THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

COLLECTED AND RETOLD BY
ROGER LANCELYN GREEN
ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR HALL

PUFFIN CLASSICS

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'Robin Hood's is a story that can never die, nor cease to fire the imagination. Like the old fairytales, it must be told and told again – for like them it is touched with enchantment, and few of us can fail to come under its spell.'

So writes Roger Lancelyn Green in the introduction to this vigorous retelling of the Robin Hood legend. When Robin Hood's land and goods were confiscated and he was declared an outlaw, he made his home deep in Sherwood Forest and recruited a band of honest and principled men to help him fight the oppression of the rich barons. They pledged themselves to help the poor and swore loyalty only to King Richard the Lionheart, who was fighting in the Crusades. In Richard's absence, however, his wicked cousin Prince John usurps the throne and is determined to wipe out any opposition to his harsh rule. The ways in which Robin Hood and his men outwit John and the Sheriff of Nottingham make entertaining and exciting reading for all ages.

Roger Lancelyn Green was born in Norfolk in 1918. While a student at Merton College, Oxford, he developed a deep interest in myths and Arthurian legends. He took to full-time writing after spells as a schoolmaster, antiquarian bookseller, professional actor and librarian. He has over forty books to his credit, many of which are classic retellings of famous stories.

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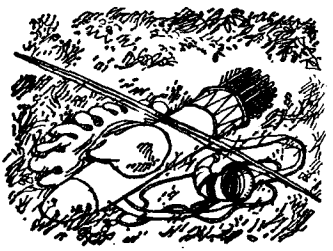

Robin Hood is here again: all his merry thieves
Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves . . .
The dead are coming back again, the years are rolled away
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

ALFRED NOYES

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To
'BUSS'
(Miss A. L. Mansfield)
in memory of ROBIN HOOD
and many other
end-of-term plays
at Knockaloe, Poulton,
and Lane End

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AS TO THE SOURCES FROM WHICH HIS MATERIAL IS DERIVED

To retell the adventures of Robin Hood is a very different matter from writing of King Arthur and his Knights. The Arthurian poems and romances, even if we take Malory as the latest, would fill a bookcase – and in that bookcase we would find some of the great literature of the world, in several languages.

Robin Hood had no Malory, and he has had few poets. A late medieval metrical romance, *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode:* a collection of Ballads most of which are the merest doggerel and some of which may be as late as the eighteenth century; a prose rendering of several of the Ballads, and two plays by Anthony Munday, a contemporary of Shakespeare, called *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* constitute nearly all that we may call the original Robin Hood Literature. If we add to this several short scraps of medieval folk-plays which merely follow extant ballads, a brief appearance in Robert Greene's play *George-a-Greene the Pinner of Wakefield* and its exactly parallel prose romance, and a rather fuller appearance in Ben Jonson's unfinished pastoral play *The Sad Shepherd*, our sources are complete.

It was only after the ballads, romances, and plays were collected and reprinted by Joseph Ritson at the end of the eighteenth century that Robin Hood found his way into real literature. Even so he found his best expression as a minor character, as all readers of *Ivanhoe* will agree. The majority of the ballads, with a glance at the dramatic background, gave Thomas Love Peacock the outline for the best prose story of Robin Hood yet written, his *Maid Marian* (1822), and the same sources (to which Peacock and Scott also lent something) produced Tennyson's play of *The Foresters* (1881) – a pleasant re-arrangement of the old materials, but of no special merit either as poetry or as drama. It was left for the twentieth century to give us the finest poetic play yet written

with Robin as hero, Alfred Noyes's *Robin Hood* (1926 – acted the same year).

There have, of course, been many other minor contributions made to the literature of Robin Hood in the form of plays, operas and adventure stories. But by far the largest number of books about him during the last hundred years consist of various forms of retellings of the old legends – none of which has found a permanent place on the shelf reserved for *The Blue Fairy Book*, *The Heroes* and *Tanglewood Tales*.

