smoke like a damp straw thatch in the sun. So shrewd was the stroke that the stranger came within a hair's-breadth of falling off the bridge, but he regained himself right quickly and, by a dexterous blow, gave Robin a crack on the crown that caused the blood to flow. Then Robin grew mad with anger and smote with all his might at the other. But the stranger warded the blow and once again thwacked Robin, and this time so fairly that he fell heels over head into the water, as the queen pin falls in a game of bowls.

"And where art thou now, my good lad?" shouted the stranger, roaring with laughter.

"Oh, in the flood and floating adown with the tide," cried Robin, nor could he forbear laughing himself at his sorry plight. Then, gaining his feet, he waded to the bank, the little fish speeding hither and thither, all frightened at his splashing.

"Give me thy hand," cried he, when he had reached the bank. "I must needs own thou art a brave and a sturdy soul and, withal, a good stout stroke with the cudgels. By this and by that, my head hummeth like to a hive of bees on a hot June day."

Then he clapped his horn to his lips and winded a blast that went echoing sweetly down the forest paths. "Ay, marry," quoth he again, "thou art a tall lad, and eke a brave one, for ne'er, I bow, is there a man betwixt here and Canterbury Town could do the like to me that thou hast done."

"And thou," quoth the stranger, laughing, "takest thy cudgeling like a brave heart and a stout yeoman."

But now the distant twigs and branches rustled with the coming of men, and suddenly a score or two of good stout yeomen, all clad in Lincoln green, burst from out the covert, with merry Will Stutely at their head.

"Good master," cried Will, "how is this? Truly thou art all wet from head to foot, and that to the very skin."

"Why, marry," answered jolly Robin, "yon stout fellow hath tumbled me neck and crop into the water and hath given me a drubbing beside."

"Then shall he not go without a ducking and eke a drubbing himself!" cried Will Stutely. "Have at him, lads!"

Then Will and a score of yeomen leaped upon the stranger, but though they sprang quickly they found him ready and felt him strike right and left with his stout staff, so that, though he went down with press of numbers, some of them rubbed cracked crowns before he was overcome.

"Nay, forbear!" cried Robin, laughing until his sore sides ached again. "He is a right good man and true, and no harm shall befall him. Now hark ye, good youth, wilt thou stay with me and be one of my band? Three suits of Lincoln green shalt thou have each year, beside forty marks in fee, and share with us whatsoever good shall befall us. Thou shalt eat sweet venison and quaff the stoutest ale, and mine own good right-hand man shalt thou be, for never did I see such a cudgel player in all my life before. Speak! Wilt thou be one of my good merry men?"

"That know I not," quoth the stranger surlily, for he was angry at being so tumbled about. "If ye handle yew bow and apple shaft no better than ye do oaken cudgel, I wot ye are not fit to be called yeomen in my country; but if there be any man here that can shoot a better shaft than I, then will I bethink me of joining with you."

"Now by my faith," said Robin, "thou art a right saucy varlet, sirrah; yet I will stoop to thee as I never stooped to man before. Good Stutely, cut thou a fair white piece of bark four fingers in breadth, and set it fourscore yards distant on yonder oak. Now, stranger, hit that fairly with a gray goose shaft and call thyself an archer."

"Ay, marry, that will I," answered he. "Give me a good stout bow and a fair broad arrow, and if I hit it not, strip me and beat me blue with bowstrings."

Then he chose the stoutest bow among them all, next to Robin's own, and a straight gray goose shaft, well-feathered and smooth, and stepping to the mark—while all the band, sitting or lying upon the greensward, watched to see him shoot—he drew the arrow to his cheek and loosed the shaft right deftly, sending it so straight down the path that it clove the mark in the very center. "Aha!" cried he, "mend thou that if thou canst"; while even the yeomen clapped their hands at so fair a shot.

"That is a keen shot indeed," quoth Robin. "Mend it I cannot, but mar it I may, perhaps."

Then taking up his own good stout bow and nocking an arrow with care, he shot with his very greatest skill. Straight flew the arrow, and so true that it lit fairly upon the stranger's shaft and split it into splinters. Then all the yeomen leaped to their feet and shouted for joy that their master had shot so well.

"Now by the lusty yew bow of good Saint Withold," cried the stranger, "that is a shot indeed, and never saw I the like in all my life before! Now truly will I be thy man henceforth and for aye. Good Adam Bell[1] was a fair shot, but never shot he so!"

"Then have I gained a right good man this day," quoth jolly Robin. "What name goest thou by, good fellow?"

"Men call me John Little whence I came," answered the stranger.

Then Will Stutely, who loved a good jest, spoke up. "Nay, fair little stranger," said he, "I like not thy name and fain would I have it otherwise. Little art thou indeed, and small of bone and sinew, therefore shalt thou be christened Little John, and I will be thy godfather."

Then Robin Hood and all his band laughed aloud until the stranger began to grow angry.

"An thou make a jest of me," quoth he to Will Stutely, "thou wilt have sore bones and little pay, and that in short season."

"Nay, good friend," said Robin Hood, "bottle thine anger, for the name fitteth thee well. Little John shall thou be called henceforth, and Little John shall it be. So come, my merry men, we will prepare a christening feast for this fair infant."

So turning their backs upon the stream, they plunged into the forest once more, through which they traced their steps till they reached the spot where they dwelled in the depths of the woodland. There had they built huts of bark and branches of trees, and made couches of sweet rushes spread over with skins of fallow deer. Here stood a great oak tree with branches spreading broadly around, beneath which was a seat of green moss where Robin Hood was wont to sit at feast and at merrymaking with his stout men about him. Here they found the rest of the band, some of whom had come in with a brace of fat does. Then they all built great fires and after a time roasted the does and broached a barrel of humming ale. Then when the feast was ready they all sat down, but Robin placed Little John at his right hand, for he was henceforth to be the second in the band.

Then when the feast was done Will Stutely spoke up. "It is now time, I ween, to christen our bonny babe, is it not so, merry boys?" And "Aye! Aye!" cried all, laughing till the woods echoed with their mirth.

"Then seven sponsors shall we have," quoth Will Stutely, and hunting among all the band, he chose the seven stoutest men of them all.

"Now by Saint Dunstan," cried Little John, springing to his feet, "more than one of you shall rue it an you lay finger upon me."

But without a word they all ran upon him at once, seizing him by his legs and arms and holding him tightly in spite of his struggles, and they bore him forth while all stood around to see the sport. Then one came forward who had been chosen to play the priest because he had a bald crown, and in his hand he carried a brimming pot of ale. "Now, who bringeth this babe?" asked he right soberly.

"That do I," answered Will Stutely.

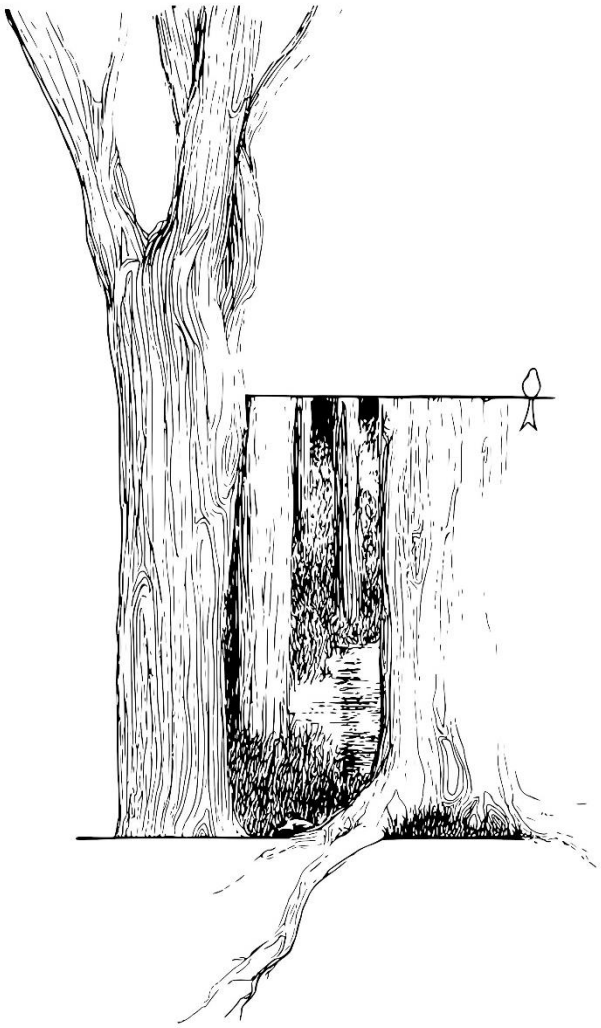
"And what name callest thou him?"

"Little John call I him."

"Now Little John," quoth the mock priest, "thou hast not lived heretofore, but only got thee along through the world, but henceforth thou wilt live indeed. When thou livedst not thou wast called John Little, but now that thou dost live indeed, Little John shalt thou be called, so christen I thee." And at these last words he emptied the pot of ale upon Little John's head.

Then all shouted with laughter as they saw the good brown ale stream over Little John's beard and trickle from his nose and chin, while his eyes blinked with the smart of it. At first he was of a mind to be angry but found he could not, because the others were so merry; so he, too, laughed with the rest. Then Robin took this sweet, pretty babe, clothed him all anew from top to toe in Lincoln green, and gave him a good stout bow, and so made him a member of the merry band.

And thus it was that Robin Hood became outlawed; thus a band of merry companions gathered about him, and thus he gained his right-hand man, Little John; and so the prologue ends. And now I will tell how the Sheriff of Nottingham three times sought to take Robin Hood, and how he failed each time.



The Poetry of T. D. J. Snelling

Ode to a Ruin

In age of feudal lords gone by
    Your walls in stature stood immense,
Within your halls great fires were stoked,
    Your gardens grand held tournaments—

But unrelenting time doth pass
    To claim those glory days of yore;
Your walls reduced to ruin now
    Your halls made empty, evermore.

Despite the state of your remains
    Not all prestige is lost of thee—
For while I stand and contemplate,
    Those glory days live on in me.

