

Robin Hode and the Munke / Robin Hood and the Monk

(c. 1461, author unknown)

presented in Middle English and translated into Modern English by Rusty W. Spell
Middle English version originally published in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*

A note on the translation: As much as possible, I tried to do a word-for-word translation, but often this isn't possible or -- if it is -- it's not understandable or clear, so I made appropriate choices there. I also wanted to maintain the ABCB rhyme scheme, which sometimes forced me to take a few liberties, but not anything drastic. A few translation suggestions were taken from the editors of *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. You should always refer back to the Middle English version for a true sense of the original language and music.

Middle English

In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song,

To se the dere draw to the dale,
And leve the hilles hee,
And shadow hem in the leves grene,
Under the grene wode tre.

Hit befel on Whitson
Erly in a May mornynge,
The son up feyre can shyne,
And the briddis mery can syng.

"This is a mery mornynge," seid Litull John,
"Be Hym that dyed on tre;
A more mery man then I am one
Lyves not in Cristianté.

"Pluk up thi hert, my dere mayster,"
Litull John can sey,
"And thynk hit is a full fayre tyme
In a mornynge of May."

"Ye, on thyng greves me," seid Robyn,
"And does my hert mych woo:
That I may not no solem day
To mas nor matyns goo.

"Hit is a fourtnet and more," seid he,
"Syn I my Savyour see;
To day wil I to Notyngham," seid Robyn,
"With the myght of mylde Marye."

Modern English

In summer, when the woods are shining,
And leaves are large and long,
It is very merry in the fair forest
To hear the birdies' song,

To see the deer draw to the dale,
And leave the high hills free,
And shadow themselves in the green leaves,
Under the green wood tree.

It befell on Whitson¹
Early in a May morning,
The sun up fair did shine,
And the merry birds did sing.

"This is a merry morning," said Little John,
"By Him that died on the tree;
A more merry man than I am one
Lives not in Christianity.

"Pluck up thy heart, my dear master,"
Little John did say,
"And think that it is a very fair time
In a morning of May."

"Yet one thing grieves me," said Robin,
"And does my heart much woe:
That I may not on solemn days
To mass or matins² go.

"It is a fortnight and more," said he,
"Since I my Savoir see;
Today will I go to Nottingham," said Robyn,
"With the might of mild Marye."

¹ Whitson -- the late days of the month of May.

² Matins -- morning prayers.

Than spake Moche, the mylner sun,
 Ever more wel hym betyde!
 "Take twelve of thi wyght yemen,
 Well weppynd, be thi side.
 Such on wolde thi selfe slon,
 That twelve dar not abyde."

"Of all my mery men," seid Robyn,
 "Be my feith I wil non have,
 But Litull John shall beyre my bow,
 Til that me list to drawe."

"Thou shall beyre thin own," seid Litull Jon,
 "Maister, and I wyl beyre myne,
 And we well shete a peny," seid Litull Jon,
 Under the grene wode lyne."
 "I wil not shete a peny," seyde Robyn Hode,
 "In feith, Litull John, with the,
 But ever for on as thou shetis," seide Robyn,
 "In feith I holde the thre."

Thus shet thei forth, these yemen too,
 Bothe at buske and brome,
 Til Litull John wan of his maister
 Five shillings to hose and shone.

A ferly strife fel them betwene,
 As they went bi the wey;
 Litull John seid he had won five shillings,
 And Robyn Hode seid shortly nay.

With that Robyn Hode lyed Litul Jon,
 And smote hym with his hande;
 Litul Jon waxed wroth therwith,
 And pulled out his bright bronde.

"Were thou not my maister," seid Litull John,
 "Thou shuld is by hit ful sore;
 Get the a man wher thou wille,
 For thou getis me no more."

Then Robyn goes to Notyngnam,
 Hym selfe mornyng allone,
 And Litull John to mery Scherwode,
 The pathes he knew ilkone.

Whan Robyn came to Notyngnam,
 Sertenly withouten layn,
 He prayed to God and myld Mary
 To bryng hym out save agayn.

Then spoke Much, the miller's son,
 Evermore good to him betide!
 "Take twelve of your strong yeomen,
 Well-weaponed, by thy side.
 Such a one who would thyself slay,
 That twelve dare not abide."

