

## ROBIN HOOD'S BOWER IN LOXLEY.

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A TRADITION is recorded in 1637 that Robin Hood was born in Loxley Firth. The passage in Harrison's Survey of that year is as follows:

Imprimis Great Haggas Croft (pasture) lying near Robin Hood's Bower & is invironed with Loxley Firth & Cont.	1—2—27
Item little Haggas Croft (pasture) wherein is ye foundation of an house or Cottage where Robin Hood was borne this piece is Compassed about with Loxley firth & Cont.	00—2—13
Item Bower wood lying betweene Loxley firth East & ye lands of Mr Eyre in part west & Cont.	4—1—5
Item Bower field (arable) lying betweene ye last piece East & ye lands of Mr Eyre North & west & Loxley firth South & Cont.	2—1—5

Ritson, who edited the Robin Hood ballads, says he was born at Locksly, in Nottinghamshire, and one of the ballads has it thus:

In Locksly town, in merry Nottinghamshire,  
In merry sweet Locksly town,  
There bold Robin Hood he was born and bred,  
Bold Robin of famous renown.

Unfortunately, however, there is no such town as Locksly in Nottinghamshire. Locksley was the name of a companion of Robin Hood, as we see in another ballad:

I have heard talk of Robin Hood,  
Derry down, derry down,  
And of brave Little John;  
Of fryer Tuck and Will Scarlet,  
Loxely, and maid Marion.

We need not stay to consider whether Robin Hood was born in Nottinghamshire or Hallamshire, for he never lived in the flesh. He belongs to mythology and romance, not to history.

The point of interest in Harrison's Survey lies not in the statement that Robin Hood was born in Loxley, but in the evident long continuance there of a ceremony associated with his name. I say the long continuance, because the mention of such places as Bower Wood and Bower Field in connexion with Robin Hood's Bower shows that such a fabric had long existed there. A new bower may have been erected every summer, but here at any rate we seem to have a permanent site. We learn from old churchwardens' accounts that Robin Hood's Bower was a booth erected for the reception of him and his companions' when,

<sup>1</sup> "Payde for setting up Robin Hood's bowere, xvliijd"—Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Helen's, Abingdon, 1566, in Hone's *Table Book*, 1827, i. pp. 482, 486.

as every summer came round, they played the King Game, or Summer Game. The bower was probably a tent or booth in which the actors dressed, as in the theatres of ancient Greece, and in which the man representing Robin Hood, or the King of May, put on his huge garland of leaves and flowers. Old churchwardens' accounts often mention the coats, caps, and other things which the parish provided for Robin Hood, Little John, and Maid Marion, when they played the Summer Game. Bardsley, in his *English Surnames*, mentions a Thomas Robynhod, living in 1388. He may have derived his name from the fact of his having acted Robin Hood in the May Game.

Robin Hood's Bower was usually set up in the churchyard,<sup>2</sup> but at Loxley there was no church, and it was erected in the forest. At Wistowe in 1469 the Summer Game was played in part of a barn called the Summer House, adjoining the churchyard.<sup>3</sup> At Ecclesfield, as late as 1792, it was called the Summer Hall, and on the 8th of February in that year a Scotch bagpiper died in this building; hence it seems to have been a structure of a more permanent kind than a tent.<sup>4</sup>

The Summer Game, so far as we know, was not a drama with a plot, but a ceremony. The ceremony, no doubt in a worn-down shape, is still performed at Castleton, in Derbyshire, on the 29th of May, and I have published a long account of it in *Folklore*, vol. xii. These performances were accompanied by much boisterous merriment and licence.

Kuhn compared Robin Hood with Odin, and we must remember that "Deep Hood" was a favourite name of that divinity, on account of his travelling in disguise, and with him Vigfusson also asks us to compare Robin Hood. The name Scathelocke, afterwards changed to Scarlet, one of Robin's companions, has a heathenish sound. It makes us think of Loki the evil giant-god of the North, and of Scathi, who, according to the *Ynglinga Saga*, was Odin's wife. I have not been able to find Scathelocke either as a personal name or a place-name, and there seems no doubt that it is mythological. It should be said that there is an Anglo-Saxon word *scatha*, meaning one who does harm.

It seems as if, long after the introduction of Christianity, the old divinities, who were only gods in the likeness of men, were not entirely driven out of popular memory, but lingered in such places as Loxley Firth, and were represented by actors at the summer festival.

<sup>2</sup> Hoare's *Every-day Book*, 1816, i. p. 686.

<sup>3</sup> For the reference, and for many other details about the King of May, see the writer's *Church and Manor*, 1913, pp. 336-9.

<sup>4</sup> See *An Old Ecclesfield Diary*, ed. by Thomas Winder, Sheffield, 1921, p. 20.