The Lady of the Lake

From sturdy mount King Arthur spied
Fair arm outstretched from glist'ning plane:
In samite sleeve it rose above
The surface delicate and proud
Akin to flower from the earth—
In milkish hand was grasped a sword:
Excalibur and rightly named,
For hardened blade sure cleaveth all.
Upon the glasslike water then
That lissom maiden Nimuë,
Enchanting Lady of the Lake,
Bestowed on him that mighty brand
Forged strong in distant Avalon.
A simple gift she asked the king
Then sword unrivalled would be his:
So Arthur lifted by the hilt
The weapon from her silken hand—
Exclaimed he granted her the boon—
And raised toward almighty Lord
That handsome blade of blest design.

Standing Stones

Their purpose known not—forming perfect round
They stand in watch, protecting ancient way,
And thus delineate this righteous ground;
Who raised these holy stones? We cannot say.

But magic hangs here still—it permeates
The very air—and one can duly sense
Some long lost power lying here in wait,
Until the time arrives it may come hence.

Perceval's Vision at the Hermit's Cell

A she-hawk dove upon a sitting duck;
Asunder torn, made prey in lethal swoop.
Yet banquet had she not: ere she could feast
Approaching hoof-step spooked her into flight.
A raven then, more brave than she, alit
Upon the corpse—when noble Perceval,
Not long arisen from the hermit's cell,
From splendid mount espied the gruesome scene.
Enamoured was he so with what he saw,
Dismounting there he fell into a trance:
For he did liken in his homesick mind
The blackness of the raven's feathered form,
The whiteness of the freshly fallen snow,
And most of all the redness of the blood
The duck had spilled upon the ground in death—
To his own maiden's hair as black as jet,
Her skin as fair as finest silk, and then
The reddened glow upon her whitish cheeks,
As prominent as blood against the snow.
And there he stayed, so far from home, and dreamt
Of her, the woman that he loved the best.

The Dance of Oak and Holly

With gentle stir the leaves begin to shed;
The sun-baked earth too softens underfoot—
A king is risen from his prickly bed,
Encroaching slowly from his murky wood.
There is another, he of oaken halls,
Who shall defend until his very last
Against e'er looming clouds and frigid squalls
The waning life of summer's beating heart.
Two kings together meet; the dance begins—
They lunge and feint, each vies to win renown—
But preordained before our time, the king
Who shall this season claim the solstice crown.
  Thus winter striketh summer down to rest;
  The oak shall sleep until the springtime next.

English Summer Days

For overlong now I have tried
To capture something on my mind—
A notion that all word evades,
But through my being yet pervades—

Description though it may escape,
I know just where it taketh shape:
It floats in greenish country haze
On lazy English summer days.

The Empty House

Walter de La Mare

See this house, how dark it is
Beneath its vast-boughed trees!
Not one trembling leaflet cries
To that Watcher in the skies—
‘Remove, remove thy searching gaze,
Innocent of heaven’s ways,
Brood not, Moon, so wildly bright,
On secrets hidden from sight.’

‘Secrets,’ sighs the night-wind,
‘Vacancy is all I find;
Every keyhole I have made
Wails a summons, faint and sad,
No voice ever answers me,
Only vacancy.’
‘Once, once … ’ the cricket shrills,
And far and near the quiet fills
With its tiny voice, and then
Hush falls again.

Mute shadows creeping slow
Mark how the hours go.
Every stone is mouldering slow.
And the least winds that blow
Some minutest atom shake,
Some fretting ruin make
In roof and walls. How black it is
Beneath these thick boughed trees!

L&A CATALOGUE

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Featured Artist & Poet William Morris

Day

I am Day; I bring again
Life and glory, Love and pain:
Awake, arise! from death to death
Through me the World's tale quickeneth.

Night

I am Night: I bring again
Hope of pleasure, rest from pain:
Thoughts unsaid 'twixt Life and Death
My fruitful silence quickeneth.

Autumn

Laden Autumn here I stand
Worn of heart, and weak of hand:
Nought but rest seems good to me,
Speak the word that sets me free.

Flora

I am the handmaid of the earth,
I broider fair her glorious gown,
And deck her on her days of mirth
With many a garland of renown.

And while Earth's little ones are fain
And play about the Mother's hem,
I scatter every gift I gain
From sun and wind to gladden them.

Another For The Briar-Rose

Here sleeps the world that would not love!
Let it sleep on, but if He move
Their hearts in humble wise to wait
On his new-wakened fair estate.

O won at last is never late!
Thy silence was the voice of fate;
Thy still hands conquered in the strife;
Thine eyes were light; thy lips were life.

Here sleeps the world that would not love!
Let it sleep on, but if He move
Their hearts in humble wise to wait
On his new-wakened fair estate.

O won at last is never late!
Thy silence was the voice of fate;
Thy still hands conquered in the strife;
Thine eyes were light; thy lips were life.

La belle Iseult

Near But Far Away

She wavered, stopped and turned, methought her eyes,
The deep grey windows of her heart, were wet,
Methought they softened with a new regret
To note in mine unspoken miseries,
And as a prayer from out my heart did rise
And struggled on my lips in shame's strong net,
She stayed me, and cried "Brother!" our lips met,
Her deawr hands drew me into Paradise.

Sweet seemed that kiss till thence her feet were gone,
Sweet seemed the word she spake, while it might be
As wordless music—But truth fell on me,
And kiss and word I knew, and, left alone,
Face to face seemed I to a wall of stone,
While at my back there beat a boundless sea.

Mine And Thine

Two words about the world we see,
And nought but Mine and Thine they be.
Ah! might we drive them forth and wide
With us should rest and peace abide;
All free, nought owned of goods and gear,
By men and women though it were
Common to all all wheat and wine
Over the seas and up the Rhine.
No manslayer then the wide world o'er
When Mine and Thine are known no more.

Yea, God, well counselled for our health,
Gave all this fleeting earthly wealth
A common heritage to all,
That men might feed them therewithal,
And clothe their limbs and shoe their feet
And live a simple life and sweet.
But now so rageth greediness
That each desireth nothing less
Than all the world, and all his own,
And all for him and him alone.

Sir Giles' War-Song

Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

The clink of arms is good to hear,
The flap of pennons fair to see;
Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

The leopards and lilies are fair to see;
"St. George Guienne" right good to hear:
Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

I stood by the barrier,
My coat being blazon'd fair to see;
Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

Clisson put out his head to see,
And lifted his basnet up to hear;
I pulled him through the bars to ME,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières.

A Good Knight In Prison

Wearily, drearily,
Half the day long,
Flap the great banners
High over the stone;
Strangely and eerily
Sounds the wind's song,
Bending the banner-poles.

While, all alone,
Watching the loophole's spark,
Lie I, with life all dark,
Feet tether'd, hands fetter'd
Fast to the stone,
The grim walls, square-letter'd
With prison'd men's groan.

Still strain the banner-poles
Through the wind's song,
Westward the banner rolls
Over my wrong.

The Reigate Squires

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

It was some time before the health of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes recovered from the strain caused by his immense exertions in the spring of '87. The whole question of the Netherland-Sumatra Company and of the colossal schemes of Baron Maupertuis are too recent in the minds of the public, and are too intimately concerned with politics and finance to be fitting subjects for this series of sketches. They led, however, in an indirect fashion to a singular and complex problem which gave my friend an opportunity of demonstrating the value of a fresh weapon among the many with which he waged his life-long battle against crime.

On referring to my notes I see that it was upon the 14th of April that I received a telegram from Lyons which informed me that Holmes was lying ill in the Hotel Dulong. Within twenty-four hours I was in his sick-room, and was relieved to find that there was nothing formidable in his symptoms. Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months, during which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day, and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch. Even the triumphant issue of his labours could not save him from reaction after so terrible an exertion, and at a time when Europe was ringing with his name and when his room was literally ankle-deep with congratulatory telegrams I found him a prey to the blackest depression. Even the knowledge that he had succeeded where the police of three countries had failed, and that he had outmanœuvred at every point the most accomplished swindler in Europe, was insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration.

Three days later we were back in Baker Street together; but it was evident that my friend would be much the better for a change, and the thought of a week of spring time in the country was full of attractions to me also. My old friend, Colonel Hayter, who had come under my professional care in Afghanistan, had now taken a house near Reigate in Surrey, and had frequently asked me to come down to him upon a visit. On the last occasion he had remarked that if my friend would only come with me he would be glad to extend his hospitality to him also. A little diplomacy was needed, but when Holmes understood that the establishment was a bachelor one, and that he would be allowed the fullest freedom, he fell in with my plans and a week after our return from Lyons we were under the Colonel's roof. Hayter was a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world, and he soon found, as I had expected, that Holmes and he had much in common.

On the evening of our arrival we were sitting in the Colonel's gun-room after dinner, Holmes stretched upon the sofa, while Hayter and I looked over his little armoury of fire-arms.

"By the way," said he suddenly, "I think I'll take one of these pistols upstairs with me in case we have an alarm."

"An alarm!" said I.

"Yes, we've had a scare in this part lately. Old Acton, who is one of our county magnates, had his house broken into last Monday. No great damage done, but the fellows are still at large."

"No clue?" asked Holmes, cocking his eye at the Colonel.

"None as yet. But the affair is a petty one, one of our little country crimes, which must seem too small for your attention, Mr. Holmes, after this great international affair."

Holmes waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him.

"Was there any feature of interest?"

"I fancy not. The thieves ransacked the library and got very little for their pains. The whole place was turned upside down, drawers burst open, and presses ransacked, with the result that an odd volume of Pope's 'Homer,' two plated candlesticks, an ivory letter-weight, a small oak barometer, and a ball of twine are all that have vanished."

"What an extraordinary assortment!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, the fellows evidently grabbed hold of everything they could get."

Holmes grunted from the sofa.

"The county police ought to make something of that," said he; "why, it is surely obvious that—"

But I held up a warning finger.

"You are here for a rest, my dear fellow. For Heaven's sake don't get started on a new problem when your nerves are all in shreds."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a glance of comic resignation towards the Colonel, and the talk drifted away into less dangerous channels.

It was destined, however, that all my professional caution should be wasted, for next morning the problem obtruded itself upon us in such a way that it was impossible to ignore it, and our country visit took a turn which neither of us could have anticipated. We were at breakfast when the Colonel's butler rushed in with all his propriety shaken out of him.

"Have you heard the news, sir?" he gasped. "At the Cunningham's sir!"

"Burglary!" cried the Colonel, with his coffee-cup in mid-air.

"Murder!"

