ROGER LANCELYN GREEN

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Even as he said this, Robin was aware of armed men wearing the Sheriff's livery who were closing in round the tree, and of the Bishop of Peterborough with his followers riding through the forest towards where he was.

'A trap!' thought Robin, and in a moment he had dropped out of the tree and was running his hardest down the hill while Worman shouted:

'After him, men! It is Robin Hood! This time he cannot escape!'

ROGER LANCELYN GREEN

The Adventures of Robin Hood

INTRODUCED BY
JOHN BOYNE

Illustrations by ARTHUR HALL

A percentage of the royalties from the sale of this book goes towards the endowment of six choral scholarships at the author's college (Merton, Oxford)

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First published in Puffin Books 1956
Reissued 2010, 2016
This edition published 2024
001

Set in Minion by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–73535–0

All correspondence to:
Puffin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

FSC MIX Paper | Supporting responsible forestry FSC® C018179 www.fsc.org

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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

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

INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN BOYNE

Before I ever dreamt of writing a novel, before I even thought of writing a short story, I wrote a play. It was an adaptation of the story of Robin Hood and was heavily – very heavily – influenced by the book you're holding in your hands right now: Roger Lancelyn Green's classic re-telling of the adventures of Robin Hood.

I was twelve years old at the time. Our drama class in school had been given the task of putting on a fifteen-minute production for an end-of-year performance and somehow I ended up as writer–director of the show (I think I wore a special hat during rehearsals). I chose the outlaw of Sherwood Forest because a year or two earlier I had been given a copy of Green's book and, along with an abridged edition of *Mutiny on the Bounty* and R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, it was rarely out of my hands.

Every child loves a good adventure story and there aren't many that are more exciting or thrilling than the story of how Robert of Locksley, the son of a nobleman, is forced into the forest by the evil noblemen who have

taken control of England. It's the stuff of legend, but also an example of one of the simplest themes in storytelling: the battle of good versus evil.

The beauty of Green's novel is the manner in which each adventure is presented as a story entirely unto itself, so after you've read it you can dip in and out and experience your favourite parts all over again. The capture of Will Scarlet is exhilarating, particularly when Robin's clever plan to save him is put into effect. The prize of the silver arrow is a tale that combines the excitement of the archery contest with the thrill of knowing that capture is at hand at every moment. And the story of the Witch of Paplewick delves into some of the more mystical elements of the legends and leaves you feeling a little more unsettled than you might have expected.

It's hard to imagine a better gang to belong to than the Merry Men. The names of Little John, Friar Tuck and Maid Marian are legendary but my favourite was always Much, the Miller's son. Much was a bit daft and was always getting himself into trouble – and getting others into trouble on account of his actions. But he hero-worshipped Robin Hood so much that he was the one I related to the best. Which was why, when I was casting the school play, I kept that part for myself.

Just as all the heroes of Sherwood Forest are neatly defined, so the villains stand out as the most dastardly of fellows. Can there be a more vindictive character in fiction

than the greedy, immoral Sheriff of Nottingham? Or a worse toady than the utterly malevolent Sir Guy of Gisborne? It was always a mystery to me how they ever managed to hold on to their positions when they were out-manoeuvred at every turn by the man they hated the most.

The moral in most of these stories is that no matter who is placed in a position of authority, no matter whose decisions condemn their fellow men to lives of servitude or poverty, a good man who puts the well-being of others above his own will always triumph. So it is with Robin Hood, who robs from the rich and gives to the poor, and becomes a hero to all in the process.

But it's important to remember that Robin is not simply fighting against the powers that be for the sake of it. Prince John and his followers may have turned the country to the bad in the king's absence, but the story builds to the moment when Richard the Lionheart, to whom Robin and his band of Merry Men have sworn their lifelong allegiance, returns.

Every time I read this book as a child, I lived in dread of the final chapter, 'The Last Arrow'. I always wanted Robin to go on and have more adventures, simply in order that I could read more about them, but sadly it was not to be. However, it's astonishing how his legend lives on in films and television and other books. It seems that there is always room for more stories about the hero of Sherwood Forest. Maybe I should go in search of that play I wrote all those years ago?

Contents

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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 retelling 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.

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 dropped the sword and kissed the child tenderly, exclaiming:

'By God, I'd like to hang your father – but your mother's dear to me still, in spite of everything . . . Well, well, you're my grandson sure enough, and it would be little

kindness on my part to begin by killing your father. Joanna, where is this villain?'

Then William Fitzooth came out from behind a tree and knelt before Sir George, begging his forgiveness and promising to be a special friend to all Saxons for his sweet wife's sake, and for the sake of his little son who himself was more than half a Saxon.

'Well, well,' said Sir George. 'All shall be forgiven and forgotten. And as for this young person – what do you say his name is? Robert? . . . Well, young Robin, born in the good green-wood, and no stately hall or painted bower; may you be true to the soil of England and bring help to the down-trodden all your days!'

1
The Good Spirit of Sherwood

Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake?
Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the brake,
Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,
Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy horn.

ALFRED NOYES: *Sherwood (1903)*

King Richard the First, Richard Cœur de Lion, came to the throne in 1189 – and very soon left his throne empty when he set off on the Crusade to free Jerusalem from the Saracens. He was summoned home by the news of trouble and rebellion – but was captured on the way and shut up in a prison – no one knew where – and in England few believed that he would ever return.