"All of my merry men," said Robin,
 "By my faith, I will not have go,
 But Little John shall bear my weapon,
 Till I wish to draw my bow."

"Thou shall bear thine own," said Little John,
 "Master, and I will bear mine.
 And we will shoot, betting a penny," said Little John,
 "Under the green wood line."
 "I will not bet a penny," said Robin Hood,
 "In faith, Little John, with thee,
 But for every one as thou do shoot," said Robin,
 "In faith, I'll bet you three."

Thus shot they forth, these yeomen two,
 Both at bush and shrub, win or lose,
 Till Little John won of his master
 Five shillings for socks and shoes.

A fiery strife fell between them,
 As they went by the way;
 Little John said he had won five shillings,
 And Robin Hood said, shortly, "Nay."

With that Robin Hood called Little John a liar,
 And smote him with his hand;
 Little John waxed wroth therewith,
 And pulled out his bright brand.

"Were thou not my master," said Little John,
 "Thou should pay for it for sure;
 Get thee a man, whoever thou will,
 For thou get me no more."

Then Robin goes to Nottingham,
 Himself mourning alone,
 And Little John to merry Sherwood,
 The paths he knew, every one.

When Robin came to Nottingham,
 Certainly and without lie,
 He prayed to God and mild Mary
 To bring him out safe one more time.

He gos in to Seynt Mary chirch,
 And knelyd down before the rode;
 Alle that ever were the church within
 Beheld wel Robyn Hode.

Beside hym stod a gret-hedid munke,
 I pray to God woo he be!
 Ful sone he knew gode Robyn,
 As sone as he hym se.

Out at the durre he ran,
 Ful sone and anon;
 Alle the gatis of Notyngham
 He made to be sparred everychon.

"Rise up," he seid, "thou prowde schereff,
 Buske the and make the bowne;
 I have spyed the kynggis felon,
 For sothe he is in this town.

"I have spyed the false felon,
 As he stondis at his masse;
 Hit is long of the," seide the munke,
 "And ever he fro us passe.

"This traytur name is Robyn Hode,
 Under the grene wode lynde;
 He robbyt me onys of a hundred pound,
 Hit shalle never out of my mynde."

Up then rose this prowde schereff,
 And radly made hym yare;
 Many was the moder son
 To the kyrk with hym can fare.

In at the dures thei throly thrast,
 With staves ful gode wone;
 "Alas, alas!" seid Robyn Hode,
 "Now mysse I Litull John."

But Robyn toke out a too-hond sworde,
 That hangit down be his kne;
 Ther as the schereff and his men stode thyckust
 Thedurwarde wolde he.

Thryes thorow at them he ran then,
 For sothe as I yow sey,
 And woundyt mony a moder son,
 And twelve he slew that day.

He went in to Saint Mary's church
 And kneeled down before the cross or rood;
 All that were inside the church
 Beheld well Robin Hood.

Beside him stood a great-headed monk,
 I pray to God woe unto he!
 For he recognized good Robin,
 As soon as him he did see.

Out of the door he ran,
 At once he did run;
 All the gates of Nottingham
 He made to be barred, every one.

"Rise up," he said, "thou proud sheriff,
 Hurry up now, with a bound.
 I have spied the king's felon.
 Forsooth, he is in this town.

"I have spied the false felon
 As he stands at his mass;
 It is all your fault," said the monk,
 "If from us he does pass.

"This traitor's name is Robin Hood,
 Under the green wood lined;
 He robbed me once of a hundred pounds.
 It is never out of my mind."

Up then rose this proud sheriff,
 And quickly he prepared;
 Many was the mother's son
 To the church with him did fare.

In at the doors they thoroughly thrust,
 With staves for every one;
 "Alas, alas!" said Robin Hood,
 "Now miss I Little John."

But Robin took out a two-hand sword,
 That hanged down to his knee;
 There where the sheriff and his men stood thickest,
 Toward them then went he.

Thrice through at them then he ran,
 Forsooth to you I say,
 And wounded many a mother's son,
 And twelve he slew that day.

His sworde upon the schireff hed
 Sertanly he brake in too;
 "The smyth that the made," seid Robyn,
 "I pray to God wyrke hym woo!