The Colonel whistled. "By Jove!" said he. "Who's killed, then? The J.P. or his son?"

"Neither, sir. It was William the coachman. Shot through the heart, sir, and never spoke again."

"Who shot him, then?"

"The burglar, sir. He was off like a shot and got clean away. He'd just broke in at the pantry window when William came on him and met his end in saving his master's property."

"What time?"

"It was last night, sir, somewhere about twelve."

"Ah, then, we'll step over afterwards," said the Colonel, coolly settling down to his breakfast again. "It's a baddish business," he added when the butler had gone; "he's our leading man about here, is old Cunningham, and a very decent fellow too. He'll be cut up over this, for the man has been in his service for years and was a good

servant. It's evidently the same villains who broke into Acton's."

"And stole that very singular collection," said Holmes, thoughtfully.

"Precisely."

"Hum! It may prove the simplest matter in the world, but all the same at first glance this is just a little curious, is it not? A gang of burglars acting in the country might be expected to vary the scene of their operations, and not to crack two cribs in the same district within a few days. When you spoke last night of taking precautions I remember that it passed through my mind that this was probably the last parish in England to which the thief or thieves would be likely to turn their attention—which shows that I have still much to learn."

"I fancy it's some local practitioner," said the Colonel. "In that case, of course, Acton's and Cunningham's are just the places he would go for, since they are far the largest about here."

"And richest?"

"Well, they ought to be, but they've had a lawsuit for some years which has sucked the blood out of both of them, I fancy. Old Acton has some claim on half Cunningham's estate, and the lawyers have been at it with both hands."

"If it's a local villain there should not be much difficulty in running him down," said Holmes with a yawn. "All right, Watson, I don't intend to meddle."

"Inspector Forrester, sir," said the butler, throwing open the door.

The official, a smart, keen-faced young fellow, stepped into the room. "Good-morning, Colonel," said he; "I hope I don't intrude, but we hear that Mr. Holmes of Baker Street is here."

The Colonel waved his hand towards my friend, and the Inspector bowed.

"We thought that perhaps you would care to step across, Mr. Holmes."

"The fates are against you, Watson," said he, laughing. "We were chatting about the matter when you came in, Inspector. Perhaps you can let us have a few details." As he leaned back in his chair in the familiar attitude I knew that the case was hopeless.

"We had no clue in the Acton affair. But here we have plenty to go on, and there's no doubt it is the same party in each case. The man was seen."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir. But he was off like a deer after the shot that killed poor William Kirwan was fired. Mr. Cunningham saw him from the bedroom window, and Mr. Alec Cunningham saw him from the back passage. It was quarter to twelve when the alarm broke out. Mr. Cunningham had just got into bed, and Mr. Alec was smoking a pipe in his dressing-gown. They both heard William the coachman calling for help, and Mr. Alec ran down to see what was the matter. The back door was open, and as he came to the foot of the stairs he saw two men wrestling together outside. One of them fired a shot, the other dropped, and the murderer rushed across the garden and over the hedge. Mr. Cunningham, looking out of his bedroom, saw the fellow as he gained the road, but lost sight of him at once. Mr. Alec stopped to see if he could help the dying man, and so the villain got clean away. Beyond the fact that he was a middle-sized man and dressed in some dark stuff, we have no personal clue; but we are making energetic inquiries, and if he is a stranger we shall soon find him out."

"What was this William doing there? Did he say anything before he died?"

"Not a word. He lives at the lodge with his mother, and as he was a very faithful fellow we imagine that he walked up to the house with the intention of seeing that all was right there. Of course this Acton business has put every one on their guard. The robber must have just burst open the door—the lock has been forced—when William came upon him."

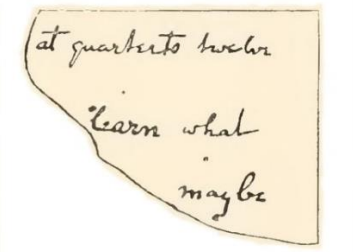
"Did William say anything to his mother before going out?"

"She is very old and deaf, and we can get no information from her. The shock has made her half-witted, but I understand that she was never very bright. There is one very important circumstance, however. Look at this!"

He took a small piece of torn paper from a note-book and spread it out upon his knee.

"This was found between the finger and thumb of the dead man. It appears to be a fragment torn from a larger sheet. You will observe that the hour mentioned upon it is the very time at which the poor fellow met his fate. You see that his murderer might have torn the rest of the sheet from him or he might have taken this fragment from the murderer. It reads almost as though it were an appointment."

Holmes took up the scrap of paper, a facsimile of which is here reproduced.



"Presuming that it is an appointment," continued the Inspector, "it is of course a conceivable theory that this William Kirwan—though he had the reputation of being an honest man, may have been in league with the thief. He may have met him there, may even have helped him to break in the door, and then they may have fallen out between themselves."

"This writing is of extraordinary interest," said Holmes, who had been examining it with intense concentration. "These are much deeper waters than I had thought." He sank his head upon his hands, while the Inspector smiled at the effect which his case had had upon the famous London specialist.

"Your last remark," said Holmes, presently, "as to the possibility of there being an understanding between the burglar and the servant, and this being a note of appointment from one to the other, is an ingenious and

not entirely impossible supposition. But this writing opens up—" He sank his head into his hands again and remained for some minutes in the deepest thought. When he raised his face again, I was surprised to see that his cheek was tinged with colour, and his eyes as bright as before his illness. He sprang to his feet with all his old energy.

"I'll tell you what," said he, "I should like to have a quiet little glance into the details of this case. There is something in it which fascinates me extremely. If you will permit me, Colonel, I will leave my friend Watson and you, and I will step round with the Inspector to test the truth of one or two little fancies of mine. I will be with you again in half an hour."

An hour and half had elapsed before the Inspector returned alone.

"Mr. Holmes is walking up and down in the field outside," said he. "He wants us all four to go up to the house together."

"To Mr. Cunningham's?"

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. "I don't quite know, sir. Between ourselves, I think Mr. Holmes had not quite got over his illness yet. He's been behaving very queerly, and he is very much excited."

"I don't think you need alarm yourself," said I. "I have usually found that there was method in his madness."

"Some folks might say there was madness in his method," muttered the Inspector. "But he's all on fire to start, Colonel, so we had best go out if you are ready."

We found Holmes pacing up and down in the field, his chin sunk upon his breast, and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets.

"The matter grows in interest," said he. "Watson, your country-trip has been a distinct success. I have had a charming morning."

"You have been up to the scene of the crime, I understand," said the Colonel.

"Yes; the Inspector and I have made quite a little reconnaissance together."

"Any success?"

"Well, we have seen some very interesting things. I'll tell you what we did as we walk. First of all, we saw the body of this unfortunate man. He certainly died from a revolver wound as reported."

"Had you doubted it, then?"

"Oh, it is as well to test everything. Our inspection was not wasted. We then had an interview with Mr. Cunningham and his son, who were able to point out the exact spot where the murderer had broken through the garden-hedge in his flight. That was of great interest."

"Naturally."

"Then we had a look at this poor fellow's mother. We could get no information from her, however, as she is very old and feeble."

"And what is the result of your investigations?"

"The conviction that the crime is a very peculiar one. Perhaps our visit now may do something to make it less obscure. I think that we are both agreed, Inspector that the fragment of paper in the dead man's hand, bearing, as it does, the very hour of his death written upon it, is of extreme importance."

"It should give a clue, Mr. Holmes."

"It *does* give a clue. Whoever wrote that note was the man who brought William Kirwan out of his bed at that hour. But where is the rest of that sheet of paper?"

"I examined the ground carefully in the hope of finding it," said the Inspector.

"It was torn out of the dead man's hand. Why was some one so anxious to get possession of it? Because it incriminated him. And what would he do with it? Thrust it into his pocket, most likely, never noticing that a corner of it had been left in the grip of the corpse. If we could get the rest of that sheet it is obvious that we should have gone a long way towards solving the mystery."

"Yes, but how can we get at the criminal's pocket before we catch the criminal?"

"Well, well, it was worth thinking over. Then there is another obvious point. The note was sent to William. The man who wrote it could not have taken it; otherwise, of course, he might have delivered his own message by word of mouth. Who brought the note, then? Or did it come through the post?"

"I have made inquiries," said the Inspector. "William received a letter by the afternoon post yesterday. The envelope was destroyed by him."

"Excellent!" cried Holmes, clapping the Inspector on the back. "You've seen the postman. It is a pleasure to work with you. Well, here is the lodge, and if you will come up, Colonel, I will show you the scene of the crime."

We passed the pretty cottage where the murdered man had lived, and walked up an oak-lined avenue to the fine old Queen Anne house, which bears the date of Malplaquet upon the lintel of the door. Holmes and the Inspector led us round it until we came to the side gate, which is separated by a stretch of garden from the hedge which lines the road. A constable was standing at the kitchen door.

"Throw the door open, officer," said Holmes. "Now, it was on those stairs that young Mr. Cunningham stood and saw the two men struggling just where we are. Old Mr. Cunningham was at that window—the second on the left—and he saw the fellow get away just to the left of that bush. Then Mr. Alec ran out and knelt beside the wounded man. The ground is very hard, you see, and there are no marks to guide us." As he spoke two men came down the garden path, from round the angle of the house. The one was an elderly man, with a strong, deep-lined, heavy-eyed face; the other a dashing young fellow, whose bright, smiling expression and showy dress were in strange contrast with the business which had brought us there.

"Still at it, then?" said he to Holmes. "I thought you Londoners were never at fault. You don't seem to be so very quick, after all."

"Ah, you must give us a little time," said Holmes good-humoredly.

"You'll want it," said young Alec Cunningham. "Why, I don't see that we have any clue at all."

"There's only one," answered the Inspector. "We thought that if we could only find—Good heavens, Mr. Holmes! What is the matter?"

My poor friend's face had suddenly assumed the most dreadful expression. His eyes rolled upwards, his features writhed in agony, and with a suppressed groan he dropped on his face upon the ground. Horrified at the suddenness and severity of the attack, we carried him into the kitchen, where he lay back in a large chair, and breathed heavily for some minutes. Finally, with a shamefaced apology for his weakness, he rose once more.

"Watson would tell you that I have only just recovered from a severe illness," he explained. "I am liable to these sudden nervous attacks."

"Shall I send you home in my trap?" asked old Cunningham.

