

At length, when the spearmen had cleared a space around the gallows, the sheriff cried out, "Now, hangman, waste no time."

The hangman, however, had been busily engaged, while the sheriff was looking after his men, in quietly severing the bonds of the three brothers who, in obedience to Robin's command, still knelt down in the cart.

On hearing the sheriff's order Robin sprang up nimbly, brandishing a sword above his head. The prisoners were up with their arms loose, standing back to back.

"Who's on Robin Hood's side?" shouted Robin.

In an instant there was a roar of voices; the slender barrier of spearmen that separated the people from the gallows was broken; the people seized the spears from the men's hands and struck right and left among the Normans. At the same time Robin's men, numbering some fifty, pressed forward to where Robin and the brothers now stood, hemmed in by friends and foes. Some of the band thrust swords into the hands of the freed prisoners and they laid about them lustily.

The sheriff was seized and would have been dragged off his horse, but was saved by the plunging of the animal, which, frightened by the noise, reared and kicked savagely. Taking advantage of the noise and confusion he dashed through the crowd, nor stopped to look behind him until he had reached his house.

"I do verily believe," he said to his wife, "that Robin Hood is in league with Satan. He's in Nottingham again today and has rescued the prisoners."

The fight continued in the street and it was with difficulty that Robin and his fellows got clear of the crowd. Then they made a dash for the nearest gate and fought their way out into the open country. The tumult in the town lasted a considerable time and many broken heads and aching sides were the result of the sheriff's attempt to hang the three rovers.

AURORA