"For now am I weppynlesse," seid Robyn,
 "Alasse! agayn my wyll;
 But if I may fle these traytors fro,
 I wot thei wil me kyll."

[There is a gap in the text here which apparently tells that Robin was captured and that his men heard the bad news.]

Sum fel in swonyng as thei were dede,
 And lay stil as any stone;
 Non of theym were in her mynde
 But only Litull Jon.

"Let be your rule," seid Litull Jon,
 "For His luf that dyed on tre,
 Ye that shulde be dughty men;
 Het is gret shame to se.

"Oure maister has bene hard bystode
 And yet scapyd away;
 Pluk up your hertis, and leve this mone,
 And harkyn what I shal say.

"He has servyd Oure Lady many a day,
 And yet wil, securly;
 Therfor I trust in hir specialy
 No wyckud deth shal he dye.

"Therfor be glad," seid Litul John,
 "And let this mournyng be;
 And I shal be the munkis gyde,
 With the myght of mylde Mary,
 And I mete hym," seid Litul John
 "We will go but we too.

"Loke that ye kepe wel owre tristil-tre,
 Under the levys smale,
 And spare non of this venyson,
 That gose in thys vale."

Forthe then went these yemen too,
 Litul John and Moche on fere,
 And lokid on Moch emys hows;
 The hye way lay full nere.

His sword upon the sheriff's head
 Certainly he broke in two;
 "The smith that made this," said Robin,
 "I pray to God give him woe!"

"For now am I weaponless," said Robin,
 "Alas! Against my will;
 Unless I flee these traitors now,
 I know they will me kill."

[There is a gap in the text here which apparently tells that Robin was captured and that his men heard the bad news.]

Some fell in swooning as if they were dead
 And lay still as any stone;
 None of them kept their heads
 Except for Little John.

"Stop your wailing," said Little John,
 "For His love that died on the tree,
 Ye that should be doughty men;
 It is a great shame to see.

"Our master has been hard beset before
 And yet escaped away;
 Pluck up your hearts, and leave this lament,
 And listen to what I shall say.

"He has served Our Lady many a day,
 And very well, surely;
 Therefore I trust in her especially.
 No wicked death shall die he.

"Therefore be glad," said Little John,
 "And let this morning be;
 And I shall be the monk's downfall,
 With the might of mild Mary.
 And if I meet him," said Little John,
 "It will be him versus me."

"Look that ye keep yourselves over by the meeting tree,
 Under the small leaves, well,
 And spare none of the venison,
 That goes in this vale."

Forth then went these yeomen two,
 Little John and Much together,
 And stayed at Much's uncle's house;
 The highway was near as ever.

Litul John stode at a wyndow in the mornyng,
 And lokid forth at a stage;
 He was war wher the munke came ridyng,
 And with hym a litul page.

"Be my feith," seid Litul John to Moch,
 "I can the tel tithyngus gode;
 I se wher the munke cumys rydyng,
 I know hym be his wyde hode."

They went in to the way, these yemen bothe,
 As curtes men and hende;
 Thei spyrrred tithyngus at the munke,
 As they hade bene his frende.

"Fro whens come ye?" seid Litull Jon,
 "Tel us tithyngus, I yow pray,
 Of a false owtlay, [callid Robin Hode]
 Was takyn yisterday.

"He robbyt me and my felowes bothe
 Of twenti marke in serten;
 If that false owtlay be takyn,
 For sothe we wolde be fayn."

"So did he me," seid the munke,
 Of a hundred pound and more;
 I layde furst hande hym apon,
 Ye may thonke me therefore."

"I pray God thanke you," seid Litull John,
 "And we wil when we may;
 We wil go with you, with your leve,
 And bryng yow on your way.

"For Robyn Hode hase many a wilde felow,
 I tell you in certen;
 If thei wist ye rode this way,
 In feith ye shulde be slayn."

As thei went talking be the way,
 The munke and Litull John,
 John toke the munkis horse be the hede,
 Ful sone and anon.

Johne toke the munkis horse be the hed,
 For sothe as I yow say;
 So did Much the litull page,
 For he shulde not scape away.