"Well, since I am here, there is one point on which I should like to feel sure. We can very easily verify it."

"What was it?"

"Well, it seems to me that it is just possible that the arrival of this poor fellow William was not before, but after, the entrance of the burglar into the house. You appear to take it for granted that, although the door was forced, the robber never got in."

"I fancy that is quite obvious," said Mr. Cunningham, gravely. "Why, my son Alec had not yet gone to bed, and he would certainly have heard any one moving about."

"Where was he sitting?"

"I was smoking in my dressing-room."

"Which window is that?"

"The last on the left next my father's."

"Both of your lamps were lit, of course?"

"Undoubtedly."

"There are some very singular points here," said Holmes, smiling. "Is it not extraordinary that a burglar—and a burglar who had had some previous experience—should deliberately break into a house at a time when he could see from the lights that two of the family were still afoot?"

"He must have been a cool hand."

"Well, of course, if the case were not an odd one we should not have been driven to ask you for an explanation," said young Mr. Alec. "But as to your ideas that the man had robbed the house before William tackled him, I think it a most absurd notion. Wouldn't we have found the place disarranged, and missed the things which he had taken?"

"It depends on what the things were," said Holmes. "You must remember that we are dealing with a burglar who is a very peculiar fellow, and who appears to work on lines of his own. Look, for example, at the queer lot of things which he took from Acton's—what was it?—a ball of string, a letter-weight, and I don't know what other odds and ends."

"Well, we are quite in your hands, Mr. Holmes," said old Cunningham. "Anything which you or the Inspector may suggest will most certainly be done."

"In the first place," said Holmes, "I should like you to offer a reward—coming from yourself, for the officials may take a little time before they would agree upon the sum, and these things cannot be done too promptly. I have jotted down the form here, if you would not mind signing it. Fifty pounds was quite enough, I thought."

"I would willingly give five hundred," said the J.P., taking the slip of paper and the pencil which Holmes handed to him. "This is not quite correct, however," he added, glancing over the document.

"I wrote it rather hurriedly."

"You see you begin, 'Whereas, at about a quarter to one on Tuesday morning an attempt was made,' and so on. It was at a quarter to twelve, as a matter of fact."

I was pained at the mistake, for I knew how keenly Holmes would feel any slip of the kind. It was his specialty to be accurate as to fact, but his recent illness had shaken him, and this one little incident was enough to show me that he was still far from being himself. He was obviously embarrassed for an instant, while the Inspector raised his eyebrows, and Alec Cunningham burst into a laugh. The old gentleman corrected the mistake, however, and handed the paper back to Holmes. "Get it printed as soon as possible," he said; "I think your idea is an excellent one."

Holmes put the slip of paper carefully away into his pocket-book.

"And now," said he, "it really would be a good thing that we should all go over the house together and make certain that this rather erratic burglar did not, after all, carry anything away with him."

Before entering, Holmes made an examination of the door which had been forced. It was evident that a chisel or strong knife had been thrust in, and the lock forced back with it. We could see the marks in the wood where it had been pushed in.

"You don't use bars, then?" he asked.

"We have never found it necessary."

"You don't keep a dog?"

"Yes, but he is chained on the other side of the house."

"When do the servants go to bed?"

"About ten."

"I understand that William was usually in bed also at that hour."

"Yes."

"It is singular that on this particular night he should have been up. Now, I should be very glad if you would have the kindness to show us over the house, Mr. Cunningham."

A stone-flagged passage, with the kitchens branching away from it, led by a wooden staircase directly to the first floor of the house. It came out upon the landing opposite to a second more ornamental stair which came up from the front hall. Out of this landing opened the drawing-room and several bedrooms, including those of Mr. Cunningham and his son. Holmes

walked slowly, taking keen note of the architecture of the house. I could tell from his expression that he was on a hot scent, and yet I could not in the least imagine in what direction his inferences were leading him.

"My good sir," said Mr. Cunningham with some impatience, "this is surely very unnecessary. That is my room at the end of the stairs, and my son's is the one beyond it. I leave it to your judgment whether it was possible for the thief to have come up here without disturbing us."

"You must try round and get on a fresh scent, I fancy," said the son with a rather malicious smile.

"Still, I must ask you to humour me a little further. I should like, for example, to see how far the windows of the bedrooms command the front. This, I understand is your son's room"—he pushed open the door—"and that, I presume, is the dressing-room in which he sat smoking when the alarm was given. Where does the window of that look out to?" He stepped across the bedroom, pushed open the door, and glanced round the other chamber.

"I hope that you are satisfied now?" said Mr. Cunningham, tartly.

"Thank you, I think I have seen all that I wished."

"Then if it is really necessary we can go into my room."

"If it is not too much trouble."

The J.P. shrugged his shoulders, and led the way into his own chamber, which was a plainly furnished and commonplace room. As we moved across it in the direction of the window, Holmes fell back until he and I were the last of the group. Near the foot of the bed stood a dish of oranges and a carafe of water. As we passed it Holmes, to my unutterable astonishment, leaned over in front of me and deliberately knocked the whole thing over. The glass smashed into a thousand pieces and the fruit rolled about into every corner of the room.

"You've done it now, Watson," said he, coolly. "A pretty mess you've made of the carpet."

I stooped in some confusion and began to pick up the fruit, understanding for some reason my companion desired me to take the blame upon myself. The others did the same, and set the table on its legs again.

"Halloa!" cried the Inspector, "where's he got to?" Holmes had disappeared.

"Wait here an instant," said young Alec Cunningham. "The fellow is off his head, in my opinion. Come with me, father, and see where he has got to!" They rushed out of the room, leaving the Inspector, the Colonel, and me staring at each other.

"'Pon my word, I am inclined to agree with Master Alec," said the official. "It may be the effect of this illness, but it seems to me that—"

His words were cut short by a sudden scream of "Help! Help! Murder!" With a thrill I recognised the voice of that of my friend. I rushed madly from the room on to the landing. The cries, which had sunk down into a hoarse, inarticulate shouting, came from the room which we had first visited. I dashed in, and on into the dressing-room beyond. The two Cunninghams were bending over the prostrate figure of Sherlock Holmes, the younger clutching his throat with both hands, while the elder seemed to be twisting one of his wrists. In an instant the three of us had torn them away from him, and Holmes staggered to his feet, very pale and evidently greatly exhausted.

"Arrest these men, Inspector!" he gasped.

"On what charge?"

"That of murdering their coachman, William Kirwan!"

The Inspector stared about him in bewilderment. "Oh, come now, Mr. Holmes," said he at last, "I'm sure you don't really mean to—"

"Tut, man, look at their faces!" cried Holmes, curtly.

Never, certainly, have I seen a plainer confession of guilt upon human countenances. The older man seemed numbed and dazed with a heavy, sullen expression upon his strongly-marked face. The son, on the other hand, had dropped all that jaunty, dashing style which had characterized him, and the ferocity of a dangerous wild beast gleamed in his dark eyes and distorted his handsome features. The Inspector said nothing, but, stepping to the door, he blew his whistle. Two of his constables came at the call.

"I have no alternative, Mr. Cunningham," said he. "I trust that this may all prove to be an absurd mistake, but you can see that—Ah, would you? Drop it!" He struck out with his hand, and a revolver which the younger man was in the act of cocking clattered down upon the floor. "Keep that," said Holmes, quietly putting his foot upon it; "you will find it useful at the trial. But this is what we really wanted." He held up a little crumpled piece of paper.

"The remainder of the sheet!" cried the Inspector.

"Precisely."

"And where was it?"

"Where I was sure it must be. I'll make the whole matter clear to you presently. I think, Colonel, that you and Watson might return now, and I will be with you again in an hour at the furthest. The Inspector and I must have a word with the prisoners, but you will certainly see me back at luncheon time."

Sherlock Holmes was as good as his word, for about one o'clock he rejoined us in the Colonel's smoking-room. He was accompanied by a little elderly gentleman, who was introduced to me as the Mr. Acton whose house had been the scene of the original burglary. "I wished Mr. Acton to be present while I demonstrated this small matter to you," said Holmes, "for it is natural that he should take a keen interest in the details. I am afraid, my dear Colonel, that you must regret the hour that you took in such a stormy petrel as I am."

"On the contrary," answered the Colonel, warmly, "I consider it the greatest privilege to have been permitted to study your methods of working. I confess that they quite surpass my expectations, and that I am utterly unable to account for your result. I have not yet seen the vestige of a clue."

"I am afraid that my explanation may disillusionize you but it has always been my habit to hide none of my methods, either from my friend Watson or from any one who might take an intelligent interest in them. But, first, as I am rather shaken by the knocking about which I had in the dressing-room, I think that I shall help myself to a dash of your brandy, Colonel. My strength has been rather tried of late."

"I trust that you had no more of those nervous attacks."

Sherlock Holmes laughed heartily. "We will come to that in its turn," said he. "I will lay an account of the case before you in its due order, showing you the various points which guided me in my decision. Pray interrupt me if there is any inference which is not perfectly clear to you.

"It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognise, out of a number of facts, which are incidental and which vital. Otherwise your energy and attention must be dissipated instead of being concentrated. Now, in this case there was not the slightest doubt in my mind from the first that the key of the whole matter must be looked for in the scrap of paper in the dead man's hand.

"Before going into this, I would draw your attention to the fact that, if Alec Cunningham's narrative was correct, and if the assailant, after shooting William Kirwan, had *instantly* fled, then it obviously could not be he who tore the paper from the dead man's hand. But if it was not he, it must have been Alec Cunningham himself, for by the time that the old man had descended several servants were upon the scene. The point is a simple one, but the Inspector had overlooked it because he had started with the supposition that these county magnates had had nothing to do with the matter. Now, I make a point of never having any prejudices, and of following docilely wherever fact may lead me, and so, in the very first stage of the investigation, I found myself looking a little askance at the part which had been played by Mr. Alec Cunningham.

"And now I made a very careful examination of the corner of paper which the Inspector had submitted to us. It was at once clear to me that it formed part of a very remarkable document. Here it is. Do you not now observe something very suggestive about it?"

"It has a very irregular look," said the Colonel.

