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.

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<td>In summer, when the woods are shining,</td>
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<td>And leves be large and long,</td>
<td>And leaves are large and long,</td>
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<td>Hit is full mery in feyre foreste</td>
<td>It is very merry in the fair forest</td>
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<td>To here the foulys song,</td>
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<td>To see the deer draw to the dale,</td>
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<td>And shadow hem in the leves grene,</td>
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<td>Under the grene wode tre.</td>
<td>Under the green wood tree.</td>
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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 mornyng," 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 mornyng 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 Savyor see;
To day wil I to Notyngham," seid Robyn,
"With the myght of mylde Marye."

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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," seyd Robyn Hode,
"In feith, Litull John, with the,
But ever for on as thou shetis," seid 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 shuldis by hit ful sore;
Get the a man wher thou wille,
For thou getis me no more."

Then Robyn goes to Notyngham,
Hymself mornyng alone,
And Litull John to mery Scherwode,
The pathes he knew ilkone.

Whan Robyn came to Notyngham,
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 therwith,
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 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.
Forsoth, 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 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 doughty 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," said Litul John,
"And let this mournyng be;
And I shal be the munks gyde,
With the myght of mylde Mary.
And I mete hym," said 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."

Forth then went these yemen too,
Litul John and Moche on fere,
And lokid on Moch emys hows;
The hye way lay full nere.
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 spyrred tithyngus at the munke,
As they hade bene his frende.

"Fro whens come ye?" seid Litull Jon,
"Tel us tithyngus, I yow praye,
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 therfore."

"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 hede,
For sothe as I yow say;
So diid Much the litull page,
For he shulde not scape 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 agevyd,
And drew owt his swerde in hye;
The munke saw he shulde be ded,
Lowed 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 nouther 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 read 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 theim yemen of the crown,
And bade theim go agayn.
He gaf John the seel in hand,
The scheref for to bere,
To bryng Robyn hym to,
And no man do hym dere.

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

Whan John came to Notyngham
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.

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

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 sertan,
As sone as he herd John calle;
Litul John was redy with a swerd,
And bare hym throw to the walle.

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 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.

"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 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.

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.

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

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 thorouout al the town,
Wheder he be yoman or knave,
That cowthe bryng hym Robyn Hode,
His warison he shuld have.

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

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

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

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 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."

"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.

"Thanne word came to oure kyng
How Robyn Hode was gon,
And how the scheref of Notyngham
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 Notyngham
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 Inglond.

"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 Inglond ar not thre.

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