Little John stood at a window in the morning
 And looked forth from an upstairs room;
 He saw where the monk came riding,
 And with him a little page too.

"By my faith," said little John to Much,
 "I can tell thee of tidings good;
 I see where the monk comes riding,
 I know him by his wide hood."

They went in to the way, these yeomen both,
 As courteous and gracious men;
 They asked news of the monk,
 As if they were his friends.

"From whence come ye?" said Little John.
 "Tell us tidings, I you pray,
 Of a false outlaw, [called Robin Hood]
 Was taken yesterday.

"He robbed me and my fellows both
 Of twenty marks and seven;
 If that false outlaw be taken,
 Forsooth, that would be heaven."

"So did he me," said the monk,
 "Of a hundred pounds and more;
 I was the first to get my hands on him.
 You may thank me therefore."

"I pray God thank you," said Little John,
 "And we will when we may;
 We will go with you, with your leave,
 And bring you on your way.

"For Robin Hood has many a wild fellow,
 I tell you in certain;
 If he knew ye rode this way,
 In faith ye should be slain."

As they went talking by the way,
 The monk and Little John,
 John took the monk's horse by the head,
 At once and anon.

John took the monk's horse by the head,
 Forsooth to you I say;
 So did Much the little page,
 For he should not escape away.

Be the golett of the hode
 John pulled the munke down;
 John was nothyng of hym agast,
 He lete hym falle on his crown.

Litull John was so agrevyd,
 And drew owt his swerde in hye;
 The munke saw he shulde be ded,
 Lowd mercy can he crye.

"He was my maister," seid Litull John,
 "That thou hase browght in bale;
 Shalle thou never cum at oure kyng,
 For to telle hym tale."

John smote of the munkis hed,
 No longer wolde he dwell;
 So did Moch the litull page,
 For ferd lest he wolde tell.

Ther thei beryed hem bothe,
 In nouthur mosse nor lyng,
 And Litull John and Much in fere
 Bare the letturs to oure kyng.

Litull John cam in unto the kyng
 He knelid down upon his kne:
 "God yow save, my lege lorde,
 Jhesus yow save and se!

"God yow save, my lege kyng!"
 To speke John was full bolde;
 He gaf hym the letturs in his hand,
 The kyng did hit unfold.

The kyng red the letturs anon,
 And seid, "So mot I the,
 Ther was never yoman in mery Inglond
 I longut so sore to se.

"Wher is the munke that these shuld have brought?"
 Oure kyng can say.
 "Be my trouth," seid Litull John,
 "He dyed after the way."

The kyng gaf Moch and Litul Jon
 Twenti pound in sertan,
 And made them yemen of the crown,
 And bade them go agayn.

By the throat-piece of the hood
 John pulled the monk down;
 John was not afraid of him.
 He let him fall on his crown.

Little John was so angry
 And drew out his sword so fast;
 The monk saw he should be dead,
 "Lord mercy" did he gasp.

"He was my master," said Little John,
 "That thou has chosen to fell;
 Shall thou never come at our king,
 For to tell his tale."

John smote off the monk's head,
 No longer would he dwell;
 So did Much the little page,
 For fear lest he would tell.

There they buried them both,
 In neither bog nor heath,
 And Little John and Much together
 Bear the letters to our king.

Little John came in unto the king.
 He knelt down upon his knee:
 "God save you, my liege lord.
 Jesus watch over thee!

"God save you, my liege king!"
 To speak John was truly bold;
 He gave him the letters in his hand,
 The king did them unfold.

The king read the letters immediately
 And said, "I say to thee,
 There was never yeoman in merry England
 I longed so sore to see.

"Where is the monk that these should have brought?"
 Our king did say.
 "By my truth," said Little John,
 "He died along the way."

The king gave Much and Little John
 Twenty pounds in certain,
 And made them yeomen of the crown,
 And bade them go again.

He gaf John the seel in hand,
 The scheref for to bere,
 To bryng Robyn hym to,
 And no man do hym dere.

John toke his leve at oure kyng,
 The sothe as I yow say;
 The next way to Notyngnam
 To take he yede the way.

Whan John came to Notyngnam
 The gatis were sparred ychon;
 John callid up the porter,
 He answerid sone anon.