My book is based on authority throughout – but that authority has not stopped short with Munday or the Ballads. They have been the main basis of my fabric, but in certain places I have sought the aid of later, literary sources – Noyes and Tennyson as well as Peacock and Scott or Jonson and Greene. I have used all my sources mainly for the outline of the tales, though the dialogue wherever possible is adapted from the ballads – occasionally from the earlier plays, in a few instances from Peacock, and in one obvious instance from Scott.

My first four chapters show perhaps the most varied example of this method of literary mosaic. Chapters 5 to 15 follow almost entirely the *Lytell Geste* and the Ballads, but with selection and a certain amount of conflation and regrouping. Chapter 16 uses two scenes of *George-a-Greene*; Chapter 17 combines a ballad with a chapter of Peacock; Chapter 18 is based on *The Sad Shepherd* (but with my own ending, since that made by F. G. Waldron in the eighteenth century seemed inadequate: the final song alone is Waldron's); Chapter 19 combines two ballads; Chapter 20 selects from *Ivanhoe*, with slight variations to fit my general scheme; 21 is mainly ballad, but here all the authorities converge – one can find lines in the various descriptions of this same incident which are almost identical in Scott, Peacock, Tennyson and Noyes; 22 uses the ballad of 'Robin Hood and the Monk', perhaps the finest of all the ballads regarded as poetry, and an incident from Noyes; while the two final chapters are almost pure ballad, the Death of Robin

touching the only note of pathos or tragedy in all the older literature of the subject. Prologue and Epilogue follow ballads also, the second but distantly and with licence. The songs are from Peacock, Tennyson, and medieval sources.

As for the setting I have followed most writers and traditions in choosing the reign of Richard I: but the history, it must be remembered, is *legendary* history, and I have not felt that detailed accuracy in background would help the story. The ballads pay no attention whatever to historical setting, some placing Robin in the reign of Richard I, others in that of one of the Edwards, some even in the time of Henry VIII. Geography too has no place in ballad literature: Robin can flee from Nottingham in the morning, on foot, and find himself in Lancashire the same afternoon, while no ballad writer troubles to wonder why the Bishop of Hereford should be in Sherwood Forest. I have amended some of the grosser errors, just as I have reduced some of Robin's record shots with bow and arrow to within sight at least of probability.

'Many talk of Robin Hood who never shot with his bow,' runs the old saying: I have at least dwelt with him in the Sherwood Forest of romance, and brought back I trust a true report of his life and doings there. For Robin Hood's is a story that can never die, nor cease to fire the imagination. Like the old fairytales it must be told and told again – for like them it is touched with enchantment and few of us can fail to come under its spell –

Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

ROGER LANCELYN GREEN

Raigne of King Richard the First . . .

In this time were many Robbers and Outlawes, among the which, Robert Hood, *and little* John, *renowned Theeves, continued in woods, dispoyling and robbing the goods of the rich. They killed none but such as would invade them or by resistance to their owne defence.*

The said Robert *intertained an hundred tall men, and good archers with such spoiles and thefts as he got, upon whom foure hundred (were they never so strong) durst not give the onset. Hee suffered no woman to be oppressed, violated or otherwise molested: poore mens goods hee spared, aboundantlie relieving them with that which by thefte he got from Abbeys and the houses of rich Carles: whom* Maior *blameth for his rapine and theft but of all theeves hee affirmeth him to bee the Prince: and the most gentle Theefe. . . .*

STOW: ANNALS OF ENGLAND, 1580

PROLOGUE

THE BIRTH OF ROBERT FITZOOTH

And mony ane sings o' grass, o' grass,
And mony ane sings o' corn,
And mony ane sings o' Robin Hood
Kens little where he was born.

It wasna in the ha', the ha',
Nor in the painted bower;
But it was in the gude green-wood,
Amang the lily-flower.

BALLAD: *The Birth of Robin Hood*

ALTHOUGH it was a hundred years since the Battle of Hastings, there was no real peace in England. William the Conqueror had divided the country amongst his followers, only in special cases leaving the old Saxon Thanes the ownership of even a small part of what had once been their properties. Often the new Norman earls and barons and knights, and their sons and grandsons also, treated the Saxons as mere slaves – serfs to till the land for them and follow them in war – serfs with no rights of their own and no chance of real justice.

