The Birth Of Popular Culture: Ben Jonson, Maid Marian, And Robin Hood

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Robin and Marian often looked at each other. Then they began to meet secretly, and slowly they fell in love. At this time, the King needed archers for his army. He had ordered all the strong young men in England to practise archery. Every year, there were special archery contests in England. In the small towns, the prizes were of meat and drink. In the large towns, the best archers won prize money. So it was rather a quiet time for Robin and his men. They lived in great caves during the winter, and spent their time making stores of bows and arrows, and mending their boots and clothes. This bright, sunshiny morning Robin felt dull and restless, so he took his bow and arrows, and started off through the forest in search of adventure. He wandered on for some time without meeting any one. Presently he came to a river.
Maid Marian was not in the earliest of the Robin Hood ballads, and she's not in many of the later ones. This ballad is from the 17th century and explains how Marian joined the band. It's much like ballads depicting how Little John, Will Scarlet and many tradesmen joined the Merry Men. I decided to include it because it shows that having Marian as a fighter on par with Robin Hood is not a recent development. It is also one of the few ballads to make Robin Hood an earl. Marian's male disguise is often used in film and television versions of the legend, including the 1952 film The