"What is the cause," seid Litul Jon,
 "Thou sparris the gates so fast?"
 "Because of Robyn Hode," seid porter,
 "In depe prison is cast.

"John and Moch and Wyll Scathlok,
 For sothe as I yow say,
 Thei slew oure men upon oure wallis,
 And sawten us every day."

Litull John spyrred after the schereff,
 And sone he hym fonde;
 He oppyned the kyngus privé seell,
 And gaf hym in his honde.

Whan the scheref saw the kyngus seell,
 He did of his hode anon:
 "Wher is the munke that bare the letturs?"
 He seid to Litull John.

"He is so fayn of hym," seid Litul John,
 "For sothe as I yow say,
 He has made hym abot of Westmynster,
 A lorde of that abbay."

The scheref made John gode chere,
 And gaf hym wyne of the best;
 At nyght thei went to her bedde,
 And every man to his rest.

When the scheref was on slepe,
 Dronken of wyne and ale,
 Litul John and Moch for sothe
 Toke the way unto the gale.

He gave John the seal in hand,
 To place in the sheriff's palm,
 To bring Robin to him,
 And no man do him harm.

John took his leave from our king,
 Forsooth to you I say;
 The nearest way to Nottingham
 To take, he went that way.

When John came to Nottingham
 The gates were all barred tight;
 John called up the porter,
 He answered him all right.

"What is the cause," said Little John,
 "Thou shut these gates so fast?"
 "Because of Robin Hood," said the porter,
 "In deep prison he is cast."

"John and Much and Will Scarlett,
 Forsooth to you I say,
 They slew our men upon our walls,
 And assault us every day."

Little John asked after the sheriff,
 And found him very soon;
 He opened the king's privy seal,
 And placed in his hands the boon.

When the sheriff saw the king's seal,
 He took off his hood anon.
 "Where is the monk that bore the letters?"
 He said to Little John.

"He is so pleased with him," said Little John,
 "Forsooth to you I say,
 He has made him abbot of Westminster,
 A lord of that abbey."

The sheriff made John good cheer,
 And gave him wine of the best;
 At night they went to their beds,
 And every man to his rest.

When the sheriff was asleep,
 Drunken of wine and ale,
 Little John and Much, forsooth,
 Took their way unto the jail.

Litul John callid up the jayler,
 And bade hym rise anon;
 He seyde Robyn Hode had brokyn the prison,
 And out of hit was gon.

The porter rose anon sertain,
 As sone as he herd John calle;
 Litul John was redy with a swerd,
 And bare hym throw to the walle.

"Now wil I be jayler," seid Litul John,
 And toke the keyes in honde;
 He toke the way to Robyn Hode,
 And sone he hym unbonde.

He gaf hym a gode swerd in his hond,
 His hed ther with to kepe,
 And ther as the wallis were lowyst
 Anon down can thei lepe.

Be that the cok began to crow,
 The day began to spryng;
 The scheref fond the jaylier ded,
 The comyn bell made he ryng.

He made a crye thoroout al the town,
 Wheder he be yoman or knave,
 That cowthe bryng hym Robyn Hode,
 His warison he shuld have.

"For I dar never," seid the scheref,
 "Cum before oure kyng;
 For if I do, I wot serten
 For sothe he wil me heng."

The scheref made to seke Notyngham,
 Bothe be strete and styne,
 And Robyn was in mery Scherwode,
 As light as lef on lynde.

Then bespake gode Litull John,
 To Robyn Hode can he say,
 "I have done the a gode turne for an ill,
 Quit me whan thou may.

"I have done the a gode turne," seid Litull John,
 "For sothe as I the say;
 I have brought the under the grene-wode lyne;
 Fare wel, and have gode day."

Little John called up the jailer
 And bade him rise anon;
 He saw Robin Hood had broken the prison,
 And out of it was gone.

The porter rose anon for sure,
 As soon as he heard John call;
 Little John was ready with a sword,
 And stabbed him through to the wall.

"Now will I be jailer," said Little John,
 And took the keys in hand;
 He found the way to Robin Hood,
 And soon had him unbound.

He gave him a good sword in his hand,
 To protect his body and crown,
 And there where the walls were lowest
 Anon they did jump down.