"My dear sir," cried Holmes, "there cannot be the least doubt in the world that it has been written by two persons doing alternate words. When I draw your attention to the strong t's of 'at' and 'to', and ask you to compare them with the weak ones of 'quarter' and 'twelve,' you will instantly recognise the fact. A very brief analysis of these four words would enable you to say with the utmost confidence that the 'learn' and the 'maybe' are written in the stronger hand, and the 'what' in the weaker."

"By Jove, it's as clear as day!" cried the Colonel. "Why on earth should two men write a letter in such a fashion?"

"Obviously the business was a bad one, and one of the men who distrusted the other was determined that, whatever was done, each should have an equal hand in it. Now, of the two men, it is clear that the one who wrote the 'at' and 'to' was the ringleader."

"How do you get at that?"

"We might deduce it from the mere character of the one hand as compared with the other. But we have more assured reasons than that for supposing it. If you examine this scrap with attention you will come to the conclusion that the man with the stronger hand wrote all his words first, leaving blanks for the other to fill up. These blanks were not always sufficient, and you can see that the second man had a squeeze to fit his 'quarter' in between the 'at' and the 'to,' showing that the latter were already written. The man who wrote all his words first is undoubtedly the man who planned the affair."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Acton.

"But very superficial," said Holmes. "We come now, however, to a point which is of importance. You may not be aware that the deduction of a man's age from his writing is one which has been brought to considerable accuracy by experts. In normal cases one can place a man in his true decade with tolerable confidence. I say normal cases, because ill-health and physical weakness reproduce the signs of old age, even when the invalid is a youth. In this case, looking at the bold, strong hand of the one, and the rather broken-backed appearance of the other, which still retains its legibility although the t's have begun to lose their crossing, we can say that the one was a young man and the other was advanced in years without being positively decrepit."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Acton again.

"There is a further point, however, which is subtler and of greater interest. There is something in common between these hands. They belong to men who are blood-relatives. It may be most obvious to you in the Greek e's, but to me there are many small points which indicate the same thing. I have no doubt at all that a family mannerism can be traced in these two specimens of writing. I am only, of course, giving you the leading results now of my examination of the paper. There were twenty-three other deductions which would be of more interest to experts than to you. They all tend to deepen the impression upon my mind that the Cunninghams, father and son, had written this letter.

"Having got so far, my next step was, of course, to examine into the details of the crime, and to see how far they would help us. I went up to the house with the Inspector, and saw all that was to be seen. The wound upon the dead man was, as I was able to determine with absolute confidence, fired from a revolver at the distance of something over four yards. There was no powder-blackening on the clothes. Evidently, therefore, Alec Cunningham had lied when he said that the two men were struggling when the shot was fired. Again, both father and son agreed as to the place where the man escaped into the road. At that point, however, as it happens, there is a broadish ditch, moist at the bottom. As there were no indications of bootmarks about this ditch, I was absolutely sure not only that the

Cunninghams had again lied, but that there had never been any unknown man upon the scene at all.

"And now I have to consider the motive of this singular crime. To get at this, I endeavoured first of all to solve the reason of the original burglary at Mr. Acton's. I understood, from something which the Colonel told us, that a lawsuit had been going on between you, Mr. Acton, and the Cunninghams. Of course, it instantly occurred to me that they had broken into your library with the intention of getting at some document which might be of importance in the case."

"Precisely so," said Mr. Acton. "There can be no possible doubt as to their intentions. I have the clearest claim upon half of their present estate, and if they could have found a single paper—which, fortunately, was in the strong-box of my solicitors—they would undoubtedly have crippled our case."

"There you are," said Holmes, smiling. "It was a dangerous, reckless attempt, in which I seem to trace the influence of young Alec. Having found nothing they tried to divert suspicion by making it appear to be an ordinary burglary, to which end they carried off whatever they could lay their hands upon. That is all clear enough, but there was much that was still obscure. What I wanted above all was to get the missing part of that note. I was certain that Alec had torn it out of the dead man's hand, and almost certain that he must have thrust it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. Where else could he have put it? The only question was whether it was still there. It was worth an effort to find out, and for that object we all went up to the house.

"The Cunninghams joined us, as you doubtless remember, outside the kitchen door. It was, of course, of the very first importance that they should not be reminded of the existence of this paper, otherwise they would naturally destroy it without delay. The Inspector was about to tell them the importance which we attached to it when, by the luckiest chance in the world, I tumbled down in a sort of fit and so changed the conversation.

"Good heavens!" cried the Colonel, laughing, "do you mean to say all our sympathy was wasted and your fit an imposture?"

"Speaking professionally, it was admirably done," cried I, looking in amazement at this man who was forever confounding me with some new phase of his astuteness.

"It is an art which is often useful," said he. "When I recovered I managed, by a device which had perhaps some little merit of ingenuity, to get old Cunningham to write the word 'twelve,' so that I might compare it with the 'twelve' upon the paper."

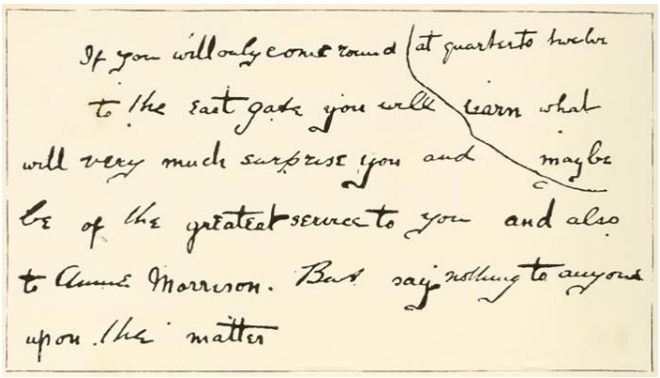
"Oh, what an ass I have been!" I exclaimed.

"I could see that you were commiserating me over my weakness," said Holmes, laughing. "I was sorry to cause you the sympathetic pain which I know that you felt. We then went upstairs together, and having entered the room and seen the dressing-gown hanging up behind the door, I contrived, by upsetting a table, to engage their attention for the moment, and slipped back to examine the pockets. I had hardly got the paper, however—which was, as I had expected, in one of them—when the two Cunninghams were on me, and would, I verily believe, have murdered me then and there but for your prompt and friendly aid. As it is, I feel that young man's grip on my throat now, and the father has twisted my wrist round in the effort to get the paper out of my hand. They saw that I must know all about it, you see, and the sudden change from absolute security to complete despair made them perfectly desperate.

"I had a little talk with old Cunningham afterwards as to the motive of the crime. He was tractable enough, though his son was a perfect demon, ready to blow out his own or anybody else's brains if he could have got to his revolver. When Cunningham saw that the case against him was so strong he lost all heart and made a clean breast of everything. It seems that William had secretly followed his two masters on the night when they made their raid upon Mr. Acton's, and having thus got them into his power, proceeded, under threats of exposure, to levy blackmail upon them. Mr. Alec, however, was a dangerous man to play games of that sort with. It was a stroke of positive genius on his part to see in the burglary scare which was convulsing the country side an opportunity of plausibly getting rid of the man whom he feared. William was decoyed up and shot, and had they only got the whole of the note and paid a little more attention to detail in the accessories, it is very possible that suspicion might never have been aroused."

"And the note?" I asked.

Sherlock Holmes placed the subjoined paper before us.

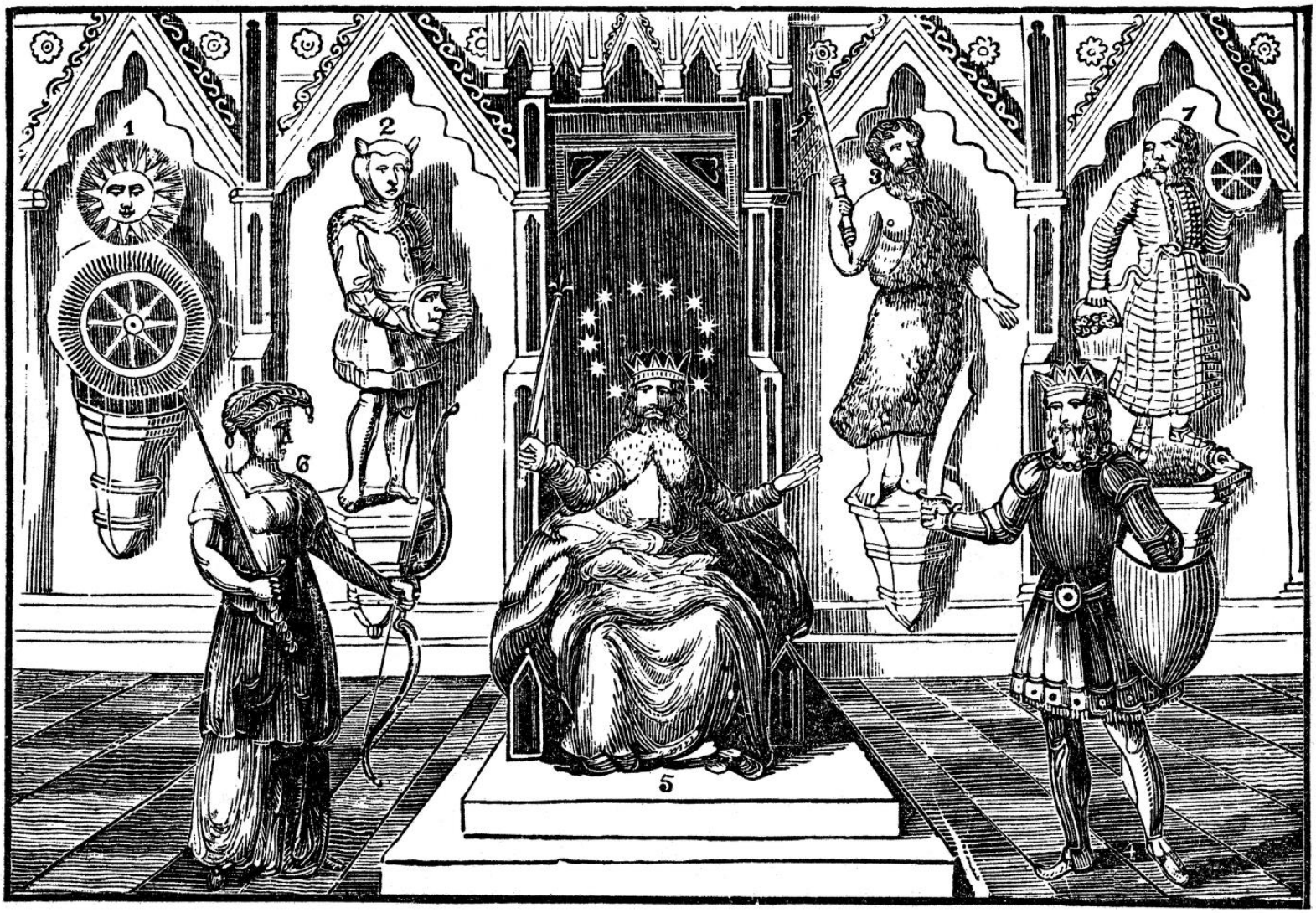

If you will only come round at quarter to twelve to the east gate you will learn what will very much surprise you and maybe be of the greatest service to you and also to Annie Morrison. But say nothing to anyone upon the matter

"It is very much the sort of thing that I expected," said he. "Of course, we do not yet know what the relations may have been between Alec Cunningham, William Kirwan, and Annie Morrison. The results shows that the trap was skillfully baited. I am sure that you cannot fail to be delighted with the traces of heredity shown in the p's and in the tails of the g's. The absence of the i-dots in the old man's writing is also most characteristic. Watson, I think our quiet rest in the country has been a distinct success, and I shall certainly return much invigorated to Baker Street to-morrow."