England was still an 'occupied' country in the twelfth century, and although there were no big outbreaks after the death of Hereward the Wake, there were many small 'underground movements', and in every forest there were outlaws and gangs of robbers. These forests were the property of the king, and the penalties for killing the king's deer were cruel and barbarous.

No wonder that in the year 1160 there was little friendship between Saxon and Norman: no wonder Sir

George Gamwell of Gamwell Hall in Nottinghamshire, a Saxon knight holding the scarred remnant of his ancestors' lands, did not encourage young William Fitzooth, son of the Baron of Kyme, when he came wooing his daughter Joanna.

Sir George was short-tempered and fierce, a bitter man who could never forget his wrongs, nor forgive the Normans whose fathers and grandfathers had wronged him.

As it happened, young William Fitzooth had a Saxon mother and a Saxon grandmother, and was already beginning to feel that he was neither Norman nor Saxon, but British – and that the way to find contentment and security for the country was by justice and not by cruelty.

But Sir George would not listen to William, and forbade him ever to enter his house again. Nor would he listen to his daughter, but ordered her as fiercely to keep to her rooms and have no more dealings with the accursed Norman.

Joanna went weeping away: but she did not obey her father. That night William Fitzooth stood beneath her window, and they swore to be faithful to one another for ever. And not long after, though Sir George had no idea of it, these two were married in secret, meeting like Romeo and Juliet at a nearby chapel.

Then William visited Joanna night by night, climbing perilously to her window in the darkness, and leaving in haste before the daylight came.

Spring turned into Summer, and William was called away for several months to follow his father to London on the king's business. When he returned to Gamwell, a messenger brought him in secret a letter from Joanna.

'I am in sore trouble,' she wrote, 'for, though I keep my bed and fain to be ill, my father will soon know what

has chanced between us – and then his fury will be terrible. If he catches you, he will certainly hang you – and I do not know what he will do to me, or to our child when it is born. So come to me quickly, dear William, and carry me away, for I am in constant fear until I feel your strong arms around me.'

Then William called to him three of his most faithful followers, and led them swiftly into Sherwood Forest, where they made their camp not far from Gamwell: for he knew that when Sir George missed his daughter he would suspect him, and seek for her first at Kyme.

When the sun had set, William and his men came silently and stealthily to Gamwell Hall, made their way into the garden, and stood beneath Joanna's window.

She was waiting for them, all ready to flee away, and leapt bravely from the window into the great red cloak which the four held for her. Then William took her in his arms, and carried her slowly and tenderly away from Gamwell and out into the silent forest where the green leaves shimmered in the moonlight and the hoot of an owl or the bark of a fox were the only sounds in the stillness.

When night was gone and the sun shone out, Sir George woke suddenly, and called loudly for his retainers.

'Where is my daughter?' he cried. 'She usually comes to see me at this time in the morning – and there is no sign of her! I dreamt a terrible dream about her – God grant it never comes true! – for I thought that I saw her drowned in the salt sea . . . But look here! If she's been stolen away, or if any harm has come to her – I'll hang the lot of you!'

Then there was fear and commotion at Gamwell Hall, servants running hither and thither, men buckling on

their swords, foresters stringing their bows and seeing to their arrows.

Sir George came storming through the midst of them, shouting for his horse and threatening to hang everyone on the spot unless they found his daughter.

'Well, young Robin, may you be true to the soil of England and bring help to the down-trodden all your days!'

At last the chief huntsman came with two of his hounds on a leash, and the whole party set forth into Sherwood Forest following the trail of William Fitzooth.

And later that day they came suddenly upon Joanna, sitting in her woodland bower, and nursing her baby son.

Then Sir George sprang to earth with drawn sword, swearing dreadful things. But when Joanna smiled up at him and placed his little grandson in his arms, he