By then the cock began to crow,
 The day began to spring;
 The sheriff found the jailer dead.
 The town bell did he ring.

He made a cry throughout the town:
 Whether he be yeoman or knave,
 Whoever could bring him Robin Hood,
 A reward he should have.

"For I dare never," said the sheriff,
 "Before the king do come;
 For if I do, I know for certain
 Forsooth he will have me hung."

The sheriff made to search Nottingham,
 Both the street and alley,
 And Robin was in merry Sherwood,
 As light as leaf on tree.

Then bespake good Little John,
 To Robin Hood did he say,
 "I have done thee a good turn for an ill,
 Repay me when thou may."

"I have done thee a good turn," said Little John,
 "Forsooth to thee say;
 I have brought thee under the green wood line;
 Farewell, and have a good day."

"Nay, be my trouth," seid Robyn,
 "So shall hit never be;
 I make the maister," seid Robyn,
 "Of alle my men and me."

"Nay, be my trouth," seid Litull John,
 "So shalle hit never be;
 But lat me be a felow," seid Litull John,
 "No noder kepe I be."

Thus John gate Robyn Hod out of prison,
 Sertan withoutyn layn;
 Whan his men saw hym hol and sounde,
 For sothe they were full fayne.

They filled in wyne and made hem glad,
 Under the levys smale,
 And yete pastes of venyson,
 That gode was with ale.

Than worde came to oure kyng
 How Robyn Hode was gon,
 And how the scheref of Notyngnam
 Durst never loke hym upon.

Then bespake oure cumly kyng,
 In an angur hye:
 "Litull John hase begyled the schereff,
 In faith so hase he me.

"Litul John has begyled us bothe,
 And that full wel I se;
 Or ellis the schereff of Notyngnam
 Hye hongut shulde he be.

"I made hem yemen of the crowne,
 And gaf hem fee with my hond;
 I gaf hem grith," seid oure kyng,
 "Thorowout all mery Ingland.

"I gaf theym grith," then seid oure kyng;
 "I say, so mot I the,
 For sothe soch a yeman as he is on
 In all Ingland ar not thre.

"He is trew to his maister," seid oure kyng;
 "I sey, be swete Seynt John,
 He lovys better Robyn Hode
 Then he dose us ychon.

"Nay, by my truth," said Robin,
 "So shall it never be;
 I make you the master," said Robin,
 "Of all my men and me."

"Nay, by my truth," said Little John,
 "So shall it never be;
 But let me be your fellow," said Little John,
 "Nothing else do I care to be."

Thus John got Robin Hood out of prison,
 Certainly without lie he had;
 When his men saw him whole and sound,
 Forsooth they were very glad.

They filled up on wine and made him glad
 Under the leaves so small in the vale,
 And ate pasties of venison
 That was very good with ale.

Then word came to our king
 How Robin Hood was gone,
 And how the sheriff of Nottingham
 Does never look him upon.

Then bespake our comely king,
 In an anger high to see:
 "Little John has beguiled the sheriff,
 In faith so has he me."

"Little John has beguiled us both,
 And that full well I see;
 Or else the sheriff of Nottingham
 High-hanged should he be."

"I made him yeoman of the crown,
 And gave him money with my hand;
 I gave him security," said our king,
 "Throughout all merry England.

"I gave them security," then said our king;
 "I say this all to thee,
 Forsooth such a yeoman as he is one
 In all England are not three."

"He is true to his master," said our king;
 "I say, by sweet Saint John,
 He loves better Robin Hood
 Than he does each of us upon.

"Robyn Hode is ever bond to hym,
 Bothe in strete and stalle;
 Speke no more of this mater," seid oure kyng,
 "But John has begyled us alle."

Thus endys the talkyng of the munke
 And Robyn Hode I wysse;
 God, that is ever a crowned kyng,
 Bryng us alle to His blisse!

"Robin Hood is ever bound to him,
 Both in street and in stable or stall;
 Speak no more of this matter," said our king,
 "But John has beguiled us all."

Thus ends the tale of the monk
 And Robin Hood, or I'm amiss;
 God, that is ever a crowned king,
 Bring us all to His bliss!

Note

The original Middle English version can be found online at *The Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester*. It was edited by Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren and originally published in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997).