A Song of Spring: A Sword Fit For A King

Part 6: Hunted

AR Green



Kildan watched a shadow making its way toward him.

"I'm here," said Findan.

"Come, step forward son, I can't see a thing through this damnable fog," said Kildan.

The young Mearcian pushed on toward the orange glow of the torchlight. He came to a stop before his father's horse and looked up.

"Is the bridge finished? And have the beasts given you any trouble, or did they leave you in peace?" asked the Leodman.

"It's finished. We felled two more trees to bridge the river, cut away all the branches and laid planks across them. It should bear the weight of the horses. As for the beasts - hard to say. The fog made it difficult to see anything beyond an arm's length, but a few of the lads said they saw fires on the other side of the river. There's no trees on that side either, so they should be easy to see coming once the fog lifts," said Findan.

"As long as they keep to their side I'm happy - maybe you could kill a few while you're over there to make my life easier," joked Paul.

"We are not going over there to hunt cearulves. We're going over there to carry out the King's orders," said Kildan.

The lieutenant bowed, "Sorry m'Leod, I'll make sure none shall pass."

Kildan nodded and turned toward where he thought the bridge lay, but it was still shrouded in fog. Paul hopped down from his horse and started setting up his men in the towers, as Micha made his way over to the Leodman.

"We've lost much of the day. Best to camp here the night and hope this miserable weather has broken by morn," said Micha.

The Leodman nodded, "Trying to push into unknown lands, when we can't see anything beyond the tips of our spears, would be worse than foolish. We'll camp here tonight."

Micha turned and walked away, fading into the gloom. Kildan heard sighs of relief from the men, as the captain told them they would be sleeping on this side of the river tonight.

Kildan awoke to find sunlight breaking in through the flap of his tent. The Leodman could hear the men of the camp beginning to stir. He got up and found the fog had lifted, and watched the night watch stepping down from their posts - they wearily carried themselves off to their bedrolls. Work had begun on making a more lasting camp, half built huts made from the branches of the felled trees had started sprouting up in the nearby forest. Kildan took in the cool morning air. He quickly packed up his tent, and sat down by the burnt out fire, soaking in the morning sun. After a while he stood and set about ordering his men to make ready to cross beyond the river.

The Leodman watched the men hastily breaking the camp. Kildan spotted his son and Nordon making their way over to him.

"Are you two ready to cross the river?" asked Kildan.

"Yes, we're ready. Nordon had something he wanted to say," said Findan, nudging Nordon forward.

"Oh? What is it lad?" said the Leodman.

"M'Leod, my father was your shieldbearer in the Oleric Wars. I see that you don't have one for this journey," said Nordon.

"Yes, I remember. Govannon was one of the finest shieldbearers I ever had - I'll bet he told you all the stories," said Kildan.

"He did - my brothers and I would sit around the fire listening to him singing songs of war, and telling us tales of you and your men. I always loved the siege of Gudbi - he told how you and he were the first warriors over the wall."

Kildan smiled and nodded, "It was a hard fought battle. I was a younger man then, more fiery and headstrong. Now I'm a fair bit older and wiser, and where we're going is more dangerous than any castle wall. After Yarik's death, no man has stepped forward to take up my shield. Is that why you are here, Nordon?"

"Yes, I will bear your shield if you ask it of me."

"Good, then my shieldbearer you will be. If you are but half the man your father was, then I would be a fool not to ask it of you."

Nordon bowed.

"I take it you have a rough idea of what your duties will be?" asked Kildan.

"Yes m'Leod. Do you need me to pack up your camp and make ready your horse?"

"My pack is ready. Go fetch mine and my son's horses, and meet us at the bridge with them."

Nordon nodded, and went rushing off towards the camp.

Kildan looked across the water at the strange lands.

"What do you think we'll find over there?" asked Findan.

"Nothing friendly, that's for sure," said the Leodman.

The two made their way over to the makeshift bridge, and were met by Nordon a while later. The young shieldbearer rode on his own horse, leading two other horses to them.

"Your horses m'Leods," said Nordon.

"Thank you, shieldbearer," said Kildan as Findan nodded, taking the reins of his horse from him.

Kildan stepped forward and swung up onto Bruncwic.

"Ready?" asked the Leodman, turning to his son.

"Yes."

Kildan rode up onto the bridge and turned to face his band.

"Beyond this bridge lies the revenge I swore would be yours for the taking. All you need do to claim it is follow me along the path set out for us by the Gods, as shown to our King. Now make no mistake - this is not a path for lesser men. Not all of us that cross this river will be coming back to our beloved homeland - some of us will make the great journey onto the halls of our forefathers. Glory will be upon us, we stouthearted few. Our names will be sung in every house and every hall. A seat will be set for every man who is brave enough to

cross this bridge, at both my table and the tables of our forefathers. Now ride out with me, and be ready to push back the tide itself."

Kildan pulled on his reins and began making his way across the bridge; Findan put his heels into his horse, following close behind his father. Steel hooves clattered on the wooden beams as the rest of the band made their way to the other side of the river. Kildan watched as the men followed him over - he spotted the ranger's son, Alasdair.

"Did your father tell you which way was best to reach the old city?"

"Yes m'Leod. He said it was best to stay off the roads, and follow the river along till we came across the ruins of an old watchtower. When we find the watchtower, we head south and make for a clearing between two forests. Once we have made it through the clearing, we should head east - sticking to the treeline of the forest. If we stick to the edge of the woods, we should reach the city after two days ride."

"Very good, scout ahead for us. If you spot anything, do not try to fight it - ride back and tell me; only fight if there is no other way out."

"Yes m'Leod."

The last of the party was finishing making their way across the bridge. The guardsmen on the other side of the water waved farewell as the band collected themselves and began riding, keeping the river on their left. They followed the river as it wove its way through the land, keeping an eye on the plains and woods beyond. The sun shone down - baking the dry, dusty earth that spread out as far as the eye could see. At midday, with the sun high overhead, the party stopped to rest. They had made it a good way along from the new bridge, some ten miles by the Leodman's reckoning.

"M'Leod, smoke!" shouted out Kieren, from the back of the pack.

Kildan and the rest of the men turned around - a thick column of black smoke rose above the hills they had just rode past.

"Looks like we'll have to find another way back - that idiot brother of the Mayor should never have been given the job of watching over the bridge. He's about as much use as a pair of wax tongs," said Micha, frowning and shaking his head.

"Should we go back and help them?" asked Findan.

"No, by the looks of that smoke the bridge will be long gone before we get there and, with no bridge to guard, the men will have left too. We push on to the tower," said Kildan - he knew it wasn't far away.

The party rode on a few more miles, then stopped to eat. As the men sat breaking their bread, Kildan looked over them. They all looked to be in good spirits, yet the band ate their meals as quietly as field mice. The few that had already faced the cearulves were sat huddled with the new warriors, telling tales in hushed tones of the battle of the Bleuwoods. They showed the charred marks on the hafts of their spears, and the blueish hues on the spearheads where the heat of the beasts had tempered the iron.

The men set off along the river once more. The steady beat of hooves cut through the quiet that had been stalking them since crossing the bridge. As they rode on, Findan felt the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end; Kildan made his way over to him.

"Do you feel it, son?" asked the Leodman, looking off toward one of the hilltops.

The young Mearcian nodded, "It's just like before."

They kept going till their shadows grew long under the setting sun. The party set up camp on the banks of the river, as the unease crept closer. Morning came, and Kildan saw the men whispering to one another as they hastily packed up.

"You all know what is hunting us by now, but do not let your thoughts stray from the path; we ride on to the tower," Kildan told the men.

The few that had fought the cearulves nodded grimly, and they all followed their Leodman - setting off for the tower.

"Not far now. Should only be a few more river bends away," said Kildan, turning back to face the band.

No sooner had he faced forward again, did he spot one of the outriders heading toward them. Alasdair cut a path straight for the Leodman.

"The tower is just ahead m'Leod, but it's already held by hwiliks. We'd best turn south now to avoid them."

Kildan pulled on the reins of his horse, bringing it to a stop.

"That would be a good idea, but I want to get a measure of these fiends for myself. How close do you think we can get without them seeing?"

The rest of the party halted behind their Leodman, waiting on his word.

"There are some hills we could use as cover to get a closer look, but we'd best go on foot if we don't want to be spotted."

The Leodman gave a nod and climbed down from his horse. The rest of the men followed Kildan's lead. A few men stayed behind, driving pegs into the ground and hitching the horses.

"Lead the way," said Kildan to Alasdair.

The ranger set off quietly with the men following close behind. They passed two wide sweeping bends in the river and came to the foot of a hill. Alasdair lay down on his belly and began crawling. The rest of the party did the same, all getting as low as they could. They made it to the crest and could see the odd grey stones of the watchtower looming over the river. In the shadows, Kildan spotted it - at first it looked like a man, but as Kildan looked more closely, a chill ran down his spine. The dark creature lurched forward - what at first the Leodman had taken for clothes, was in fact skin loosely fixed to bone. The men lay watching the monster shuffling around for a while.

