

## The Robin Hood Story

By GEO. M. FOWLDS

ONE of the most picturesque figures in early English history, is that of Robin Hood and his merry men of the Sherwood Forest. He indulged in considerable irregular hold-up traffic on the highways, and like the income tax collectors, he took from the rich and gave to the poor. His activities became legendary and glamorised amongst the mass of the common people in the succeeding generations, who presumably had a "sneaking regard" for this virile freebooter. His "stand and deliver" methods, while strictly illegal, did not inflict anything like the same hardship as the legal imposts of the noble rack-renters of that lawless age.

"Who is the greater criminal, the man who steals the goose from off the common, or the man who steals the common (land) from the goose?" Though Robin Hood's actual identity is in doubt, his name and exploits provided subject matter for numerous ballads and plays of the 14th century and after. Many people of former times and most children of today, prefer to accept him as a real personage whose fame will never fade. A few years back it was reported from Nottingham, the town near which he formerly operated, that a move was being made to erect a statute to him.

Some reports claim Robin was of noble birth and even an Earl of Huntingdon. His female companion, Maid Marian, is also said to have come from aristocratic stock. In the reign of Edward II, there was a Robertus Hood connected with the Manor of Wakefield. Another account says he was born in the reign of Henry II, and was active in those of Richard I and John. Then in the Rolls of 1228, 1230 and 1231, occurs the entry that the Sheriff of Yorkshire owes 32/6 in respect of Robin Hood, fugitive. As the chroniclers say, it was a stirring and heroic period—an age of mighty men and mighty hunters, but it is claimed that he "oppressed no righteous men."

Largely as a result of recent research by the Yorkshire Historical Society, considerable new light has been thrown on the happenings which drove Robin Hood to the profession of a highwayman and finally to doom. He apparently was an unwilling victim of certain circumstances which many people in different countries still suffer from today, despite the alleged progress made in the past four or five hundred years.

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### Making a Lawbreaker

Robin Hood owned a small house to which he added a room or two, doing the work himself. Upon finishing the job that made his house more comfortable and more of a credit to the community, the local assessor sent him a bill for heavier taxes which the law required. Robin Hood believed it unjust to tax and fine a man each year for building a better home, but the assessor said he had no power to accept the tax that Robin Hood had previously paid.

Robin then walked up to London to tell his troubles to a Member of Parliament and even tried to see the King, but without success.

Thoroughly disgusted with officialdom and such topsy-turvey ideas for raising city revenue, Robin abandoned his home and took to the shelter of Sherwood Forest, where he gained notoriety as "a chivalrous outlaw." More than five centuries have passed since then, but our rulers and leaders have learned little. They carry on, in most places, the silly system of taxing and fining men who make improvements to property. Within the last few years, dozens of the stately homes of England, which cannot be sold, are being torn down to avoid the heavy rates and taxes. In this country [New Zealand], the districts which rate on the capital or annual value are still following the plan of the local assessor who sent Robin into the wilderness.

Rating should be on the basis of benefits received and not on the so-called idea of ability to pay? Land value arises solely because of the presence of people and the wise expenditure of public money. To rate a man on the value of his house, which the local body did not provide, is just daylight robbery and a form of capital levy. Fortunately, in the last fifty years, a glimmer of sense has prevailed and steps were taken in New Zealand and elsewhere to make an advance by allowing the ratepayers to decide whether houses (and other buildings) should be exempt from rates, and taxes levied on the value of the land only. The result of the change has been that more and better houses have been erected in those districts and their population has grown at a greater ratio than in places adhering to the old system. Now more than half the local authorities in this country have adopted the sensible plan and over 50 per cent of the 10,000,000 pounds or more collected annually in local revenue, comes from the unimprove value of land only. Places like Auckland City which have operated under the old fashioned method of blackmail penalty rating for over a century, show the effects in the presence of third grade buildings on the main streets, shabby shops in secondary streets and festering slums in other areas. Surely the good citizen who continually improves his property, should be encouraged as against the speculator-parasites, who hold land vacant, waiting to exploit would-be buyers, and pay only peppercorn rates. So it would appear that even in this far-off land, the peculiar protest of Robin Hood and many others in succeeding generations, has borne fruit so that some common sense is displayed in what to rate and what to exempt.

[George M. Fowlds of Auckland, N. Z., is the son and spiritual heir of the late Sir George Fowlds, who was a devoted friend of Henry George. His article on Robin Hood is in reply to news from the State of Indiana, where, as reported in the New Zealand press, a school teacher objected to the above mentioned tale on the grounds that Robin Hood followed a "communist line."]