When he went away, Richard left the Bishop of Ely to rule for him, but very soon the King's wicked brother, Prince John, accused the Bishop of treason, made him

fly for his life, and himself became ruler of the country.

John was a cruel, merciless man, and most of his followers were as bad as he. They needed money, and he needed money: the easiest way of getting it was to accuse some wealthy man of treason or law-breaking, make him an outlaw – and seize his house or castle and all his goods. For an outlaw could own nothing, and anyone who killed him would be rewarded.

When Prince John had seized a man's lands he would usually put one of his own followers in his place – provided he paid him large sums of money. Prince John's followers did not mind how they came by this money: for them the easiest way was to take it from the small farmers, the peasants and even from the serf. And not only Prince John's upstart knights and squires did this, but many also of the Bishops and Abbots who were either in league with him, or greedy for their own good like the worst of the nobles and barons.

Many a Sheriff, too, was appointed to keep order and administer justice in the towns and counties by Prince John – provided he paid well for the honour: and of course he had also to force the money from someone weaker than himself, and obey Prince John however cruel and unjust his orders might be.

Such a one was the Sheriff of Nottingham, the little town on the edge of Sherwood Forest, and when Prince

John came and set up his Court there for a time, he was naturally most eager to show his loyalty and zeal.

One evening he and his men came upon a serf who had killed a deer. Without a thought of pity, the Sheriff ordered the poor man's cottage to be searched for money, and when none was found, had it burnt to the ground.

Then the wretched serf was brought before him.

'You know the Forest Laws,' said the Sheriff grimly. 'All right, my men: one of you heat the irons quickly. Blind him, and turn him loose!'

'No, no! Not that!' shrieked the man. 'Anything but that! Kill me straightaway! If you blind me, God will repay you! Mercy! Mercy!'

Prince John had ridden out to see the Sheriff at work, and at this moment he joined the little group round the glowing embers of the cottage.

'What night-jar have we here?' he asked carelessly. 'Surely, good Sheriff, you should have cut out his tongue first. You should keep silent and secret if you expect this bogey Robin Hood to come to his aid, as I've heard tell he does. Why, this man's cries will waken the King in Palestine, or wherever he is now!'

'Silence, you dog!' cried the Sheriff striking the serf roughly across the mouth. 'You ought to know better than to make this unseemly noise in the presence of His Royal Highness Prince John!'

'Prince John! Prince John!' gasped the man. 'Oh, save me, sire! For God's love, save me!'

'Who is he?' asked John casually. 'What has he done?'

'They call him Much,' said the Sheriff importantly. 'He was a miller once. But he was too fond of the King's deer. See, his first and second fingers have been cut off: that tells its own story – a bowstring pulled unlawfully. Now we've caught him at it again: the law lays it down that for a second conviction for deer-slaying, a man shall have his eyes burnt out. A third time – and he hangs. But I'll warrant he'll find it hard to shoot a deer when we've done with him: I've never known a man to shoot by smell – ha! ha!'

The Sheriff laughed heartily at his own joke, and Prince John was pleased to smile.

'Well, fellow?' he said to poor old Much, who still knelt trembling before him.

'So please your highness,' gasped Much, 'they burnt my mill to make a wider hunting-ground and a way to the stream so that the deer could come there to drink. How could I get my food but by hunting? It's hard to shoot straight and true lacking the arrow fingers, and true and straight must a man shoot if he would kill lawful game, the rabbit and the wood-pigeon . . . I had two children, one died of want, and my boy, young Much, was crying out for food . . . We cannot live long upon grass and herbs like an ox, nor upon the roots that the swine eat.'

'Oh,' said Prince John, 'so you decided to try a richer diet, did you? The king's deer! . . . Was there no other way? No, no, Master Sheriff, let me deal justly with him . . . What of this Robin Hood of whom tales are told? Some rich man, they say – a yeoman or a nobleman born of some old Saxon family – who, mad fool, brings help to such dirt as you and your kin of law breakers, kills the king's deer himself, and has even robbed a purse on the highway before now . . . Well, where is he? And, more to the point, *who* is he? Tell me that, and you shall keep your eyes to see your way to the gallows one day, I'll be bound!'

'I know not who he is!' gasped Much. 'Robin Hood comes out of the forest – men say he is the Good Spirit of Sherwood – and having brought help, he goes away as silently as he came. No one has seen him by daylight . . .'

'Faugh!' cried Prince John impatiently. 'Take him away and do your work on him out of my sight. These rogues are too loyal for my liking, or for their own good.'

So four of the Sheriff's men dragged poor Much away while a fifth drew the glowing irons from the fire which had been his home and followed grimly at his heels. But suddenly with a desperate cry he tore himself loose, snatched a sword from one of them, and made a rush at Prince John. He never reached him, however, for with a sudden vicious whine an arrow sped from behind them and laid him dead on the ground.

'A good shot, truly,' remarked Prince John, 'though I could wish that it had but maimed him. A dead man is no bait for this Robin Hood . . . Who was it loosed this arrow?'

He turned as he spoke, and saw advancing towards him from the edge of the glade a short dark man wearing a green cloak over his suit of brown leather.

'My lord,' said the man, bowing very low before Prince John, 'I am called Worman, Steward to Robert Fitzooth, Earl of Huntingdon.'

Prince John's smile twisted itself suddenly into a scowl of anger.

'Earl of Huntingdon, indeed!' he exclaimed, 'I have