"I think this is close enough - any closer and they might spot us. Have you seen enough m'Leod, should we make our way past?" asked Alasdair, looking down at the tower with unease written on his face..

"Fret not young ranger, I've seen enough of these fiends. We'll do well to stay out of their way as long as we

can, so let's head back before we're seen," said Kildan in a whisper.

Alasdair nodded to the Leodman. Just as Kildan started heading back down the hill, one of the creatures dropped down onto all fours. It jolted forward with arms and legs scrambling - a hare sped across the plain, but it wasn't fast enough. The monster dove atop it, grabbing hold of it and biting down through the fur. Findan looked on, scowling at the foul beast as it ripped apart the hare.

"As if the fall of the empire itself was not enough," said Findan under his breath.

"They forsook the gods and turned on their own kin, they earned this fate," whispered Alasdair.

The band slowly crawled backward down from the hilltop and made their way back to the horses. Kildan led the men south toward a gap in the woods. As they started passing the first few barren trees, the sun dipped low to the west. The days had slowly been growing longer, but night would soon be upon them.

"Set up camp here, away from the woods. Set up watches so we can see anything coming. I'm sure none of us want to be woken up by the smell of burning in the morn, so keep a keen eye out for cearulves," shouted Kildan to his men. The Leodman had already spotted a few shadows moving in the woods.

"The cearulves will avoid us if we light enough fires - but my Dad said if we light too many fires, there are other more dangerous monsters even than the hwiliks that may be drawn to us," said Alasdair to Kildan.

The Leodman nodded and gave orders to be sparing with the torches. After the party had climbed into their tents for the night, the shadows in the woods faded away into the darkness. The first and second watch passed quietly. On the third watch some of the men spotted a few small fires in the treeline - come morning, it became clear the fiery eyes of cearulves were upon the party once more.

Kildan woke, hearing the men whispering nearby, and made his way to a small fire at the heart of the camp to get his breakfast.

"Why did they only watch, and not attack last night?" one of the newcomers asked the man next to him.

"They're waiting for their chief," said Kieren.

As the Leodman sat on a small boulder, he looked to the treeline wondering how much bigger the beasts on this side of the river would be. Out of the corner of his eye he spotted a hulking black shadow creeping through the woods - he had his answer. This creature was twice the size of the beast that he had slain in the Bleuwoods. A few of the men turned to face the fiend, spears in hand. The cearulf let out a piercing howl, Kildan jumped to his feet.

"Break the camp! Get to the horses!"

The men scrambled, bundling tents and bedrolls onto the backs of horses. Kildan jumped atop Bruncwic and set off, leading the band. The woods lay to their east and west hemming in the way ahead. The cearulf that had left the shade of the trees was now slowly following the group, its kin came pouring out of the forest like smoke from a chimney. The men pushed onwards - by midday, the pack following them had grown to at least two dozen or so. Kildan had turned the party to face the beasts, but they scattered into the treeline. As the band rode on, yet more creatures crept out of the shadows of the woods. The beasts now outnumbered the riders. The woodlands fell away until barren brushland unfolded as far as Kildan could see before him.

The men came together more tightly in the open lands, the Leodman spotted hills far off to the south and pressed onward. Findan rode forward, coming alongside his father.

"They seem to be driving us as though we are a flock."

"Yes, they do. And there's too many of them now to turn back, so I'll guess we'll find out where they're herding us soon enough.

As the band continued heading south, Kildan spotted a string of giant banner poles dotting the lands ahead of them. He turned to head east away from the strange poles, but the cearulves cut him off - pushing him toward them.

Kildan came to a crumbling wall of waist height; beyond it, the ground was muddied, but beneath it he could see strange black stones and the same white stone he had seen on the roads to Gurord. This was a road of the old empire. The Leodman cursed under his breath and looked back to the cearulves that were slowly pressing toward the band. Kildan turned his horse back to the wall and jumped over it.

Bruncwic's steel shoes clacked against the black stone as he landed. Kildan looked back and watched his men follow over the crumbling wall. It looked as if the road had been one whole stone when first made, now many holes and cracks broke it apart. Kildan could see two more walls lay between the party and the other side; he made his way to the next, which sat in the middle of the road, cleaving it in two. Riding along it he found some smaller gaps near the bannerpoles, and made his way through to the other half. He put his heels into his horse, and galloped across the stony ground. The Leodman then quickly jumped over the next wall and rode on to get away from the road. Harod's warning echoed in his ear - "stay off the roads."

Findan shouted out to the party from the back.

"Look, the pack has stopped."

The party turned back to watch as the cyngwulf stopped, sniffing at the first wall on the north side of the road. The fiend stood looking over the crumbling rubble, fiery eyes fixed on the party. Kildan could almost feel the heat of the creature's gaze upon him like a red hot poker. The beast did not linger, it turned and headed back toward the woods - the rest of the pack slowly turned away, following their leader.

A few of the men sighed in relief as they watched the monsters slinking away back to whatever hole they crawled out of. Kildan watched with a queer feeling of dread hanging over him. A thought quietly pushed its way to the front of the Leodman's mind, like the point of a dagger.

"Why did they chase us over this road?"

Eagle's Flight 7

AR Duncan

“**Attack at once**. Each day we wait we risk getting discovered. We’ve got the advantage, we’ve snuck in past their scouts and they are entirely unprepared. The more we wait the more we have to lose. We must attack at once”.

As Anaerin delivered his impassioned pleas the twelve men assembled around the campfire hidden deep within the cliffs stared at him in silence deferring their judgement to the elder. Anaerin was the youngest of the thirteen by many years, the eldest was already old when he held him as a babe, but Anaerin had earned his place amongst them for both feats of the field of battle and for virtue of being the King’s heir apparent. Yet, he was still young, still impetuous. Still filled with an overwhelming passion for glory that only war could provide. The past year of war, marriage, and royal duties had thrust him into manhood but, as young men who have yet to taste failure are, he was still fully convinced in his own invulnerability. The gods had chosen him alone to drag Stratysca into the promised future. The warleaders, as always, called for patience.

“We are on our own and outnumbered. The rest of our force and the Seaxings are a day and a night’s march away. If they find us, we draw their men away from our allies. And if they don’t, and leave to pursue the other forces, then we can attack. But until that point, patience. Our time will come”.

He smiled at Anaerin with the ever so friendly face that had smiled at him since birth but even those warm hazel eyes could cast a gaze of authority and order better than those of any man around the fire. He was one of the few men to remember the last wars before the two decades of peace and still be fighting, and he was certainly the only man to remember the war before that. He had seen nearly as much fighting as a Seaxing but his face showed little of the signs of it. It was filled with joviality and patience and beneath the deep set eyes and long nose he had a thick moustache that wriggled on his face as he talked like a creature with a will of its own. But when the battle loomed and men were asked to risk their lives, every word from his mouth was direct from the gods. Still, Anaerin stood there and considered him a coward.

“We’ll attack on my order, and that’ll come when the time is right. Keep on high alert, you’re dismissed men”.

The men spilled out from the depths of the cliffs and back to the soldiers who waited patiently for their leaders. Hoc waited for his master just beyond earshot and joined him as he walked between the rocks that sheltered the small force. He knew the look on his master’s face. Rebellion.

“Get the twins. The three of you come meet me at the cliff edge lookout. Bring no one else”.

“We’re attacking aren’t we. And against orders too”.

“Get the twins. Meet me at the cliff edge”.

From the cliff’s edge one could get a commanding view over the entire valley that the town of Moridden lay at the centre of, and all without easily being seen by any inhabitants. On road cut through the thick forest that lined the valley as it lead the river down to the distant sea. Gazing out through the patchwork of trees and clearings Anaerin could see the vague hints of life continuing as normal. Too far out to discern individuals, the centre of the town was a patchwork of colours and shadows in constant flux as commerce, industry, and family cared not for the prospect of war. Occasionally the sun would glance off steel and the flash would remind Anaerin of war. His mind would wander from war to his plans for the evening, and then the haze of anger and rebellion would fall upon him. If they waited loss was inevitable but the old men were not brave enough to see it. He would disobey his leaders but tonight he would succeed and prove they had been wrong, or die and then there would be no punishment. The gods would not object either. He knew the stories, the poems, the tales of old. He was in the right. Neither Hoc nor either of the twins would stop him, and though they would object he knew they’d agree to follow him when pushed. Hoc was bound to his master and his mind was one that was incapable of considering betrayal. His father had been no different. And Hewarch and Talisen, the twins who wrapped themselves in such cynicism they would inevitably follow anyone who ordered them. They just needed correctly channelled. All three were now leaders of a small group of warriors, there would be thirty in all. Thirty that were all young and aching for a fight. There were hundreds in the town but they only needed to get in and begin causing enough chaos for the rest of the Stratyscan army to notice and then the battle could begin proper. How could they not win? From the trees emerged Hoc and the twins. The servant’s face resigned, the twins’ twisted with displeasure.

“What glory have you got lined up for us this time then O chosen of the gods”.

Anaerin turned and prepared himself, confident in the knowledge that he would win.

That night thirty men snuck through the gloom filled forest that swayed in the breeze and the rain, crying out the presence of intruders to a deaf, unhearing world. They stalked along both sides of the road keeping just beyond the limits of torchlight that any of the men who may have dared walk the road at night. Under dancing branches and over rotting logs the two parties stepped forward pace by pace. At the head of his pack Anaerin’s eyes and mind were fixed on the road ahead with no energy spared for the puddles and marsh underneath his sodden feet. They had talked through the plan and were prepared to scale the walls, to keep themselves hidden until they could open the gate for their comrade, and they were all ready to burn whatever the rain would allow them. It was only a short walk through

the forest to the town and soon the fighting could begin. Each man steeled himself for violence as he walked.

Suddenly they were stopped. The silhouette of a lone man appeared momentarily between the trees that lined the road. Anaerin turned to see one of his men with an arrow knocked and his aim steadied, but before he could fire Anaerin slammed the bow to the ground and let out a hushed cry. All his men fell to the ground crouching behind trees, logs, and bushes in an attempt to avoid the gaze of the scout. He was fully armed and armoured, stalking along the road with a stealth the observers wished they possessed and where there was one scout there were others, and then behind them would be an army. All Anaerin could do was sit in silence and hope that his men weren't seen and that the men the twins commanded had the sense to do the same. They did not.

