

his band had arisen, a second time to awaken terror and dismay throughout England. The Princess Mary, however, seeing in the adventure, only amusement, and a variety most welcome to the monotony of a court life, had not retreated a step at their approach, and while with smiling and delighted eyes she gazed on the sylvan band, her imagination transported her to the days of the real Robin Hood, and arrayed before her those marvellous feats, the detail of which, had formed the enchantment of her nursery. In the meantime the outlaws having by a silent but courteous gesture expressed their reverence for the bright being in whose presence they stood, remained stationary, for a few minutes, during which a whispered consultation passed between them. When it was ended, the leader of the band stepped towards the Princess, and bending one knee to the ground, pressed his lips with deference to the border of his robe.

"Fair nymph," he began, when the lady Guildford, jealous for the safety and honour of her Queen and Princess, advanced and unceremoniously cut short his address.

"What merry making is this, my masters," she said authoritatively, "an' ye knew into whose presence ye were thus boldly intruding, ye would wish yourselves changed to your own arrows, and sticking in the side of yonder goshawk that is hovering above us, sooner than ye had come hither with your wild and rude wassail, to disturb our quiet."

"And thou art right, fair lady," answered the fictitious Robin Hood, in a disguised voice, "granting that the wounded bird were to fall with us into the midst of this bright band of wood nymphs, who should rescue, and use us in their own sylvan bows to pierce the tender hearts of ring-doves and nightingales withal."

"Bold outlaw," said the indignant lady, "these are no rustic wood-nymphs, nor is this a place for thee and thy graceless followers, so get thee hence with all speed, or there may be force used which thou wottest not of, to thrust thee from this royal demesne."

"And it be a royal demesne, lady, so much the better for bold Robin Hood. His home is in the greenwood, and he is lord of every forest glade in merry England, but the king's forests are his chosen resort, for there go the fattest bucks and in plenty, and e'en the arrow that flies at random, never flies in vain."

"I know not what face thou wearest under that vizor," said the baffled lady, "but thy tongue wags all too boldly for such a presence as is here—so go thy ways, if thou would'st not the king should take note of thee—and come, my Lady Mary, let us to the castle."

She turned to go, but the outlaw, with a gentle, yet commanding touch, detained her.

"Nay, fair dame, I entreat thee tarry yet a little

while," he said, "thou knowest well that the king himself uses not more courtesy towards thy gentle sex, than Robin Hood and his valiant yeomen, and I, and my merry men would fain shew to these radiant beauties some touch of our skill in wood craft. Yonder sail a flock of wild geese, wilt thou that we bring their wary leader to the ground?"

Catherine and her ladies, during the progress of this dialogue, had conquered every emotion of fear, and reassured by the noble port and bearing of the seeming outlaws, they pressed forward at this proposition, signifying their desire to behold the feat. The pretended Robin Hood, with a shrill whistle, unstrung his bow, when the bow of every forester was instantly bent,—a dozen arrows sped at the same moment from the relaxed strings, and the next, the pioneer of the flock fell transfixed in as many places at the feet of the Princess Mary. The ladies were speechless with admiration, and when one of the band stepped forward, to remove the wounded bird, the Princess passed her hand lightly over its ruffled plumage, and said, with a smile:

"A gallant feat, sir outlaw, and crafty woodsmen have ye proved yourselves, or this cunning leader would not now be bleeding at my feet."

"It is no strange sight, to see more noble victims lying at your highness' feet, transfixed with sharper arrows, and hopeless of such pity, even as you lavish on this bird," answered the forester, in a low tremulous voice, as he bent towards the ground.

The Princess started, her colour varied, and her heart beat audibly. She could not be mistaken, and one hasty stolen glance over the fine proportions of that perfect figure, confirmed her first suspicion. Silent and blushing, yet with a cold and haughty look she drew back and stood behind the Queen. The forester bent low as she retired, and with an air of deep dejection rejoined his sylvan comrades.

"By your favour," said Robin Hood, "we have yet another suit to press, and since ye have seen that outlaws can be courteous, we pray ye come with us an arrow's flight through the pleasant windings of this forest, and see how outlaws live. The banquet shall not lack dainties fit for a royal palate. The venison shall be well stopped with cloves, nor shall savory jellies and sweet hippocras be wanting to flavour the repast."

The ladies looked at each other significantly as he named these articles of luxury, which in that age of semi-barbarism, were almost exclusively confined to the royal table, and which were peculiarly acceptable to the epicurean taste of Henry, of whom it was said that "he understood a man and a dish." The Queen herself made answer to this speech.

"Sir Outlaw, we are beholden to thy courtesy, but we crave the freedom to deny thy boon. We must away to the castle, where a noble company from the court have appointed to be with us, and thither, if thou and thy brave foresters will repair,