An arrow flew out of the woodland on the other side of the road and struck the tree Hoc sheltered behind. The man on the road let out a cry and turned to run back along the road. Two other dark figures emerged from the trees and began running back towards the town. Anaerin let out another yell, this time loud enough to be heard across the road, and his men burst from their cover to catch the fleeing scouts. The man who had stalked between the road and the Stratyscans fell near instantly and Anaerin could see some of his men go after the figure deeper in the woods but the man on the road fled with hasten so Anaerin pressed on after him. The world in the trees became a blur and the noises and cries became warped and muffled through wind, rain, and the all-consuming fog of war. The mist fell thickly and the figure of a fleeing man was cast against the dark grey sky and framed by darkening trees was the only thing Anaerin witnessed. The ground was muddy and slick with rain but still the two men charged onwards drawing on energy that the wind itself seemed to impart upon them. Two other men had joined Anaerin on the chase but both now lagged behind, one stopping the chase to loose an arrow at the fleeing target but it went wide and disappeared into the woods.

Ahead the dark grey of the night's sky became tinged with the unnatural orange glow that danced and flickered. A horde of men with torches made their way, ready to embrace their scout home and bring ruin upon the plans of Stratysca's heir apparent. Figures became visible as the chase drew on and Anaerin threw himself forward with spear in hand and thrust it through the belly of the fleeing man. He fell to the ground crying out a warning to the men who marched toward the scene of the fight but did not live to see if it would be heeded. Anaerin turned back to his men and frantically signalled for them to hide, but he had chosen well and the men did not need told. Nearly slipping as he strained against the mud and rain slicked grass, he dragged the corpse from the road to the edge of the forest and laid low, hoping that the men would not notice, or the rain would wash clean the road, or the men would assume an animal origin to the blood that led behind the patch of tall grass.

He did not have time to fully compose himself before the enemy was only paces away and he was required to still himself, fighting against the shakes of adrenaline. The men wore rain slicked shining armour and held weapons and shield and each had a face and they talked readily amongst themselves. They were men ready for war and looked forward to it eagerly. Nearly half the column had passed before one man stopped and took note of the trail of blood. He motioned at it to one of his comrades but they only let out a laugh and continued marching. The weather was much too poor to waste time in the forest. The solitary inquisitive soldier broke rank and peered over towards to the tuft of grass Anaerin lay behind holding close to the corpse of his recently defeated foe. The investigator paused and held his torch aloft, the light hitting the edge of Anaerin's armour that before this evening had shone with steely clarity but now was dull with mud. An unlikely saviour. Anaerin screwed his eyes shut and could not let himself breathe. The agonising seconds drew on as the torchbearer combed the scene with light, drawing ever closer to finding the truth.

Suddenly an eagle disturbed by the man's intrusion burst forth from the trees and flew over the soldier's head and into the sky above the army. Her turned abruptly to watch it go, then realised how far his comrades had gone in his absence so rejoined the men and marched on. Anaerin lay still and did not move until the formation's torches were long gone and he sighted his own men. They left the bodies in the forest and continued onto the town.

The earth packed wooden walls showed little evidence of occupation. A few paltry torches bobbed back and forth beyond the palisade in the predictable pattern of bored watchmen and the watch posts sheltered less men than they should. On a night like that night each of them would be wishing they were anywhere else than patrolling the outskirts of a ran soaked town. The rain would be their undoing. The walls of the Moridden were built to keep out wolves and opportunistic bandits not the pack of glory crazed young men who now descended upon them. With the garrison of the town gone they could dispense with the need for stealth. In the nighttime rain Anaerin was not spotted until he was already on top of the wall and moments after that all his men appeared beside him. A cry came up from the nearest tower but the wind and rain made short work of it. Two spears pointed down from the watch post towards Anaerin's chest but the thrusts were feeble and he beat them aside handily, pulling himself up to the covered platform to face his foes. Two men stood staring at the blood crazed youth before them, their untrained spears pointing off at nothing. One was much too old, the other much too young. Anaerin made short work of them. Up and down the stretch of wall the same scene played out in

similarly graphic detail. Inhabitants of the houses closest to the massacre began to wake and flee into the streets, where they too were cut down. A warrior ran into a house and then back out a few moments later as the building burst into flames. Anaerin smiled from the tower as the rush of success flowed through him. The gods truly were with him. He pulled the torches from their sconces and threw them to the floor, ripping some dry cloth from the treasured clothing of the two dead men and throwing that down to join the budding fire. After a minute of tending even the damp wood took light and as he ran down to the ground the heat of the inferno behind him scorched his back. He roared with joy and ran into the dark streets of Moridden to join his men in causing unimaginable and all-consuming chaos.

A mile away a lone lookout sitting on a cliff's edge saw the flames of his foe's town and went to wake his superiors. Within in little time the entire camp was roused and flooding down into the valley with sword in hand and murder in their hearts. The warleader noted the absence of Anaerin and his men but that was an issue to be dealt with later. There was war to be made.

Edward Burne Jones

St Swithin

Shieldmaiden

Portrait of St Swithun in the
Benedictional of St Æthelwold, c. 970s

greencanticle.com

St Swithun's day if thou dost rain. For forty days it will remain. St Swithun's day if thou be fair. For forty days 'twill rain nae mare.

There is folklore surrounding St. Swithin's day, which states that if it rains on July 15th (St. Swithin's feast day), it will continue to rain for the next 40 days.

The belief in the connection between St. Swithin, rain, and apples has been passed down through generations of apple growers. It is seen as a sign of good luck and prosperity for the upcoming harvest season. The tradition of hoping for rain on St. Swithin's Day or St. Peter's Day continues to be observed by many apple growers, as they eagerly await the blessings of the saints on their orchards. The symbolism of rain as a form of divine intervention in the growth and development of apples adds a spiritual element to the practice of apple cultivation, reinforcing the deep-rooted connection between nature, religion, and agriculture.

A verse by Anglo-American writer Elizabeth Sewell says

"High in the Heavenly Places

I see Saint Swinthin Stand.

HIs garments smell of apples

And rain-wet English land."

This lore is said to have originated from the legend that when St. Swithin's remains were moved from their original burial place outside to a shrine inside Winchester Cathedral, it began to rain and continued for 40 days. This led people to believe that if it rained on his feast day, it would continue for the same amount of time. The saying has persisted in British folklore for centuries. Today, many still look to the weather on St. Swithin's Day as a predictor of what the summer weather will be like in the weeks to come.

St. Swithin's influence extended beyond the borders of England, reaching as far as Norway through the efforts of English missionaries. His connection to St. Olaf, the patron saint of Norway, further solidified his presence in Norwegian religious tradition. The dedication of cathedrals in both countries to St. Swithin reflects the widespread reverence for this Anglo-Saxon bishop and his significance in Christian history. The shared feast days in England and Norway serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness of these two cultures and their mutual respect for this beloved saint.

Swithin's legacy as a wise counselor and influential figure in Winchester continued long after his death. He was revered as a saint, with miracles attributed to him, and his feast day on July 15th became known as "St. Swithin's Day." The legend of the stone bridge he built over the river Itchen symbolized his contributions to the development and prosperity of the city.

Legend has it that St. Swinthin's miraculous protection of the queen during her trial solidified her reputation as a powerful and benevolent saint. The story spread far and wide, inspiring countless believers to turn to St. Swinthin in times of need. The queen herself became a devout follower of the saint, forever grateful for her intercession on that fateful day at Winchester Cathedral.

This miracle not only demonstrated St. Swithin's compassion and willingness to stand up for the vulnerable, but also showed the power of forgiveness and redemption. It serves as a reminder that even small acts of kindness can have a profound impact on others, turning a moment of despair into one of hope and restoration. St. Swithin's miracle continues to inspire people to show empathy and generosity towards those in need, no matter how insignificant the gesture may seem.

As word of the miracle spread, pilgrims from near and far flocked to the cathedral. The site of the ploughshares blades became a place of pilgrimage, with many seeking healing and protection from the saint's powerful presence. The story of St. Swinthin's miraculous protection of the queen became a symbol of hope and faith for many, reminding them that even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, divine intervention is always possible.

Today in Winchester Cathedral you can see St Swinthin's shrine.

Venta by Jane Austen

When Winchester races first took their beginning
It is said the good people forgot their old Saint
Not applying at all for the leave of St. Swithin
And that William of Wykham's approval was faint.

The races however were fix'd and determin'd
The company met & the weather was charming
The Lords & the Ladies were sattin'd and ermin'd
And nobody saw any future alarming.–

But when the old Saint was inform'd of these doings
He made but one spring from his shrine to the roof
Of the Palace which now lies so sadly in ruins
And then he address'd them all standing aloof.

Oh subjects rebellious, Oh Venta depraved
When once we are buried you think we are dead
But behold me Immortal. – By vice you're enslaved
You have sinn'd & must suffer. – Then further he said

These races & revels & dissolute measures
With which you're debasing a neighboring Plain
Let them stand–you shall meet with your curse in your pleasures
Set off for your course, I'll pursue with my rain.

Ye cannot but know my command in July
Henceforward I'll triumph in shewing my powers
Shift your race as you will it shall never be dry
The curse upon Venta is July in showers.

The Children of Stare

Walter de La Mare

Winter is fallen early
On the house of Stare;
Birds in reverberating flocks
Haunt its ancestral box;
Bright are the plenteous berries
In clusters in the air.

Still is the fountain's music,
The dark pool icy still,
Whereupon a small and sanguine sun
Floats in a mirror on,
Into a West of crimson,
From a South of daffodil.

'Tis strange to see young children
In such a wintry house;
Like rabbits' on the frozen snow
Their tell-tale footprints go;
Their laughter rings like timbrels
'Neath evening ominous:

Their small and heightened faces
Like wine-red winter buds;
Their frolic bodies gentle as
Flakes in the air that pass,
Frail as the twirling petal
From the briar of the woods.

Above them silence lours,
Still as an arctic sea;
Light fails; night falls; the wintry moon
Glitters; the crocus soon
Will open grey and distracted
On earth's austerity:

Thick mystery, wild peril,
Law like an iron rod:—
Yet sport they on in Spring's attire,
Each with his tiny fire
Blown to a core of ardour
By the awful breath of God.

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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris