

STORIES OF THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR.

By

CHARLES HENRY HANSON,

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUSTAVE DORÉ.

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PREFACE.

NO other merit or importance is claimed for this book than that of a compilation; but it is, so far as the writer is aware, the most complete epitome of the Arthurian Legends that has yet been prepared for the use of young readers. More than one modernized version of the work of Sir Thomas Mallory has been published; but every student of the legends will be aware that there were many of which Mallory, in the compilation of his narrative, took no account; and the substance of several of these has been embodied in the present work. For the story of Merlin, recourse has been had to the version of the old romance given by Ellis in his "Early English Metrical Romances." The quaint story of Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight is adapted from the edition of that legend which is included among the publications of the Early English Text Society; while to Lady Charlotte Guest's "Mabinogion" the writer is indebted for the story of Geraint and Enid, and also for the romance of Ewaine and the Lady of the Fountain.

It is obvious that in a single volume of the bulk of the present there could not be included more than a selection from the great mass of legends which during several centuries accumulated round the mighty though shadowy figure of Arthur. The aim of the writer has been to make choice of such of these stories and traditions as were most likely to captivate the imagination or excite the attention of the boy-readers of this generation; to cast them, so far as possible, into the shape of a connected narrative and regular sequence of events; and to preserve so much of the quaint style of Mallory as is consistent with perfect clearness. Whether these objects have been attained, it must be left for critics and readers to pronounce; but the compiler ventures to believe that the book will be found a serviceable introduction to the study of the romances themselves, and of Mallory's famous prose version of them; while it will also assist young readers in the comprehension and appreciation of the Poet Laureate's noble series of poems on Arthurian Legends. In the romances, both in their prose and metrical form, there are occasional allusions and episodes which make them unfit to be placed in the hands of juvenile readers. It is scarcely necessary to say that in the present work nothing of this kind has been retained.

The attempt to blend in the same book fragments of the original Cymric traditions with others which in the course of ages had received from foreign

adapters so many changes and modifications that they seem at first sight to belong to a totally different stock, is perhaps a bold one. The reader will not fail to note that in the stories epitomized from the “Mabinogion,” and in “Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight,” personages and incidents alike are ruder, simpler, more poetical than in the other chapters. There is much more liberal employment of supernatural agencies; there are fewer traces of those ideas and institutions of chivalry which to the romancers of the Middle Ages were the very refinement of civilization, the highest development of the social system. But though this contrast be perceptible, it is not so much so, perhaps, as to mar the continuity of the book; and it is instructive, because it enables the reader to view side by side some legends in a form approximating to that in which they were current among the people who claimed Arthur as their hero, and others in the shape they assumed under the hands of Norman, Breton, and French *trouvères* and romancers.

No schoolboy now-a-days needs to be told that the Arthur of the legends is to all intents and purposes a fictitious personage. That there was a great chieftain among the Britons of the name of Arthur, who rose to preeminence by his military prowess during the sanguinary struggles which resulted in the English Conquest, may be regarded as certain; but as to the extent of his dominions, the duration of his reign, and even the chief scenes of his exploits, all is doubtful. It is partly from an unwillingness to commit too great a trespass on historical fact, and partly from a desire to omit tedious and monotonous records of fighting, that the compiler has dismissed with a brief reference the episode of Arthur’s Continental invasion and conquest of the Roman Empire, which occupies considerable space in Mallory’s work, and is the subject of more than one of the metrical romances. The Quest of the Holy Grail has been briefly treated because of the mystical nature of the subject.



STORIES OF THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR.



CHAPTER I. MERLIN THE WIZARD.

SOME hundred years after the authority of the Roman emperors had finally ceased in Britain, a king reigned there whose name was Constans. Wise in peace, and skilful and brave in war, this monarch had obliged all the lesser chiefs and kings of the island to acknowledge his supremacy, and had occupied the throne for many years to his own glory and to the benefit of his subjects, when he was attacked by an illness so severe that he himself at once perceived death to be at hand. He had three sons. Constantius, the eldest, had from childhood shown a liking for the cloister, and had for some years been the inmate of a monastery. As, however, the king's other sons, whose names were Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon, were yet only children, Constans named Constantius the monk his successor; and in his dying hour he entreated the sorrowing nobles who gathered round his bed to render to his son the same loyal and faithful service as they had given to himself. With this request the barons, of whom the king's steward Vortigern was the foremost both in rank and in ability, promised to comply; and thus Constans, after a prosperous reign, died peacefully and happily.

After the funeral of the deceased monarch, Constantius was brought from his monastery and duly crowned King of the Britons. But his disposition, his abilities, and his previous method of life, all unfitted him for the performance of duties which could only be properly discharged by a great statesman and warrior. Of this fact the steward Vortigern was very well aware. He was an ambitious and unscrupulous man, elated by the distinction he had won in King Constans wars with the Danes and the Saxons, and he considered himself, in virtue of his experience as a general and in matters of government, the only competent successor to his late master. It was not long before an opportunity arose for the furtherance of his evil designs. A Danish sea-king named Hengist, who had frequently harassed the country during the late reign, but had always been driven off by the redoubtable Constans, no sooner heard of the death of his old antagonist, and the accession of the pacific Constantius, than he assembled an army of a hundred thousand men, and invaded Britain. Constantius, quite unfit to make headway against such an enemy, entreated Vortigern to conduct the campaign on his behalf. But the treacherous minister, pretending that he was incapacitated by age and illness, retired to his castle, and left the unfortunate

king to his own devices. Constantius assembled his forces, and led them against the invaders; but he was no match for a veteran warrior like Hengist, and in the first battle he was completely defeated.

The subordinate British princes, and most of the nobles of the land, had responded to Constantius's summons, and fought under his banner; but they were greatly enraged at his defeat, which, with some justice, they attributed to his incapacity as a general. The forces of the pagan Hengist now spread like locusts over the country, burning and destroying in every direction; and the Britons, as Vortigern had calculated, saw no hope of getting rid of them except under the leadership of King Constant's old lieutenant. They therefore sent a deputation to Vortigern, urging him to take the command of the army, in order to save the country from ruin. The steward, however, refused to engage in such an enterprise merely for the sake of winning honour and authority for the monkish king. "If Constantius were out of the way," he said, "I would gladly do my best for you and the country; but I will not face all the perils of war to benefit a king who cannot defend his own throne."

In this dilemma the princes and nobles of Britain forgot the promises they had made to the dying Constant. When they received the answer of Vortigern, a number of them proceeded at once in search of the unfortunate king, and murdered him in his own hall. The two princes, Aurelius and Uther Pendragon, were too young to reign; and even those barons who still remained faithful to the family of Constant saw no alternative, in view of the havoc that was being wrought by the Saxon invaders, except the election of Vortigern to the vacant throne. He was accordingly proclaimed king; and his pretended illness at once gave place to the activity he had been wont to show in earlier days. His first endeavour, after his coronation, was to get possession of the persons of the two princes; but in this design he was foiled by the sagacity of some of their friends, who had hastened, as soon as the murder of Constantius was made public, to convey them over sea to the country which was then called Little Britain, and is now known as Brittany.

If he had not had his hands full at home, Vortigern would have pursued the princes even to their place of refuge; for he was well aware that his tenure of the throne must always be uncertain while they were alive. But he was also conscious that while the victorious Hengist and his Saxons remained in the country, the dignity to which he had been raised was but an empty one. He proceeded without delay to reorganize the army which had been shattered by the defeat of the ill-fated Constantius. He then led it against the invaders, and, displaying all the military skill which he had learned in his campaigns under

King Constans, gained victory after victory, and soon reduced Hengist to such straits that he was glad to retire from the kingdom, giving a solemn pledge that he would never again invade it.

Vortigern had thus given substantial proof of the prudence of the choice which had placed him on the throne, and had established a claim to the gratitude of his subjects. But the Britons were soon to learn that something more than military skill is needed to make a good king, and that a man who will only save his country to gratify his own selfish ambition will not hesitate to bring it to ruin from the same motive. At a great festival held by Vortigern to celebrate the victories he had won, the barons who had assassinated Constantius presented themselves, and demanded some reward for the deed which had given the crown to Vortigern. The latter, however, was of opinion that to comply with their request would be to set a premium upon treason; whereas, now that he had attained the object of his desire, it would be wise in him to discourage it. So he repudiated all participation in the murder of Constantius; and to show his abhorrence of the deed, he caused the nobles who had avowed themselves the perpetrators to be put to death with great cruelty. It happened, however, that the criminals—who, if they deserved their fate, certainly ought not to have suffered at the hands of the man who had instigated and profited by their crime—were men of rank and great family influence. Their many relatives and friends at once rose in revolt to avenge their death; and the insurrection very soon became so widespread that Vortigern was on the point of losing the crown for which he had so dexterously intrigued and fought. In his extremity he resorted to the expedient of appealing for help to his old antagonist Hengist, who gladly acceded to the request, and once more came over to Britain at the head of a formidable army. With this assistance Vortigern succeeded in vanquishing the rebels. But he could no longer count on the loyalty of the Britons; so, to make himself secure, he married the daughter of Hengist, and maintained his authority by means of a Saxon army.

The cruelty of his rule, and the favour he showed to his pagan friends and supporters, earned for Vortigern such general and intense hatred among the Britons, that he determined to erect an impregnable fortress which might furnish him with a safe refuge against conspirators and foes. Accordingly, having chosen what seemed to him to be a suitable site on Salisbury Plain, he gathered together many thousands of workmen and ordered them forthwith to begin the erection of his castle. As the tyrant was in the habit of punishing disobedience or dilatoriness with remorseless severity, while he was also lavish in the rewards he gave for zealous service, the masons set to work with a will, and at the close of

the first day had made such progress that the ground had been excavated, the foundation laid, and a wall of immense thickness had risen to the height of some feet. But what was the astonishment and awe of the workmen, when on the following morning they assembled at the scene of their labours, to find that the wall had been levelled with the ground, and all that remained of it was nothing more than shapeless piles of stone and mortar! Quite unable to comprehend this extraordinary phenomenon, the builders made the best of the business by once more setting to work with such energy that at nightfall the wall had again risen breast-high. But all their efforts had been expended to no purpose, for the next day it was found that the wall had once more been overthrown. In vain did they examine the site to discover the cause of the mystery. Nothing that could account for it was to be found; so the masons proceeded to inform the king of the inexplicable difficulty that had arisen in the carrying out of his design.

Vortigern hurried to the spot, and investigated the circumstances for himself, but departed no wiser than he had come. The mystery, however, gave him great anxiety, for he could not help connecting it with the treachery by which he had obtained the throne, and the many crimes he had since perpetrated. He therefore summoned his astrologers, and informed them that they must either discover the reason why his castle-wall fell down as soon as it was built up, or be put to death. Incited by this unpleasant alternative, the wise men closely studied the aspect of the heavens, and then told the king that some few years before a boy had been born in England without an earthly father. If this boy could be found, put to death, and the foundations of the castle smeared with his blood, there would be no further difficulty about its subsequent progress.

Vortigern at once sent emissaries to all parts of the country to find the wonderful boy; but to make sure that the astrologers should not escape his vengeance if the messengers were unsuccessful in their search, he threw them all into prison.

Astrology must, however, have been better understood in those days than it is now, for the wise men had interpreted the planetary revelations with perfect accuracy. The boy for whom the servants of Vortigern were searching did in fact exist, and was none other than the afterwards famous wizard and prophet Merlin, whose mother was a British maiden, while his father was the Arch-fiend, who had hoped through his agency to carry out his evil purposes against mankind. This design had, however, been thwarted by a pious hermit named Blaize, who had taken the boy's mother under his protection, and had baptized the infant at the moment of his birth, so that the supernatural gifts which he inherited from his demon-father were enlisted on the side of good, instead of being employed in

the service of the evil one. Endowed from his birth with the power of foretelling the future, and with the knowledge of all mysteries, Merlin had been thus far content to lead the life of other children, well knowing that the time was at hand when he must play a more important part. He now made himself known to one of Vortigern's messengers, whom he astonished by informing him of the object of his search. He added that though the astrologers had rightly interpreted the portent of the heavens, his death was not necessary for the erection of Vortigern's castle; for on this point the wise men had been misled by the devices of Satan, who, since Merlin was now out of his power, was anxious for his destruction. The boy gave the king's emissary to understand that when brought into Vortigern's presence he would explain the whole mystery. The royal officer was naturally well pleased to have achieved the object of his mission; and any doubts he might still have entertained about the reality of Merlin's pretensions to supernatural powers were dispelled by the extraordinary proofs which the child furnished during their journey to Winchester, where Vortigern then held his court. The party were making their way through the busy streets of a town, when Merlin broke into loud laughter. When asked the reason, he pointed out a young man who was bargaining for a pair of shoes, and explained that what had aroused his mirth was the extreme eagerness to secure substantial foot-gear shown by one who would not live to wear the shoes he had bought. As the young man was to all appearance in robust health, Merlin's companions received this statement with incredulity; but before they had gone many paces further, they heard an uproar in the street behind them, and on inquiry they found that it was due to the fact that the man Merlin had shown to them had suddenly-dropped down dead. This, and other evidences of the prescience of the young seer, convinced Vortigern's messenger, who hastened to conduct the wonderful boy into the presence of the king.

Vortigern received Merlin with a pomp which in no wise disturbed the philosophical serenity of the child, and in due course conducted him to the place selected as the site of the castle, where he described the extraordinary failure of the attempts that had thus far been made to build it, and inquired the reason.

"Sir King," answered Merlin, "the reason is this. Below the place where your workmen have sought to lay the foundations of the wall there are two large and deep pools of water. At the bottom of these lie two huge stones, which cover the lairs of two gigantic serpents, the like of which none of your subjects have ever before set eyes on. One of these serpents is milk-white in hue, the other red as blood. They sleep all through the day; but every night they engage in a furious combat, which is without result, because they have not sufficient space wherein

to move. The walls built by your masons were overthrown because the very earth was shaken by the struggles of the serpents. But if you cause the water to be drained away, and the stones to be raised, the serpents will be able to settle their dispute, and there will then be no hindrance to the building of the castle.”

Overjoyed at this information, Vortigern at once gave the necessary orders. His army of workmen was speedily engaged in digging, and presently the two pools of water described by Merlin were disclosed. The water having been removed, the stones were laid bare; and when, with infinite difficulty, they had been uplifted, there lay the two serpents, side by side. Both were of enormous size, and covered with shining scales, while fire flashed from their mouths. They were not only distinguished by the difference of colour of which the young wizard had spoken, but the white serpent had two heads. As soon as the light of day fell upon them, they awoke from the torpor in which they had been sunk, uncoiled their monstrous folds, and, to the terror of the vast multitude assembled—amongst whom Merlin was the only unconcerned spectator—they began a furious conflict, which lasted till night. The fire which they vomited forth against each other flashed through the air like lightning, and their huge jaws dripped with their black blood. At first the red serpent seemed to gain the advantage; but as the day wore on the white one waxed in strength, and at last he beat his antagonist to the ground, and then descended upon him with such fury as to crush him into dust. The white serpent then himself disappeared, and was never again seen by mortal man.

The literal fulfilment of Merlin’s prediction naturally inspired Vortigern with the utmost confidence in the wisdom of the prophet, more especially as the erection of the castle thenceforth proceeded without let or hindrance. He was at once installed as the chief counsellor of the king; but this high promotion, which he himself accepted with the taciturn indifference which was his ordinary demeanour, raised him many enemies, and one of these represented to Vortigern that, as Merlin knew everything, he would certainly be able to explain the significance of the terrific, fight between the two serpents, which must doubtless have some deep hidden meaning. The king, whose conscience was always stinging him, eagerly grasped at the idea, and Merlin was forthwith sent for and questioned on the subject. He remained persistently silent, however, until Vortigern threatened him with instant death if he did not answer.

“Know, O King,” said the seer, “that what you threaten is as far beyond your power as it was to discover the reason of the overthrow of your castle wall. Save by my own will, no man or woman can injure me. Since, however, you are resolved to know the meaning of the combat between the two serpents, I will

reveal it. The red dragon which you saw overthrown and destroyed represented yourself; the white one symbolized the two princes Aurelius and Uther Pendragon, the sons of King Constans, who are the rightful rulers of this realm. They are coming from Little Britain with a mighty armament; they will utterly defeat you in battle; and when, with your family and the Saxon Hengist, you take refuge in the strong castle you have built, you will perish there by fire, even as the red serpent perished.”

At this appalling forecast of his fate, Vortigern was overcome by despair. But bethinking him of Merlin’s great craft and wisdom, he turned fiercely upon him and demanded counsel as to how he should evade the approaching ruin.

“That which is to be must be,” answered the wizard. “I have no counsel to give you.”

Full of wrath, Vortigern drew his sword; but when he would have smitten Merlin with it, the latter had disappeared, and all the king’s efforts to find him were unavailing. He had indeed, by the exercise of his magic art, transported himself to the distant hermitage of his first friend, the holy Blaize, to whom he committed the task of writing his famous Book of Prophecies, foretelling the future history of Britain; a work of which, unhappily, only a few sentences remain, and these expressed in such obscure and figurative language that no man can decipher their meaning.

The ruin which Merlin had foretold speedily overtook the wicked Vortigern. He received news of the landing of Aurelius and Uther at the head of a large army. He mustered his forces, summoned Hengist to his assistance, and hastened to meet his enemies. But the Britons would not fight against the sons of their old king. Deserted by all but his Saxon allies, Vortigern sustained a ruinous defeat. He took refuge with Hengist in his stronghold on Salisbury Plain. The princes forthwith besieged it; but finding that they could make no impression on its mighty walls, they caused wildfire to be cast over the battlements, and in the conflagration that followed, the usurper and all his kin, with his heathen ally, were utterly consumed. The remnant of the Saxon invaders were permitted to leave the country, on giving pledges that they would never return; and Aurelius and Uther, who agreed to share the honours and cares of rule, were recognized by all the smaller potentates, the barons, and the commons, as the kings of Britain.

They were not, however, permitted to remain long in peaceable possession. Their reign had scarcely begun when Merlin, who, like a loyal Briton, had come forward to give the benefit of his wisdom and his counsel to the new kings, warned them that a numerous army of pagans from Denmark had landed at

Bristol. He added the painful news that though the Britons would be successful in their encounter with the invaders, one of the royal brothers was destined to perish. All fell out as he had predicted: the heathen were so utterly overthrown that scarcely one of them escaped alive from the field; but Aurelius died nobly in the moment of victory, and Uther Pendragon remained the sole and unopposed monarch of Britain.

Under the guidance of Merlin, whose counsels he always prudently followed, Uther Pendragon reigned gloriously for many years. He completely re-established the supremacy which his father had gained over the other kings of Britain, and even carried his conquests into other lands, worsting Claudas, King of Gaul, and receiving the allegiance of the brothers Ban and Bors, two of the most famous knights in Europe, and lords respectively of Benwick and Gannes. He also became liege lord of Hoel, King of Harman, a country which is no longer to be found on the maps. The wife of Hoel was the beautiful Igraine; and being still in the prime of life at the death of her husband, she wedded the Duke of Tintagel, a powerful baron who held wide lands in Cornwall. By her first lord she had been the mother of three daughters, of whom the eldest was wedded to King Nanter of Gerlot. The second became the wife of King Lot of Orkney, and bore to him four sons—Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth. The third was the famous Morgan le Fay. She received instruction in magic from Merlin, and became scarcely less skilled in the black art than the great wizard himself.

She also became the wife of a king—Urience, lord of the land of Gore.

At the instigation of Merlin, King Uther set up the Round Table, whereat he sought to assemble the best knights of the world. To this table none were admitted save such as were of royal or at least noble blood, were distinguished for great personal strength, skill in arms, and unfaltering valour. All who were so received were obliged to swear a solemn oath to give aid to one another, even to the peril of life; to be ever ready to undertake dangerous adventures; to be faithful to their liege lord; and to be willing on all occasions to defend the weaker sex from wrong. King Uther was able to bring together many noble knights as members of the company of his Round Table, for his own valour and the wisdom of Merlin had made him one of the most puissant monarchs of his time.

It chanced that while King Uther was once holding his court at Camelot, there came to do homage to him, among other barons, the Duke of Tintagel, who brought with him his lady, the fair Igraine; and her beauty made such an impression upon the king, who was still unmarried, that he was immediately seized with a great desire to have her for his queen. There was, however, a

serious obstacle in the way, in the shape of the duke her husband, who, as soon as he had learned that the king was unduly attentive to his wife, retired with her from court, and refused to obey a command by the king that he should return. The haughty Uther treated this refusal as an act of rebellion, and forthwith proceeded to wage war against the duke, who placed his wife in his strong castle of Tintagel, retired himself to another fortress named Terabil, and prepared to offer a resolute resistance to the royal forces. King Uther laid siege to Terabil; but his love for Igraine had become a stronger passion than even his desire to assert his authority, and he implored the aid of Merlin, who undertook to win him the lady as his queen if it were agreed that their son should be placed at his disposal, to be brought up as he saw fit. The king accepted the conditions prescribed; and Merlin, by means of a device which the old chroniclers relate at length, fulfilled his part of the bargain. The unfortunate duke was killed while making a sally from his fortress, just at the time when Uther gained entrance into Tintagel and obtained possession of Igraine, with whom, after a brief interval, his nuptials were celebrated with great splendour. In due time, Igraine gave birth to a son, who, according to the compact made by the king, was given over to Merlin, who caused him to be baptized by the name of Arthur, and placed him in the keeping of a worthy knight named Sir Ector.

For many years after this, Uther Pendragon reigned prosperously as King of Britain, and ever kept the Saxons stoutly at bay. At last, however, he was attacked by a dangerous illness which kept him languishing on his couch, and then the heathen began to make head against him, and harassed his people sorely. Under Merlin's direction, therefore, he was carried in a horse-litter at the head of his army, who were so encouraged by his presence that they inflicted an utter defeat on the enemy, and drove them out of the country. Then King Uther was brought back to London; but the rejoicings on account of his victory were scarcely over when his disease increased so much that his death was manifestly at hand. His subjects were filled with consternation: for the birth of Arthur had—for what reason it is impossible to say—been kept strictly secret, and it was supposed that King Uther would leave no heir behind him. When he had been speechless for three days and nights, however, Merlin summoned the great barons of the realm and the Archbishop of Canterbury into the chamber of the dying king, and in their presence asked him if it were his will that his son Arthur should be his successor. Thereupon Uther answered: "I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soul, and also that righteously and worshipfully he claim the crown, on forfeiture of my blessing." Immediately after speaking thus, Uther Pendragon died.

But none of the barons understood, or cared to understand, the meaning of his dying declaration. They knew nothing of any son of Uther's named Arthur; and Queen Igraine, having been kept in ignorance of the fate of her son, knew not whether he were alive or dead. So great contention arose in the realm, and everywhere there were misery and bloodshed; for all the vassal kings asserted their independence, and every baron who could muster a few thousand followers was ready to put forward his claim to the crown. Many of the knights of the Round Table quitted the country to seek "worship" in other and happier lands. The Round Table itself, with the remnant of its noble company, was placed in charge of Leodegrance, King of Cameliard, to whose keeping it had been bequeathed by Uther Pendragon; and in the realm of Britain it was, for many years, no more heard of or remembered.

The ruin of the country seemed to be at hand, when Merlin took measures to put an end to the prevailing anarchy by bringing about the accession of the rightful king. He induced the Archbishop of Canterbury to summon a meeting of all the great barons and nobles at London, on Christmas eve, in the hope that at that solemn festival some miracle might be wrought that should make manifest to all to whom the throne rightly belonged. The assembly was held accordingly, and amongst those who attended it was Sir Ector, who had brought up Arthur in ignorance of his birth, but had been careful to train him in all the knightly exercises and accomplishments which in those days were held to be fitting in a man of rank. Along with Sir Ector came his son Kay, who had been knighted at the preceding All-hallowmas; and Arthur accompanied Sir Kay in the capacity of his squire. A solemn religious service was held in the greatest church of London, when the archbishop offered up prayer for the enlightenment of the people as to who ought to be their king. When the service was over, it was found that in the churchyard there had risen up a huge block of marble, and on the top of it was an anvil of solid steel, in which was imbedded, pointwise, a sword of marvellous brightness, bearing on its jewelled hilt this inscription: "Whoso pulleth me out of this stone and anvil is rightwise king born of England."

It may easily be imagined that the appearance of this mysterious sword excited much emotion in the assembly of the barons, many of whom entertained ambitious hopes of winning the crown of Britain for themselves. At the command of the archbishop another mass was said, and thereafter all the assembly marched into the churchyard, where, one after another, in the order of their rank, they essayed to draw forth the sword. First came King Nanter, King Lot, and King Urience, who, as the husbands of Queen Igraine's daughters, might claim some family connection with the late king. Each of the three was a noted

warrior; but not one of them could move the sword a hair's-breadth. Then came forward the other tributary kings of the realm—King Brandegoris of Latangor, King Clarence of Northumberland, King Idres of Cornwall, the King of the Hundred Knights, King Anguisance of Ireland, and many more; but they fared no better than they who had preceded them. When all in the assembly who desired to do so had made the attempt, the mystic sword still remained firmly fixed in the anvil.

“He is not yet here,” said the archbishop, “who shall achieve the sword; but do not doubt that he will yet appear. It seems to me that we should appoint ten knights to keep guard round about it, and make proclamation that every man who will may essay it.”

All was done as the archbishop had said; but day after day passed, and most of the nobles and proved knights of the realm had endeavoured in vain to draw out the sword from the anvil. Merlin and the archbishop were desirous to keep the lords together, and so on New-Year's Day a tournament was held. Among the knights that rode to take part therein was Sir Kay, and with him went Arthur as his squire. Now as they went toward the field, Sir Kay found that he had left his sword behind him at the lodging where he abode with his father Sir Ector and his mother, and Arthur, who passed for his brother. He prayed Arthur to ride back for his sword; and Arthur obeyed, as was fitting in a squire. When, however, he came to the lodging he found it closed, for all who dwelt there had gone to see the jousting. Now on his way Arthur had passed by where the sword was standing in the anvil in the churchyard; and so he straightway rode thither, for, said he, “certainly my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day.” The knights that should have guarded it being at the tournament, no one but himself was present. He came to the sword, and took it by the hilt, and easily drew it forth without reading the words engraven on the hilt, and carried it to Sir Kay.

Now Sir Kay was a good knight of his hands, but he was exceedingly proud and masterful. As soon as he beheld the sword, he knew well whence it had come; and so he rode boldly to his father, Sir Ector.

“Sir,” said he, “here have I the sword of the stone; therefore I must be chosen king of this land.”

Sir Ector, who knew better than his son to whom the throne rightfully belonged, would not believe that Sir Kay had drawn forth the sword. He led him to the churchyard, Arthur also following, and bade him replace the sword and then again remove it. Sir Kay, thinking that the charm was broken, promptly obeyed; he put the sword back into the anvil readily enough, but when he

essayed to pull it out again, his utmost strength did not avail to move it.

“Now, son,” said Sir Ector, “I call upon you, in the name of the Most High, to tell me truly from whom you had the sword.”

“Sir,” answered Sir Kay abashed, “it was brought to me by my brother Arthur.”

Then Sir Ector bade Arthur draw forth the sword, and that he did as easily as from a scabbard. Straightway Sir Ector and his son knelt down and greeted Arthur as king.

“Ah, my dear father and brother,” said Arthur, “why do you call me king, and kneel to me?”

“You are not my son,” replied Sir Ector, “but of better blood than ever mine was.” And he told Arthur how Merlin had placed him in his charge; and entreated, in reward for the care with which he had been nourished, that when he became king he would make Sir Kay his seneschal, a request which Arthur readily granted. Then they went to the archbishop, and told him how the sword had been achieved, and by whom. On Twelfth Day, another solemn service was held, and afterwards, in the presence of all the kings and barons, Arthur again drew out the sword from the anvil, though no one else could move it.

But the great lords were not at all inclined to recognize as their king a mere youth, who had hitherto passed as the second son of a knight of no great estate. So they put off the decision of the matter till Candlemas; but a pavilion was set up over the sword and stone, and five knights watched over it by day and five by night. At Candlemas the barons assembled again, and again Arthur only could draw out the sword. Still there were many of the chief men of the realm that were loath to take him as their king, and another delay was agreed upon till Easter. At Easter all went as it had gone before; and now the lords agreed to delay the matter till Pentecost. But Merlin and the archbishop saw that Arthur’s right would not be admitted without bloodshed, and they gathered as many as they could of the best knights of the realm, and such as had been faithful followers of King Uther, and kept them always about Arthur.

The rest of the wonders that Merlin wrought to give the kingdom to Arthur, and to make his reign glorious, may be more properly told in the history of the king himself. But for a long time Merlin the Wizard was Arthur’s chief adviser; and while the king was guided by his counsels and aided by his magic art, all went well with him. When Arthur had been some years on the throne, however, the great enchanter disappeared for ever from mortal ken, through a calamity which he himself had long ago foreseen. He had become deeply enamoured of

the lovely Yiviane, who dwelt in the forest of Breceliande in Brittany, and is usually, in the ancient chronicles, called the Lady of the Lake. Yiviane did not return his love, but she feared his supernatural powers, and therefore sought for means of ridding herself of him without exciting his wrath. She pretended to be as much devoted to him as he was to her, and induced him by her wiles and caresses to reveal to her an enchantment by which a man, of whatsoever might or magic skill, could be enclosed and imprisoned without a tower, without walls, without chains, so securely that of his own skill he could never be released. It was only with great reluctance that Merlin intrusted the secret to her, for well he knew that it would be used against himself. But, as the old proverb has it, "love levels all," and it made the wisdom of the great seer power-less against the arts and the beauty of Viviane. It fell out that some little time afterwards Merlin and the lady were wandering in the forest of Breceliande, and they came to a white-thorn bush, laden with bloom. Underneath this bush they sat down together, and in a while Merlin laid his head in Viviane's lap and fell asleep. Then she rose deftly, without waking him, and made a ring round Merlin and the bush, and began the enchantment which he himself had taught her; and when she had ended, there was, as it were, a cloud about the place, so that Merlin was hidden from sight. But to him, when he awoke, it seemed that he was shut up in the strongest tower in the world, and laid upon a fair bed. Then he knew that the enchantment had been wrought upon him, and that there was no escape, for only Viviane could undo the spell. She visited him oftentimes, but would never release him, and after many years she died. But Merlin still remains a prisoner in the depths of the forest. To him the long years and ages have been but as days. He lies in a magic sleep. But the day will come when the strong enchantment that bound him will be broken, and he will come forth to behold the changes that have been wrought by more potent arts than his, and all the wonders of this later time.



CHAPTER II. HOW ARTHUR GOT HIS CROWN, HIS QUEEN, AND THE ROUND TABLE.

THE Feast of Pentecost came, and there was again a great gathering of kings, nobles, and knights at London to decide who should be King of Britain. Once more a great many competitors came forward and strove to draw out the magic sword; but pull and twist as they might, it remained immovable in the grasp of all save Arthur, who drew it forth again and again in the sight of lords and commons. Most people were by this time weary of the long interregnum, and of the terrible evils it had brought upon the land. When, therefore, Arthur once more came forth the only successful competitor from the miraculous test, the assembly broke out into loud cries that he and none other should be king. Thereupon, without further ado, he was first knighted by the most distinguished knight present, and then solemnly crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Forthwith he proceeded to appoint his great officers of the household, making Sir Kay his seneschal, according to his promise, Sir Lucas his butler, Sir Baldwin his constable, Sir Ulfius—a wise counsellor, as well as a brave warrior—his chamberlain, and Sir Brastias warden of the northern frontier. For some time King Arthur was busied in redressing wrongs that had been committed and in restoring order in the country round about London; but after a while he set out for Wales, and appointed a great feast to be held at the city of Caerleon, whereat the vassal kings and barons who had not yet given in their allegiance might acknowledge him as their overlord. At the time agreed upon, King Lot, King Urience, King Nanters, and several others of those who had been among the most powerful competitors for the crown, arrived in the neighbourhood of Caerleon, each bringing a strong following of knights and men-at-arms, and they all encamped outside the city. Arthur was glad to hear of their coming, supposing that they meant to tender their fealty. He therefore sent out heralds to greet them, with costly presents. But the kings had come with no amicable purpose. They disdainfully informed the messengers that they would receive no gifts from a beardless boy of base parentage, that they would not acknowledge such a boy as their king, and that they had come to bestow gifts on him in the shape of hard blows betwixt the neck and shoulders.

On receiving this answer to his friendly advance, Arthur forthwith took measures of defence, gathered his knights about him, laid in a stock of

provisions and munitions, and caused the city gates to be closed. The confederate kings thereupon advanced and laid siege to the city. A few days after this civil war had begun, Merlin made his appearance in the camp of the kings, and some of them, being old acquaintance of his, greeted him heartily, and asked him how it was that an unknown youth like Arthur had been placed on the throne of Britain. Merlin told them plainly that it was because Arthur was the son of King Uther Pendragon, and related all the circumstances connected with his birth. His story made little impression; but though the confederates, being themselves famed knights, and having a much larger army than Arthur, were confident of victory, they proposed an interview with him, and sent him by Merlin a safe-conduct to and from their camp. Acting on Merlin's advice, the king came out to meet them; but as a very lofty tone was taken on both sides, the meeting was productive of nothing but threats and defiances, except, indeed, that three hundred of the best knights in the rebel camp were so impressed by Arthur's bearing and language that they came over to him in a body. Immediate preparations for battle were made on both sides, and early the next morning Arthur and his followers suddenly attacked the confederates in their camp. The surprise, as well as the great valour of the king and his knights, gave them a considerable advantage; but the numerical superiority of the enemy was so great that at last they were decidedly gaining ground, when Arthur drew the magic sword he had taken from the anvil. It flashed with a radiance equal, as the chronicle says, to that of thirty torches, and the slaughter which the king accomplished with it was so great that the enemy beat a precipitate retreat, leaving numbers of dead upon the field.

But this brilliant success, however satisfactory in itself, was only the beginning of the war. The confederate kings returned to their own countries, induced several neighbouring princes to join their alliance, and forthwith took measures to raise a great army. Arthur and his knights, on their part, held anxious council as to what it would be most expedient to do, and they were assisted by the wisdom and magic craft of Merlin. The prophet warned them that unless they obtained help they could not contend against the rebels, who counted among them some of the best knights then alive; and he suggested that two trusty knights should be sent over sea to King Ban of Benwick and King Bors of Gannes, who had been feudatories of King Uther Pendragon, and were among the most famous warriors of the time. They were, said Merlin, engaged in a desperate war with King Claudas of Gaul; but he proposed that they should be invited to give their help to King Arthur, on the understanding that when firmly established on the British throne he should in return espouse their quarrel against

Claudas.

The advice being Merlin's, was of course excellent, and it was immediately followed. Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias were selected for the mission. They crossed the sea in safety, but while making their way to Benwick were assailed by eight of King Claudas's knights. To Ulfius and Brastias the odds of four to one were not at all alarming: they put their spears in rest and successively overthrew all the eight, leaving them so badly bruised as to be unable to mount their horses. The emissaries then proceeded to Benwick, found there both the kings, delivered their letters, and received a favourable answer. Ban and Bors promised to come over at All-hallowmas with three hundred knights. King Arthur therefore appointed a great tournament for that festival. The kings arrived according to their promise, and were received with much pomp and show. In company with Arthur, they were spectators of the tournament, at which Sir Kay, Sir Lucas, and another distinguished knight of the court, Sir Griflet, did great feats of arms, and gained the prizes. On the following day, a council was held, at which Merlin undertook, on being furnished with tokens of authority from the two kings, to bring over their army to Britain with secrecy and expedition. This he accomplished—transported ten thousand men across the Channel, and conducted them to a concealed camp in the great forest of Bede-graine, which at that time covered most of the country between the rivers Trent and Humber. The enchanter then informed Arthur and his guests of what he had done, and the three kings at once marched northward with twenty thousand men, which was the total strength of the force that Arthur was able to muster. Having effected a junction with the troops of Benwick and Gannes, they waited for the advance of the enemy.

Their patience was not long tried. The confederate princes had got together a formidable host of fifty thousand men, with which they marched towards Bedegraine as soon as they had got definite information of Arthur's whereabouts. The battle which ensued was one of the most severe and obstinately contested in which the king was ever engaged. The confederate kings had a great advantage in numbers, and some of them, especially King Lot, were generals of proved skill and experience; but all these advantages were more than counterbalanced by the knightly prowess of Arthur and his friends, and by the fact that the craft of Merlin was on Arthur's side. The fighting lasted for two days. All the leaders on both sides were again and again unhorsed and put in great peril, only to be rescued by the valour of their fellows. The slaughter was appalling; but at last the confederates were fairly beaten off the field. Though their army was reduced to but fifteen thousand, however, they took up a new

position, and held it with indomitable courage. Merlin now intervened. He told Arthur that it was time for him to withdraw. He had won the field, and gained great spoils, which he must divide between his own knights and his allies; but if he were to persist in carrying on the struggle, fortune would begin to incline to the side of his opponents. The wizard added that he could undertake that the rebel kings would not molest Arthur for at least three years to come, inasmuch as full employment had been found for them elsewhere, a great army of Saxons having invaded their territories.

The time had not yet come, however, for Arthur to take peaceable possession of his dominions. King Leodegrance of Cameliard, who has already been mentioned as one of the chief and most loyal feudatories of King Uther Pendragon, was at this time sorely pressed by Rience, the Saxon King of North Wales, who was besieging him in his capital, Carohaise. Merlin informed Arthur of his plight, and advised the king, with Ban and Bors and the knights of the household, to go to his relief, while the soldiery of Benwick and Gannes might be sent home to defend their master's territory against the troublesome Claudas. This advice was followed. Arthur and his companions arrived at Carohaise, and having entered the city without being observed by the besiegers, offered their services to Leodegrance, on condition that no inquiry should be made as to their name or quality. The offer was thankfully accepted, and an opportunity was soon afforded them of proving their efficiency. Rience suddenly attacked the city at the head of a large body of his troops. Arthur and his companions armed themselves and hastened to sally out, headed by Merlin, who carried a wonderful standard—a huge dragon, with barbed tail and gaping jaws, whence there flashed actual sparks of fire. When the little troop of knights, who in all numbered only forty-two, arrived at the gate, they found it locked, and the porter refused to give them egress without an order from King Leodegrance. There was no time for parleying, so Merlin simply stepped forward and lifted the ponderous gate out of its place, with all its locks, bolts, and bars, calmly replacing it when the knights had passed through. He then resumed his position at their head, and they swept down on a detachment of the besiegers who were conducting a convoy to their camp, cut them to pieces, and captured the convoy. Meanwhile Leodegrance, with the bulk of his army, was fighting gallantly in another part of the field; but his troops had not the prowess of Arthur and his companions, nor were they supported by the necromancy of Merlin, so, being woefully outnumbered, it is not surprising that they were defeated. Leodegrance himself was taken prisoner, and was being led off to Rience's camp by an escort of five hundred knights, when Arthur and his little squadron made their appearance,

dispersed the escort, and rescued the king. The battle still continued for some hours, during which Arthur distinguished himself by cleaving in twain, by a single stroke of his sword, a giant fifteen feet high who had ventured to encounter him in single combat. Eventually Rience was utterly routed, and very few of his troops escaped extermination. The immense spoils of his camp were given up, by order of King Leodegrance, to Arthur, who forthwith divided them among the people of Carohaise, and thereby much increased his already great popularity. On his return to the city, Arthur was unarmed by the fair hands of Guenever, the king's daughter, whose beauty had already made a deep impression on his heart; while the like honour was done to his companions by the ladies of the court.

While Arthur was thus warring on behalf of King Leodegrance, the confederate kings who had given him so much trouble were carrying on a desperate struggle with the heathen invaders who had descended in swarms upon their territories, and who also carried their ravages into the dominions of Arthur himself. Gawaine, Agravaine, and Gaheris, the sons of King Lot, with Galachin, the son of King Nanter, having learned from their mothers that Arthur was in truth their uncle, and the son of King Uther Pendragon, resolved to throw in their fortunes with his, and join his company of knights. With this design they collected a small force and set out. They were but unproved warriors; but incessantly encountering on their journey great bodies of the persevering enemy who was seeking to overrun Britain, they performed prodigies of valour, and slaughtered thousands of the Saxons. Gawaine especially distinguished himself. His strength, always greater than that of ordinary men, became doubled between the hours of nine o'clock in the morning and noon, and the same phenomenon again took place between three in the afternoon and even-song. He generally contrived to engage in battle at those times of the day when his prowess was greatest, and of course wrought terrible havoc among the heathen, devoting his attention especially to the giants, who were numerous in their ranks, and cutting them to pieces in a fashion which rivalled the exploits of his uncle at Carohaise.

Having at length completely dispersed and overcome all the enemies they could find, the young warriors made their way to London, and thence to Camelot. In the meantime Arthur was engaged in a final struggle with King Rience, who now had the aid of his brother, King Nero, King Lot of Orkney, and others of the confederates. King Rience himself was taken prisoner by some of 'Arthur's knights while on a nocturnal expedition; and on the next day another great battle was fought, in which Nero was totally defeated, and King Lot fell by the hand of one of Arthur's most formidable knights, King Pellinore—an event

which laid the foundation of a blood-feud that continued for many years.

In the realm of Britain there was now no longer any one who disputed Arthurs title or supremacy. So he came to Camelot, and set up his court there in great splendour, and many famous knights gathered about him. But Sir Ulfius and others of his older counsellors often urged him to take a wife, so that the realm might have a queen as well as a king. Arthur was not displeased with this counsel, for the love he had felt for Guenever when he first saw her at the court of her father King Leodegrance had rather grown greater than less. So he sought the advice of Merlin, who said he ought to marry, and asked him if there were any lady that he loved. He answered frankly that his heart was set upon Guenever.

“Sir,” answered Merlin, “the lady is one of the fairest that lives; but if you did not love her so well, I would find you a queen of no less beauty and goodness. Since, however, your heart is set upon her, it is bootless to think of any other.”

Merlin said this because he was well aware that the king’s choice would not be for his happiness; and he would have given him some warning, but Arthur’s passion for Guenever was too strong to let him listen. Merlin therefore offered no farther opposition, but went to Cameliard and asked Leodegrance to give Arthur his daughter to wife, letting him know at the same time that the great monarch who now sued for Guenever’s hand was the same unknown champion who had rescued him from the sword of King Rience. Gratitude alone would have made Leodegrance favour the suit of one who had given such decisive proof that he possessed the qualities most esteemed in those troublous times; and he was naturally overjoyed on learning that the knight who had already won his daughter’s heart, and now sought her hand, was none other than his liege lord. Guenever was not less pleased; and when Merlin escorted her to Loudon, where her bridegroom was awaiting her, he took with him also the Round Table, and as many of its knights as still remained, by way of a marriage gift from King Leodegrance. Arthur gave the princess a right royal welcome, and avowed that the Round Table and its gallant company were more welcome to him than any other dower that Leodegrance could have bestowed with his daughter.

The number of “sieges” or seats at the Round Table was a hundred and fifty, but the knights sent by the King of Cameliard only numbered a hundred. Arthur was anxious to have all the seats filled before his marriage, and urged Merlin to collect all the knights worthy of the honour whom he could find. The necromancer obeyed; but though he used his utmost diligence, there were still several vacant seats at the table. Each seat was then solemnly consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the knights all swore the oath of which the terms

were set forth in the first chapter of this chronicle. Then Arthur's nephew, Gawaine, came forward and asked a boon of his uncle.

"Ask," said the king, "and I will grant it."

"Sir," answered Gawaine, "I beg that you will make me knight on the same day that you wed Queen Guenever."

"That will I do with a good will," Arthur replied; "both because you are my sister's son, and because you have already proved yourself a man of valour and worship in the field."



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But before the day appointed for the marriage, King Arthur held a great feast at Camelot, that lasted for eight days; and one time, while the king and all his counsellors and knights were gathered in the hall of the palace, there came before him a squire leading a horse, on which there sat a knight wounded to the death. The squire said that there was a knight in the forest who had set up a pavilion by the wayside, and forced every knight that passed to joust with him, and that he had now mortally stricken the knight before them. At this there was a great outcry in the court, and many were eager to undertake the adventure; but Sir Griflet besought Arthur, for the sake of all the services he had rendered, to give it to him. The king consented, though unwillingly, for Griflet was but a young knight, and Merlin said that the knight of the pavilion was one of the best in the world. Sir Griflet, however, entreated the king, who let him go, on a promise that he would return and relate whatever befell him.

Sir Griflet armed himself accordingly, and rode forth in all haste; and presently he came to a fountain by the wayside, where he saw a rich pavilion, and a strong horse standing under a tree, on which hung a shield with a device of many colours, and a great spear. Then Griflet lifted his own spear and smote the shield, so that it fell to the ground. With that, a knight came out of the pavilion, and said, "Fair knight, why smote you down my shield?"

"Because I will joust with you," answered Sir Griflet.

"It were better you did not," said the knight, full courteously, "for you are but young, and newly made knight, and your might is nothing to mine."

"Let that be as it may," said Griflet, "I will joust with you."

"It is not at my desire," returned the other; "but since no better may be, you shall have your wish." Then he took his spear and shield, and got on his horse, and they rode together. Griflet's spear was shivered on the strange knight's shield; but the latter smote Griflet through his armour and his left side, so that horse and man fell down. When the knight saw that, he was sorry; but he unlaced Griflet's helm, and, when he was a little recovered, helped him on his horse, and bade him farewell, saying that he had a mighty heart, and that if he lived he would prove a passing good knight. With that Griflet rode to the court, and told his tale as well as he could; but he was for long in great danger, and only through the skill of the leeches was his life saved.

Now King Arthur was exceedingly wroth that Griflet was hurt, and early the next morning he armed himself secretly and went forth to seek the stranger-knight. As he rode, he saw Merlin running, chased by three churls, so he galloped toward them, and when they saw him coming they fled.

“Now, Merlin,” exclaimed the king, “here wouldst thou have been slain, in spite of all thy craft, had I not come.”

“Not so,” answered Merlin; “I could have saved myself if I would. But you, sir, are nearer your death than I, for you are now going to your death if God do not befriend you.”

But the king would not quit the adventure; so he and Merlin rode along, till they came to the pavilion by the side of the fountain; and the knight was sitting within the pavilion all armed.

“Sir Knight,” said Arthur, “for what cause abideth thou here, that no knight may ride this way but that he joust with thee? I advise thee to leave that custom.”

“That custom,” answered the knight, “I have used, and will use, whoever may forbid it; and whoever is grieved by it may amend it if he can.”

“I will amend it,” said the king.

“And I shall defend it,” said the knight. He took his shield and spear, and mounted his horse, and he and the king ran together with such force that both their spears were broken, but neither lost his seat. Then King Arthur drew his sword.

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“Nay,” said the knight, “let us try another course with spears.”

“Right willingly,” answered the king, “if I had another spear.”

“I have spears enough,” said the knight; and forthwith a squire brought two new spears from the pavilion. Again the two knights came together so mightily that the spears were broken.

“You are,” quoth the stranger, “as good a jouster as ever I met withal. For the love of the high order of knighthood let us joust it once again.”

“I assent,” replied the king; so new spears were brought, and they tilted for the

third time. But now it was only Arthur's spear that broke scathless. The strange knight smote the centre of the king's shield so hard that horse and man went to the ground. Then was King Arthur sore angered, and he drew his sword and said,

"I will assay thee, Sir Knight, on foot, for I have lost the honour on horseback."

"I will be on horseback," answered the stranger. But as the king drew near he sprang from his horse lest it should be slain. Then he also drew his sword, and they fought furiously together, and struck strong strokes, giving each other many wounds; and they both grew at last so wearied that they could scarce stand. It chanced that as their swords clashed together, Arthur's sword broke in two pieces. Then said the knight,—

"Thou art at my mercy, whether I list to spare thee or slay thee, and if thou do not yield as recreant, thou shalt die."

"As for death," answered the king, "welcome be it when it cometh; but rather than be so shamed as to yield recreant, I had liever die." Then suddenly he leaped upon the other, and took him by the middle, and threw him to the ground. But the strange knight was of exceeding strength, and he got the king under him, and raised his sword to slay him. Then Merlin, who had stood by, came up, and said,—

"Sir Knight, hold thy hand, for if thou slayest this knight thou wilt do this kingdom great damage. He is a man of greater rank than thou knowest of."

"Why, who is he?" said the knight.

"It is King Arthur," was the answer.

Then the stranger raised his sword again to kill the king, for he dreaded his wrath; but Merlin cast such an enchantment upon him that he fell asleep. After that, Merlin set the king on his horse again, and himself took the knight's horse, and they rode away together.

"Alas!" cried the king, "what have you done, Merlin? Have you slain that good knight by your crafts? He is the best man of his hands that ever I met, and I would rather lose a year's rents than that he should die."

"Fear nothing, sir," answered Merlin. "He is more whole than you are. He is but asleep, and will wake within these three hours." And he told the king that the knight was Sir Pellinore—the same that had slain King Lot.

Then they rode to a hermitage where dwelt a holy man that was an excellent leech, and he searched the king's wounds, and healed them in three days. Then

they departed; and as they went Arthur said to Merlin, "I have no sword."

"No matter," answered Merlin, "near by there is a sword that shall be yours if all go well."

Presently they came to a lake, and in the middle of it the king saw an arm thrust out of the water, clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in the hand.

"Yonder," said Merlin, "is the sword I spoke of." Just then they saw a damsel walking by the lake.

"What damsel is that?" asked the king.

Merlin said she was the lady of the lake, and that the sword belonged to her; but if he spoke her fair, she would doubtless give it him. Then the king saluted the damsel, and asked what sword that was, held up above the water, and said he would it were his, for he had none.

"Sir King," answered the lady, "that sword is mine, and if you will give me a gift when I ask you, you shall have it."

This the king gladly promised; and then she bade him take a boat that was there, and row out to the sword and take it, and she would ask for her gift when she saw fit. The king obeyed her direction, and took the sword; and when he held it in his hand, he liked it exceedingly. Merlin told him that its name was Excalibur, which signifies "cut-steel;" but that the scabbard was still more precious than the sword, for while he wore it he could lose no blood, no matter how sorely he was wounded.

Then the king and Merlin returned to Camelot, where all the court greeted them joyfully; and when King Arthur's adventures were told, all the knights were happy to be under chief who was as ready to put his person in peril as any one of them.



CHAPTER III. THE DEEDS AND DEATH OF BALIN

WHILE the king was yet holding high festival in Camelot, before he was married to Guenever, there happened another adventure. As Arthur was sitting one day in the great hall of the palace, holding council with his barons, there came a damsel bearing to him a message from the great Lady Lyle of Avallon. She wore a mantle richly furred; and when she let it drop from her shoulders, it was seen that at her side she wore a noble sword. At this the king marvelled, and said,—

“Damsel, for what cause art thou girt with that sword? Such gear befits not a lady.”

“Sir,” answered the damsel, “this sword I carry not with any good will of mine own. It is to me a cause of great sorrow; but I cannot be delivered of it save by a good knight, who must be not only strong of his hands, but clean of any shame with man or woman. If I can find such a knight, then may he draw the sword from the scabbard, and so shall I be rid of the enchantment that belongs to it. But never yet have I found any knight that could draw the sword. One time I was at the court of King Rience, because I had heard that there were many noble knights; but though he and all his court essayed it, there was not one that could prevail.”

When King Arthur heard this he marvelled still more.

“Damsel,” he said, “I will myself essay to draw out the sword, not presuming upon myself that I am the best knight, but to give example to my barons, that they also may essay it.”

So the king took the sword by the hilt, and pulled eagerly at it, but it came not forth.

“Sir,” said the damsel, “you need not pull at it half so hard, for he that shall draw it forth will be able to do so with little might.”

“Then,” answered Arthur smiling—though in truth he did not well like his misadventure—“this achievement is not for me. So now, my barons, let all of you essay it; but beware that ye are not defiled with shame, treachery, or guile.”

“That will not be enough,” said the damsel; “for he that draweth the sword

must be mighty of his hands as well as a clean knight, and of noble descent, both on the father's and mother's side."

Then all the knights and barons that were at that time about King Arthur essayed the sword; but when all of them had striven, it still remained fast in the scabbard. Then the damsel made great moan, saying that she had thought in this court to find a good knight that was without defilement.

"Well," said the king, "by my faith I have here as good knights as any that are in the world at this time, but it seems there is not any of them that has grace to help you."

Now it happened that there was in the hall at that time a poor knight of Northumberland, named Balin le Savage, who did not belong to Arthur's court, but had been kept prisoner by the king for some time for having slain a knight of his kin. But though he had no estate, yet was he of good blood and of great prowess; and some of the barons had obtained his pardon, because it was in fair fight that he had killed the knight for whose death he was imprisoned. And he stood and watched the king and all his barons essay the sword; and when none of them could achieve it, he greatly desired to attempt it in his turn, but was ashamed to stand forward because, having but just come out of prison, he was in mean attire. But at last, when the damsel had made her obeisance to King Arthur and the lords, and was about to leave the hall, Balin took heart, and said to her,—

"Damsel, I pray you of your courtesy to suffer me to essay that sword; for though I be poorly clothed, yet am I a knight, and it may happen that the adventure shall fall to me."

Then the damsel looked at him, and saw that he was a likely man of his body; but because of his mean array she could not believe him to be a man of high lineage without shame. So she said,—

"Sir, there is no need to put me to further trouble in this matter, for there is scant likelihood that you will speed well where so many great lords and brave knights have failed."

But Balin answered her that worthiness and manhood were not in raiment, but in him that wore it; and again he besought her to essay the sword. So without more words she assented, and, lo! when he took the hilt in his hand he drew forth the sword easily. The king and all his barons marvelled much that Balin should have been able to do that which they could not, and some of the knights were passing wroth.

"Truly," said the damsel, "thou art the best knight that ever I found, and the most of worship, without any shame or treachery, and many marvellous deeds

wilt thou accomplish gentle and courteous knight," she said, "give me the sword again."

But Balin found the sword exceedingly fair to look upon, and he would not give it up. The damsel entreated him, and warned him that it would bring about his destruction; but of that he took no heed, so she left the court, sorrowing much that he would not give her the sword again. Then Balin got his armour and his horse, and made ready to ride forth. The king begged him to stay in his court, promising to make amends for all the harm he had done him, and to give him advancement. Balin thanked him for his graciousness, but said that at that time he must depart.

But while Balin was making ready, there came into the hall that lady of the lake who had given to King Arthur his sword Excalibur. She entered on horseback, richly clad, and saluted the king, and said she had come to claim the boon he had promised her.

"Ask what you will," answered the king, "and you shall have it, if it be in my power to give it."

"Well," said the lady, "I ask the head of that knight who hath won the sword, or else the head of the damsel that brought it; and though I have both their heads I shall sorrow, for he slew my brother, who was a good knight and true, and that damsel was the cause of my father's death."

"Truly," replied King Arthur, "I cannot grant you the head of either of them with honour; therefore ask what else you will, and I shall fulfil your desire."

But the lady would not ask nor have anything else. And now it chanced that Balin saw her, and she was his worst enemy, for she had brought about the death of his mother. When it was told him that she had asked his head of the king, he was exceedingly wrathful. He went straight up to her, and said,—

"Evil be thou found! Thou wouldst have my head, and therefore shalt thou lose thine own." And suddenly he raised the sword and struck off her head in presence of the king and all the court.

Then the king was full of anger against Balin, and reproached him sharply. Balin excused himself as well as he could, saying that the lady had, by witchcraft, been the destroyer of many good knights, and that she had been the means of the death of his mother. But Arthur answered him full sternly, "Whatsoever cause of complaint you had against her, you should have forborne her in my presence. Such a despite was never before done me in my court, and therefore you will do well to begone with what speed you may."

So the dead lady was buried with great pomp, and Balin set forth sorrowfully

because of the king's anger. Now there was at the court a knight named Sir Lanceor, the son of a king in Ireland. He was very proud, and counted himself one of the best knights, and he had a spite at Balin because of the achievement of the sword Therefore he asked leave of the king to ride after Balin and avenge the despite that that knight had done. The king granted his request, and bade him do his best, for he wished that Balin might be punished for the deed he had wrought.

Sir Lanceor armed himself, and took spear and shield, and rode hotly after Balin. After a while he came in sight of him, and called upon him to stop. When Balin heard him he turned his horse, and asked him if he desired to joust.

"Yes," answered the knight. "For that cause am I come."

"Peradventure," said Balin, "you had done better to stay at home, for many a man who seeks to put his enemy to rebuke is himself put to shame. But whence come you?"

"I come from the court of King Arthur," said the knight of Ireland, "to avenge the insult you have given there this day."

"I should be loath to have ado with you," answered Balin, "for I would not give more offence to the king than there is already. Moreover, there is not need for you to take up the quarrel of that lady that I slew, for she was an enemy to all good knights."

"Make you ready," said Sir Lanceor, "and meet me, for one of us shall abide in the field."

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It befell as he had said; for when the two knights encountered, Sir Lanceor broke his spear on Balin's shield. But Balin gave so fierce a thrust that he ran his spear through the other's armour and the middle of his body, and he fell back dead from his horse. Immediately thereafter Sir Lanceor's damsel came up, and when she saw him dead she grieved out of measure, and before Balin could prevent it she had killed herself with her lover's sword; at which piteous sight Balin was right sorrowful. While he stood there, there came up to him another knight, and when he approached, Balin knew from the arms he bore that it was

his brother Balan, who was well-nigh of as much prowess as himself. They were heartily rejoiced to meet; and while they were telling each other their adventures, there passed by a knight called King Marke of Cornwall. When he saw Lanceor and his damsel lying dead, he made inquiry as to the cause, and Balin told him. King Marke was filled with pity that such true lovers should have ended thus sadly, and he pitched his tent at that place, and caused his squires to put the dead knight and lady in a rich tomb, on the which he had this inscription written: "Here lieth Lanceor, a king's son of Ireland, that at his own request was slain by the hands of Balin; and his lady Colombe, who slew herself with her lover's sword out of dole and sorrow." While King Marke was erecting the tomb, Merlin came, and foretold that at that place there should hereafter be a great battle betwixt the two best knights of the world. Also he warned Balin that, because of the death of the lady Colombe, he should strike the most dolorous stroke that ever man struck since the death of our Lord, for it would cause three kingdoms to be in great poverty, misery, and wretchedness for twelve years. Therewith Merlin suddenly vanished; and so Balin and Balan rode on their way, and had many adventures together. But after a while they separated, and each sought adventures for himself.

Within a day or two Balin came where King Arthur, feeling weary of his life in court, had set up a pavilion in a meadow, and was lying therein on a pallet. Just before Balin came, a knight had passed making great sorrow; and when the king had asked him the cause, he had refused to tell it. So after Balin had courteously saluted the king, Arthur asked him to go after that knight, and make him return either of his own good will or by force. This Balin readily undertook, and rode after the knight, whom he found with a damsel in a forest. When Balin bade him return, at first he would not; but when Balin made ready to fight, he consented, and rode back, leaving the damsel behind him. But just as they reached the king's pavilion, suddenly there came one invisible and smote the stranger-knight through the body with a spear.

"Alas!" said the knight, "now am I done to death while under your conduct and guard. He that has slain me is a traitorous knight named Garlon, that goes always invisible. I pray you ride with the damsel, and follow the quest that I was in, where she will lead you, and avenge my death when you may."

This Balin swore to do, and then departed; and King Arthur caused the murdered knight, whose name was Sir Herleus le Berbeus, to be honourably buried.

Balin rode on with the damsel, and as they journeyed through the forest, a worthy knight named Sir Perin de Mountbeliard, who had been hunting, met and

saluted them, and asked Balin why he seemed so sorrowful. When he had heard the story, he proffered to go with them; but as they were all three of them riding past a hermitage, the false knight Garlon again came invisible and struck down Sir Perin, even as he had slain Sir Berleus. Then the hermit and Balin buried him, and placed a tomb over him; and after that Balin and the damsel continued their journey. At nightfall they came to a castle, and as the gates were open, they went up with intent to enter and spend the night there. Balin went first, and as soon as he had ridden within the gate, the portcullis was suddenly dropped behind him, and at the same time many men rushed out of an ambush and seized the damsel. When Balin saw that he could not ride back to her help he dismounted, got upon the wall, and leaped down into the ditch. Then he drew his sword and rushed upon the men that were about the damsel. But they were no more than squires and churls, and they would not fight him, but said that they were only observing the custom of the castle. Their lady was sick of a disease which had held her many years, and she might not be made whole save by a silver dish full of blood taken from a clean maid and king's daughter; and thus no maid was allowed to pass the castle without being bled.

"Well," said Balin, "she may give you as much of her blood as she will, but she shall not give more while I have life to defend her."

But the damsel of her own free will gave them a silver dish full of her blood, and though it did not help the lady, she and Balin were entertained in the castle all night, and had right good cheer. The next day they continued their journey, and at night rested with a knight that had a great castle and kept a rich table. While they sat at supper Balin heard some one crying as if in pain, and he asked what was the matter.

"I will tell you," said his host. "I was lately at a tournament, and jousting twice with a knight who is brother to King Pellam, and twice I smote him down. Then he promised to have vengeance on my best friend, and he has sore wounded my son, who cannot be healed till I have some of that knight's blood. He often rides invisible, but I do not know his name."

"But I know it," answered Balin. "His name is Garlon, and by his treachery he has slain two knights that were with me. I had rather meet with him than have all the gold in this realm." The other then told him that King Pellam had appointed to hold a great feast at his city of Listenise, and that if they went thither they should see his brother Garlon. At hearing this Balin was blithe, and the next day they set out. After a long journey they reached Listenise, and were well received at the king's castle. Balin was led to a chamber where they unarmed him, gave him rich robes, and would have taken his sword from him, but he would not

consent, for he said it was the custom in his country for a knight always to keep his sword at his side. So he was allowed to keep his sword; and then he went down into the great hall with his damsel, and was set at the high table. Soon Balin asked a knight if there was not a lord in that court named Garlon. The other said yes, and pointed out Garlon where he sat. Balin gazed earnestly at him, pondering what he should do; for to set on him before all those knights would, he thought, be perilous. But Garlon, when he saw how Balin looked at him, went up to him and smote him on the face with the back of his hand, saying,—

“Knight, why dost thou behold me in such fashion? For shame eat thy meat, and do that for which thou earnest hither.”

“Thou sayest well,” answered Balin. “This is not the first despite thou hast done me, and therefore I will do that for which I came.”

Then he rose up and smote Garlon with his sword so fiercely as to cleave his head to the shoulders. Then he called the knight who had brought him to Listenise, and said he might now get blood enough to heal his son.

But all the knights rose up from the table to smite Balin, and King Pellam cried, “Knight, why hast thou slain my brother? For this deed shalt thou die.”

“Well,” said Balin, “do thou thyself slay me.”

“Yes,” the king cried fiercely, “none other but myself shall have to do with thee, for my brother’s sake.”

So all the other knights stood back, and King Pellam came right fiercely at Balin with an iron mace. Balin warded the blow with his sword, but the heavy mace shivered the sword to pieces in his hand. Then he turned about, and ran about the chamber seeking a weapon, but could find none. So he fled into another chamber, still looking for a weapon, and King Pellam followed after; and at last Balin came to a great chamber that was splendidly garnished, and in it stood a bed arrayed with cloth of gold of the richest sort. By the bed was a table of pure gold standing on four silver pillars, and on the table stood a marvellous spear, strangely wrought. Balin seized it without regarding aught but the peril he was in. Then he turned on King Pellam, who was following hard after him, and smote him with the spear. Immediately the king sank down in a swoon as though he had been dead, and the castle walls were riven and fell in ruins. Few of all the great company that were within them escaped; for the spear with which Balin had wounded King Pellam was the same with which our Lord was wounded on the cross, and now Balin had struck the dolorous stroke of which Merlin had forewarned him. For three days Balin lay insensible within the ruins; and then

Merlin came to him and restored him, and got him a good horse, and bade him ride out of that country. Balin would have taken his damsel with him, but she had perished in the falling of the castle. For twelve years King Pellam suffered grievously from the wound Balin had given him, and could never be healed till the good prince Galahad healed him in the quest of the Holy Grail; and through this same stroke all King Pellams countries were suddenly reduced to great misery.

As for Balin, he rode on his way with a heavy heart, and had some other adventures, the which need not be recounted here; for as it had been aforetime, ever since he took the sword from the damsel in King Arthur's court, he brought nothing but woe to all that had to do with him, albeit he was ever pure in his life and did all knightly. At last he came to a castle where there were many knights and ladies, and they greeted him right nobly. But after he had been thus entertained, the chief lady of the castle told him that he must joust with a knight who kept an island close by, for it was a custom of the castle that no man might pass except he jousted.

"It is an unhappy custom," said Balin, "that I must joust whether I be willing or not. However, since so it is, I am ready. Though my horse be weary with travel, my heart is not weary; but I should grieve little if I were going to my death," For he saw that the curse of the sword he had taken abode ever with him.

"Sir," said one of the knights of the castle, "methinks your shield is not good. I will lend you a better." And he gave Balin a shield with a strange device, and Balin left behind him his own shield, which bore his arms. Then he rode to meet the knight with whom he was to joust, who came forth armed all in red. This was none other than his brother Balan, but he knew not Balin because of the strange device on his shield. So the two knights ran together with such might that both were overthrown. After that they drew their swords and fought for a long time with such might and hardihood as had never before been seen, and each gave the other mortal wounds. At last Balan withdrew a little and lay down on the ground, that was all wet with the blood of both.

"What knight art thou?" said Balin. "Never before now found I any knight that matched me as thou hast done."

The other answered him, "I am Balan, brother to the good knight Balin le Savage."

"Alas!" said Balin, "that ever I should see this day." And he fell back in a swoon.

Then Balan crept to him and unloosed his helmet, and found that it was his

brother. When Balin came to himself again, both lamented sorely, and Balin told how a knight of the castle had changed shields with him, so that Balan should not know him. Within a little while both of them died, and the chief lady of the castle caused both to be buried in one tomb. On the morrow Merlin came, and wrote on the tomb an inscription in letters of gold, telling how Balin le Savage, that had achieved the sword and struck the dolorous stroke, lay there with his brother, the two having met in mortal combat without knowing each other. Merlin also wrought many marvellous enchantments at the tomb, and predicted that Balin's sword should come into the hands of the best knight of the world.

Thus piteously died Balin le Savage, who was as good a knight as any that lived in his days, and a man of great nobleness, but who ever brought sorrow to others and to himself after he had kept the sword which he achieved before King Arthur.



CHAPTER IV. THE ADVENTURE OF THE THE HART, THE HOUND, AND THE LADY

THE lady Guenever having come to Camelot, the king was wedded to her with great solemnity at the Church of St. Stephen there. He had caused it to be proclaimed through all the land that on the day of his marriage he would give to any man any gift that he might ask that was within his means and not unreasonable. When the high feast was spread before the king and queen, and all the Knights of the Round Table were in their places, there entered the hall a poor man in mean attire, and with him a young man, whose clothing also was mean, but he was tall and straight, with a comely and noble countenance. The old man went up to the king, and craved a boon at his hands; and King Arthur said he would grant him anything that did not impair his realm or his honour.

“Sir,” said the old man, “I ask nothing but that you should make my son here a knight.”

“That is a great thing which thou askest of me,” said the king. “What is thy name?”

“My name is Aries the cowherd,” answered the man. And when the king questioned him further, he said that his son’s name was Tor, and that the lad would never labour in the field as his younger brethren would, but was always throwing darts, or watching jousts, and that it was because Tor had entreated him that he had now come to ask this boon of the king. So, after some further question, King Arthur made Tor a knight, and then asked Merlin if he would prove a good knight.

“He ought to be,” answered Merlin, “for he is come of as good a knight as any that now lives. He is the son of King Pellinore.”

At first the cowherd would not believe this; but when inquiry was made, it was found that Merlin had spoken the truth. Even then King Pellinore came into the hall, and when he learned that the new knight was his own son, he was passing glad. Then Merlin led King Pellinore to one of the highest seats at the Round Table, and said that he was more worthy to sit therein than any other that was there. At this Gawaine and his brothers were exceedingly angry, for they hated Pellinore, because he had slain their father, King Lot, and they plotted together how they might take vengeance upon him, but agreed that they could

not accomplish it at that time. Then, in fulfilment of the promise he had given, King Arthur made his nephew Gawaine a knight.

Afterwards the king and queen and all the knights went to dinner; and as they sat, a white hart came running into the hall, and close after him a white hound, and behind, thirty couples of black hounds that made a great cry. The hart ran round the tables, and as he came near the door again the white hound leaped up at him and bit him sorely. Then the hart gave a great bound, and overthrew a knight that sat near the door, and so escaped out of the hall. Immediately the knight arose, took the white hound in his arms, mounted his horse, and rode away with it. Then a lady mounted on a white palfrey came into the hall, and cried aloud to the king—

“Sir, suffer me not to have this despite, for the white hound that was taken by that knight is mine.”

“I will not meddle in the matter,” said King Arthur. Then suddenly a knight well armed rode into the hall, and seized the lady, and carried her away, albeit she made a great outcry. When she was gone, Merlin said that unless these adventures were taken up, it would be a great dishonour; and at his advice Sir Gawaine was appointed to follow the hart, and bring it to the court; Sir Tor, the knight with the hound; and King Pellinore, the knight with the lady. Each of the three knights, at the king’s command, undertook the quest that was given him; and they armed themselves, and set forth without delay.

Sir Gawaine followed at a hard pace after the hart, and his brother Gaheris, who was not yet made knight, went with him as his squire. When they had gone some little way, they came to where two knights were fighting very stoutly on horseback. Sir Gawaine rode between them, and asked what their quarrel was.

“It is in truth a simple matter,” answered one of the knights, “the more as we are brothers bom; but it happened that as we were riding forth this morning we saw a white hart pass, with a white hound in full cry after him. Both of us desired to go after them, to take up the adventure. I claimed it because I am the elder; but my brother said it should belong to him, because he was the better knight; and thereupon we fought, to determine whether he or I was the better.”

“That is not a quarrel on which two brothers ought to fight,” said Gawaine. “But you must understand that the quest of the hart has been given to me by King Arthur; and if you will not yield to me, and do according to my ordinance, you shall have to do with me.”

Then the brothers yielded to him, for they were wearied with fighting, and had lost much blood. And Gawaine bade them go and yield themselves to King

Arthur, and tell him that they had been sent by the knight who followed the quest of the white hart. Their names were Sir Surluse and Sir Brian of the Forest.

Sir Gawaine and Gaheris went on their way, and presently they came within sight of the white hart, that ran but slowly, because the hound had wounded him; and the black hounds were still following him in full cry. In front there was a great river, and the hart sprang into it, and swam across. Gawaine was preparing to follow; but on the other side of the river there stood an armed knight, who called out to Sir Gawaine that if he came over the river after the hart, he must needs joust with him.

“As for that,” answered Gawaine, “I will not fail to undertake whatever may befall in the quest I am in.”

So he and Gaheris swam their horses over the river, and on the farther side the knight and Gawaine met in full course, and Gawaine smote the other off his horse. Then he bade him yield; but the knight drew his sword, and dared him to fight on foot. Gawaine got off his horse, and both fought together furiously; but Gawaine struck the stranger so hard on the helm that the sword edge pierced even to his brain, and he fell down dead.

“Ah!” said Gaheris, “that was a mighty stroke for a young knight.”

So Gawaine and his brother left the knight, whose name was Allardin of the Isles, lying there dead on the sward, and followed after the white hart; and presently they saw it take refuge in the court of a castle, of which the gate stood wide open. They rode in after the hart, and Gaheris let slip at it three couples of greyhounds that they had brought with them, and these dogs pulled down the hart, and slew it. Straightway there came a knight out of a chamber, with a sword in his hand, and he killed two of the hounds in sight of Sir Gawaine, and chased the others out of the castle. Then he took up the hart, and lamented over it, for his lady had given it to him, and he swore that he would avenge its death. So he went in and armed himself, and came forth fiercely to Gawaine.

“Why have you slain my hounds?” said Gawaine. “They only did after their kind. I had rather you had wreaked your wrath on me than on the dumb beasts.”

“Well,” answered the knight, “I have avenged me on your hounds, and so I will on you ere long.”

Down sprang Sir Gawaine from his horse, nothing loath, and they fought together with their swords a great while, and both had many wounds. But at last Gawaine struck down the other knight, whose name was Sir Ablemore of the Morass, and then he yielded, and cried for mercy, and begged Sir Gawaine, as he was a knight and a gentleman, to save his life. But Gawaine answered him,

“Thou shalt die for slaying my hounds.”

The knight again entreated him, offering to make ample amends. Sir Gawaine would not listen, and unlaced Ablemore’s helmet, with intent to strike off his head. Suddenly Sir Ablemore’s lady came out of her chamber, and threw herself over her lord to shield him, and Gawaine, who had not seen her, struck off her head by misadventure instead of the knight’s.

“Alas!” said Gaheris, “that was foully and shamefully done. The shame of that blow will not soon quit you. Moreover, you should give mercy to those who ask it; for a knight without mercy is without worship.”

Sir Gawaine was so bewildered at his unhappy deed that he could not for the moment either speak or move; but then he said to Ablemore, “Arise; I will give thee mercy.”

“I care not for mercy now,” answered the conquered knight, “for thou hast slain her whom I loved more than all else on earth.”

“I repent it,” said Gawaine; “but I struck not at her but at thee.”

Then he charged the knight to go to King Arthur, and confess how it was that he was sent. Sir Ablemore said that he cared not whether he lived or died; nevertheless, for dread of death he swore to do according to Sir Gawaine’s will, and to bear one of the dead greyhounds before him on his horse, and the other behind him.

Gawaine and Gaheris went into the castle and prepared to rest there, but all at once four well-armed knights came in and assailed them fiercely, giving Gawaine many bitter reproaches for having slain the lady. Gawaine and Gaheris withstood them as well as they could; but the knights were dangerous fighters on foot, and one of them with a bow gave Gawaine a wound through the arm, so that at last the two were in great peril of their lives. Then four ladies came, and begged the four knights to spare Gawaine and Gaheris; and to this the knights assented, only the brothers were obliged to yield themselves prisoners. Afterwards, when the knights knew that Gawaine was nephew to King Arthur, they permitted him to go free, out of love for the king, and gave him the head of the white hart, because that was in his quest. But they made him swear also to bear the dead lady with him, her head hanging at his neck, and her body before him on his horse. In this guise Gawaine returned to Camelot, and Gaheris with him. When he arrived he was sworn to tell all his adventures truthfully, and this he did. King Arthur and Queen Guenever were greatly displeased that he had refused mercy to the knight Sir Ablemore, and through that had killed the lady; and the queen gave sentence that ever while he lived Gawaine should be an

especial champion of ladies, and undertake their quarrels, and also that he should never refuse mercy to him that asked it. This Gawaine swore to perform, on the books of the Four Evangelists.

The second of the three knights to whom a quest had been assigned was Sir Tor, who was appointed to follow the knight with the hound. After he had ridden fast till he was a long way from Camelot, he came to a place where there were two pavilions set up by the road-side, and two great spears leaning against the pavilions. Sir Tor was riding on, intent only to follow his quest, when suddenly a dwarf started up from underneath a tree, and smote his horse on the head with a staff, so that it reared up and went backward a full spear's length.

"Why dost thou smite my horse?" asked Tor.

"Because thou must not pass this way before jousting with the two knights that are in these pavilions."

"I have no time for jousting," said Sir Tor. "I am in a quest which I must follow."

"Thou shalt not pass otherwise," answered the dwarf, and then he blew loudly on a horn. Forthwith an armed knight came, and got on his horse that was standing near, took a spear, and rode at Sir Tor, who met him with such force that he smote him from his horse. Then the knight yielded, but said,—

"Sir, I have a companion in yon pavilion who will assuredly have to do with you."

"He shall be welcome," answered Tor. And when this knight came, he overthrew him also, as he had done the other. And he made both of them swear to go to King Arthur at Camelot, and say they were sent by the knight that went after the hound. Their names were Sir Felot of Languedoc and Sir Petipace of Winchelsea. But the dwarf said he would serve no more recreant knights, and begged Sir Tor to let him go with him.

"I know," he said, "that you are seeking the knight that took the white hound, and I can bring you where he is."

Sir Tor was glad to hear this, and bade the dwarf take a horse and follow him. The dwarf led him to an open glade in the forest, close by a priory; and in the glade were standing two pavilions, at one of which hung a white and at the other a red shield. In one of the pavilions three damsels were lying asleep; in the other was a fair lady, also sleeping, with the white hound at her feet. When the hound saw Sir Tor it bayed so lustily that the lady awoke; but the knight took it in his arms, and gave it in charge of the dwarf.

“Sir Knight,” said the lady, “you will not take my hound from me?”

“That must I do,” answered Tor. “For no other cause am I come from King Arthur’s court to this place.”

“Well,” said she, “take her if you will; but you will not go far ere you are overtaken by one that will give you evil handling.”

“I shall abide whatever adventure cometh,” replied Sir Tor; and he rode away.

It was now even-song, and he and the dwarf abode for the night in a hermitage, where they had but rough lodging. On the morrow they rode toward Camelot, but soon they heard one calling loudly on them:—

“Knight, yield me the hound which you took from my lady.” Sir Tor turned his horse, and saw a seemly knight riding to him, well armed, with his spear in rest. The two came together so fiercely that they went to the ground, man and horse. Then they drew their swords, and rushed on each other like lions; and they smote many heavy strokes, till the armour of both was cut in many places, and both were wounded. But at the last the strange knight began to weary, and so Tor pressed him still harder, and at last smote him to the earth.

“Yield thee to my mercy, Sir Knight,” quoth Tor.

“That will I never do while life lasteth and the soul is in my body,” said the other, “unless thou give me up my lady’s hound.”

“That I will not grant thee,” answered Sir Tor; “for I am sworn to bring to King Arthur the hound and thee, or else slay thee.”

Even as he spoke there came a damsel riding hard on a palfrey, and she cried with a loud voice on Sir Tor to grant her a boon. He answered that he would.

“Then,” said the damsel, “I ask the head of this false knight Abellius, for he is the worst knight that liveth, and the greatest murderer.”

“That is a gift that I should be loath to grant,” replied Tor. “If this knight has committed any trespass against you, let him make amends.”

“Alas!” she said, “he cannot make amends, even if he would. Lately he fought with my brother, who was a good knight and a gentle, and got the better of him; and though I kneeled half an hour in the mire, entreating him to spare my brother’s life, he would have no mercy, but struck off his head. Therefore, as thou art a true knight, I require thee to give me my gift, for he is the man of most cruelty living, and a destroyer of good knights.”

When the damsel had spoken thus, Abellius was afraid, and he yielded, and began to beg for mercy. But Tor said that he could not now grant it, after his pledge to the damsel, more especially as Abellius had refused mercy before

when he might have had it. So he unlaced his helmet and took it off; and then Abellius rose up suddenly and fled. But Sir Tor ran after him quickly, and struck off his head from behind. After that, the damsel made much of Sir Tor, and took him to her husband's castle hard by, where he had good entertainment till the next day. Then he rode to Camelot, where he was joyfully received; and when he told his adventures, the king and all the court gave him great praise. But said Merlin—

“These things are nothing to what he shall do; he will prove as noble a knight as any now living, and gentle, and courteous, and full of good parts, and passing true of his promise, and he shall never do any outrage.”

When King Arthur heard this, he gave Sir Tor an earldom of lands that had fallen to him. And so ended the quest of the hound.

In the meanwhile, King Pellinore had followed the knight that carried away the lady. As he was passing through a forest, he saw a damsel sitting by a well, and a wounded knight lying in her arms. When she saw Pellinore, she cried to him, “Help me, Knight, for Christ's sake!” But he was so eager in his quest that he would not stay. And when the lady saw that, she prayed that God might yet send him as much need of help as she had. Presently the wounded knight died, and the lady, for pure sorrow, slew herself with his sword.

King Pellinore rode on, and presently he came to a valley where were two pavilions. One of the knights of the pavilions was fighting with him that had carried off the lady; for he said she was his kinswoman, and she should not be carried off against her will. The lady was standing the while in charge of two squires. Pellinore went to her and said,—

“Fair lady, you must come with me to King Arthur's court.”

“Sir Knight,” said one of the squires, “those two knights are fighting for this lady. I pray you go to them and tell your errand, and you may have the lady if they be agreed.”

King Pellinore assented, and he went between the two knights, and asked them why they fought.

“Sir Knight,” said one of them, “I will tell you. Even now this knight, that is called Sir Ontzlake of Westland, was passing by, carrying away the lady you see yonder. She is my near kinswoman; and when I heard her complain that she was with him against her will, I fought with him to release her.”

“Well,” said the other, “the lady is mine, for I won her this day by force of arms in King Arthur's court.”

“Fie, Knight!” answered Pellinore, “that is untruly said. You came in all suddenly as we were at the feast, and took away the lady before any man could make him ready. But it is my quest to take her back again, and you also, unless one of us abide in the field. If, therefore, you choose to fight for her, you must fight with me, and I will defend her.”

“Well,” said the knight, “make you ready, and I shall strive with you to the uttermost.”

Now Sir Ontzlake was on foot; so King Pellinore was getting off his horse to meet him evenly in the field, when Ontzlake came up craftily and ran the horse through with his sword, saying,—

“Now thou art on foot as well as we.”

King Pellinore was exceedingly angry at this, for the horse was a good one. He drew his sword, put his shield before him, and cried,—

“Knight, keep well thy head, for thou shalt have a buffet for slaying my horse.”

The other was ready, and they fought; but it was not for long, for Pellinore gave Sir Ontzlake so stern a stroke on the helmet that he clove his head to the chin, and he fell dead to the earth. When the other knight saw that, he would not fight, but yielded to Pellinore’s mercy, only asking that his kinswoman should be put to no shame. This Pellinore promised, and the knight entertained him in his pavilion till the next day, and then gave him a good horse in place of that which Ontzlake had killed. So Pellinore and the lady rode toward Camelot. When they passed by the place where the wounded knight and the lady had been, both their bodies had been eaten by wild beasts, all save the lady’s head. At this Pellinore mourned, for he knew that he might have saved them if he would. When they came to the court, they were heartily welcomed, and King Pellinore told his adventures, as the other two knights had done. Then Pellinore was greatly blamed because he had not stayed to help the wounded knight and the lady, and he confessed that he repented sorely that he had been too eager in his quest to do so. Thereupon Merlin told him that he had good reason to repent, for the lady that had called to him was his own daughter; and he warned Pellinore that even as he had failed that knight and lady, his own nearest friend should fail him in the hour of his greatest need.

And thus ended the three quests of the hart, and the hound, and the lady, which were the first adventures that befell in King Arthur’s court after he was married to the Lady Guenever.

CHAPTER V. THE EVIL DEVICES OF MORGAN LE FAY.

KING ARTHUR was now firmly established in his kingdom. He ruled wisely and lived nobly, so that there was a great concourse about him of men of good condition, and in the island of Britain at that time were gathered the strongest and bravest knights of Christendom. To such of the Knights of the Round Table and others of his court as were of poor estate the king gave lands, that they might the better perform all that to which they were pledged by the oaths they took when they were made knights. Castles and fair towns arose in the land ; and knights were ever riding about, seeking adventures, of which there was no lack, for evil men who had gotten rich and strong in the stormy times of Vortigern and Uther Pendragon were still many, and ever they held themselves against King Arthur and his rule. There were also enchanters, and some of them used their supernatural powers for evil, who were fearful of his power and jealous of his greatness, entered into an alliance against him, and they led a great host into his lands, and burned, and slew, and plundered on every side. When King Arthur heard this news he was wrathful. He appointed King Pellinore to bring the main body of his army as soon as might be; and he himself, with Queen Guenever and such knights and men-at-arms as were at that time in the court, set out to meet the five kings, who were lying with their host in a wide forest near the river Humber. But it chanced that as King Arthur, with the queen, Sir Kay, Sir Gawaine, and Sir Griflet, was riding out by the river side, they met the five kings, that were also riding out without any following; and those four fell upon the five kings with such might that they killed them all. When the followers of the kings found them dead, they lost heart and courage, and would have fled; but Arthur and his little army came upon them, and slew so many that scarcely any escaped back to their own lands. So the war was ended before King Pellinore and the main host could come near the place. To show his thankfulness to God for this great victory, Arthur founded a rich abbey on the spot where the battle had been. Then he returned with his knights to Camelot, and again abode there in peace.

For some years the realm was at peace; but then it befell that Merlin came under the spell of Viviane, as it has been told in the first chapter of this book. When it was noised abroad that King Arthur had lost his best counsellor, five

kings of the north and in the island of Britain at that time were gathered the strongest and bravest knights of Christendom. To such of the Knights of the Round Table and others of his court as were of poor estate the king gave lands, that they might the better perform all that to which they were pledged by the oaths they took when they were made knights. Castles and fair towns arose in the land; and knights were ever riding about, seeking adventures, of which there was no lack, for evil men who had gotten rich and strong in the stormy times of Vortigern and Uther Pen-dragon were still many, and ever they held themselves against King Arthur and his rule. There were also enchanter, and some of them used their supernatural powers for evil.

Of the king's sisters by the mother's side, the daughters of Queen Igraine, Arthur chiefly loved Morgan le Fay, who was the wife of Urience, King of Gore. She had learned necromancy from Merlin, and was scarcely less skilled in magic arts than he. But she hated King Arthur, and was ever watching to find an opportunity to destroy him. While Merlin was with him, she could do him no ill; but afterwards, because Arthur loved her and trusted her, he placed his sword Excalibur and the scabbard in her keeping, and then Morgan thought the time had come when she might accomplish his ruin. She loved not her husband, King Urience, who was a good knight and loyal to King Arthur, but she chiefly esteemed a knight named Sir Accolon of Gaul.

It befell that King Arthur, with many of his knights, one day rode out from Camelot to hunt in the forest. They followed a great hart; and King Arthur, King Urience, and Sir Accolon, being the best mounted, rode away from the others, and chased the hart so mightily that their horses fell dead under them. Then they did not know what to do, for they were a great way from Camelot, in the midst of the thick wood.

"Let us go on foot," said King Urience, "till we come to some lodging."

Before them lay a great water, and suddenly they saw upon it a little ship, all gilt, with sails of silk, and it was coming straight toward them, and ran on to the sands. King Arthur went near it, and looked in; but there was no living thing on board.

"Sirs," said Arthur, "let us go into this ship, and see what there is in it."

So they went on board, and found it full richly garnished, with a fair cabin all hung with doth of silk; and while they were gazing upon it, the ship suddenly left the land again, and went into the middle of the water. By this time it was dusk, and all at once there were a hundred torches about the sides of the ship that gave forth a great light. Then suddenly twelve beautiful damsels appeared, and they

saluted King Arthur on their knees, calling him by his name, and bade him welcome, telling him he should have the best cheer they could give. They led the king and his two companions into the cabin, where was a table richly appointed with all kinds of meats and wines. King Arthur and King Urience and Sir Accolon fared sumptuously, for they were very hungry after the chase. When the supper was over, all three were sleepy, and the damsels conducted each to a sleeping chamber that was nobly arrayed, where they lay on soft pallets, and soon were buried in deep slumber.

When King Urience awoke, he found himself, to his great marvel, in the chamber of his wife Morgan le Fay at Camelot. How this could be he understood not, for when he had fallen asleep he had been full two days' journey from Camelot. But Arthur did not fare so well, for when he awoke he discovered that he was in a dark prison, and heard all about him the groans and complaints of woful knights. Then he said,—

“Who are ye that thus complain?”

“We are,” answered one of them, “twenty good knights that are here prisoners. Some of us have lain here seven years, and even more, and some for less time.”

“For what cause?” asked King Arthur.

Then the knights told him that the lord of the castle was a rich baron named Sir Damas, who was one of the falsest knights alive, full of treason, and an arrant coward. He had a younger brother named Sir Ontzlake, who was a good and honourable knight, and a man of great prowess. But Sir Damas, by means of his riches and the men-at-arms he kept, had deprived Sir Ontzlake of much of his heritage, so that there was always a great warfare between them. Damas would never meet his brother in the field; and Ontzlake had offered to fight him, or any knight he could find in his stead, to settle their dispute in that fashion. But Damas would not fight himself, and he was everywhere so hated that he could get no knight to undertake his quarrel. So he lay ever in wait with his servants, and laid hold by treachery of every errant knight that came into his lands to seek adventures. Then he kept them in prison, till one of them should agree to fight Sir Ontzlake on his behalf; but thus far, not one had ever consented to do it.

When King Arthur heard this he was ill at ease; but he thought that he would rather undertake the battle, albeit it were in an unjust cause, than lie hungering in prison. As he sat there, a damsel came to him and asked him, “What cheer?”

“I cannot tell,” said King Arthur.

“Well,” she said, “if you will fight for my lord, you shall be delivered out of prison; but if not, you shall not escape hence all your life long.”

“It is a hard case,” answered Arthur. “But I would rather undertake the adventure than die in prison; so I will fight for thy lord, on condition that he will release all these knights as well as myself.”

This the damsel promised, and she said that he should also have horse and armour. When the king looked at her, it seemed to him that he had seen her before, and he asked her if she had not been in King Arthur’s court. She answered that she had never been there; but she spoke false, for she was one of the damsels that served Morgan le Fay. She knew Arthur well enough, and had come to that place at her mistress’s bidding, to contrive that he should undertake the battle on behalf of Sir Damas. Now she went to Sir Damas, and told him how she had found a knight for him. He sent for King Arthur, and saw that he was a strong man, well-made, and knightly in his carriage, and so was well content to have him for his champion. Then Arthur swore to Sir Damas to do his battle to the uttermost; and Damas straightway released all the knights that had been his prisoners. They, however, waited to see the battle.

Now we must tell of Sir Accolon of Gaul, the knight who had been in the ship with King Arthur and King Urience. When he awoke from his sleep, he found himself lying by the side of a beautiful fountain. Even while he yet wondered how he had been brought thither, there came to him a dwarf, who said, “Sir, I am sent hither by Queen Morgan le Fay, who greets you well, and bids you be strong of heart, for you are to fight to-morrow morning early with a knight. Therefore, I have brought you King Arthur’s sword Excalibur, and its scabbard; and Queen Morgan desires you, as you love her, to do the battle to the uttermost, as you promised her when she and you talked privately together.”

“I understand well what she means,” answered Accolon; “and now that I have the sword, I will make good what I promised.” So he sent loving messages to Queen Morgan; and he now knew that the enchantment of the ship, and the means whereby he had been transported to the side of the fountain, were of her contrivance. And now also by her means was Sir Accolon conducted to the manor of Sir Ontzlake, Damas’s brother, where he was well entertained. But Sir Ontzlake was lying on a couch; for, a little while before, he had been wounded through both thighs with a spear. Soon after Sir Accolon came to him, Sir Damas sent him word that he had found a knight to undertake his battle, and that’ Sir Ontzlake must be ready by the next morning. Sir Ontzlake wist not what to do, for he was so badly hurt that he could not stand on his feet; but his guest, Sir Accolon, when he knew what the matter was, offered to fight in his stead, as Morgan le Fay had sent him word to do; and Sir Ontzlake was very thankful, and sent word to Sir Damas that he would have a knight ready.

On the morrow King Arthur heard mass; and after that, he armed himself and mounted his horse, and went to the place appointed for the battle, where there was a great gathering of the gentle folk and commons of the country. While Arthur was waiting, there came to him a damsel from Morgan le Fay, and brought a sword and scabbard, like Excalibur and its scabbard, saying, "Morgan le Fay sends you here your sword for great love." For this he was thankful; but both the sword and the scabbard were only counterfeit, brittle, and false.

Then Sir Accolon came into the field, and as both their vizors were down, neither of the knights knew the other. So they rode together with such force that both were unhorsed; and then they drew their swords, and fought on foot, giving each other many heavy strokes. But Sir Accolon wounded the king with almost every blow, and shed much of his blood; while he himself lost no blood at all, because he had the scabbard of Excalibur at his side. When King Arthur felt himself so wounded, and saw his own blood on the ground, he was dismayed, for he began to understand that the sword which he had could not be Excalibur, and it seemed to him that the other knight's sword was very like Excalibur. For all that he held himself full knightly, and defended himself so well that all the people there said they had never seen a knight fight better. However, with loss of blood he grew so feeble that he withdrew a little to rest. But Sir Accolon was bold because he knew that he had Excalibur, and he called out, "It is no time for me to suffer thee to rest." Then he came fiercely on, and King Arthur met him and smote him so mightily on the helm that he nearly fell to the earth. But with that stroke Arthur's sword broke at the cross, and left only the pommel and the handle in his hand.

When Accolon saw that, he said, "Knight, thou art weaponless, and may no longer endure. I am loath to slay thee, therefore yield thee as recreant."

"Nay," answered Arthur, "I may not yield, for I have sworn to do this battle to the uttermost. Moreover, I would rather die with honour than live with shame; and if you slay me, being weaponless, the shame will be with you."

"For that I care not," answered Accolon; and then he came fiercely on, and struck Arthur a blow that well-nigh sent him to the earth. But the king pressed against Accolon with his shield, and smote him with the pommel in his hand so that he went three strides back. Sir Accolon came on again all eagerly; but at the next stroke he gave, the sword Excalibur slipped from his hand and fell to the earth, and Arthur leaped to it and got it in his hand. Forthwith he perceived clearly that it was in truth his good sword Excalibur. "Ah!" he cried, "thou hast been too long from me, and much damage thou hast done me." Then he suddenly sprang to Sir Accolon and snatched the scabbard from where it hung by his side,

and threw it far away from him.

“Now, Knight,” said King Arthur, “you have done me much hurt with this sword, but ere we part I shall reward you with it as well as you have rewarded me.” So he rushed upon Accolon with all his might, and pulled him to the earth, took off his helmet, and smote him such a buffet on the head that the blood gushed out of his ears, nose, and mouth.

“Now will I slay thee,” said King Arthur.

“Slay me you may,” answered Accolon, “if it please you; for you are the best knight that ever I met, and I see well that God is with you. But I promised to fight this battle to the uttermost, and so I cannot yield to you.”

Then it seemed to King Arthur that he knew the knight, so he asked him his name.

“Sir,” answered Accolon, “I am of the court of King Arthur, and my name is Accolon of Gaul.”

At this Arthur was sore troubled, for he remembered that Accolon was favoured by his sister Morgan le Fay.

“Sir Knight,” said he, “I pray you tell me who gave you this sword.”

“Accursed be the sword,” answered Accolon, “for it has given me my death.” Then he confessed that the sword had been sent him by Morgan le Fay, with the intent that he should kill King Arthur with it; and that when that was accomplished she would compass the death of her husband King Urience, so that Accolon and she might be king and queen. When he had made this confession, Accolon asked Arthur who he was.

“O Sir Accolon,” answered the king, “now know thou that I am King Arthur, to whom thou hast done great damage.”

When Accolon heard this, he cried out, “My gracious lord, have mercy on me, for I knew you not!”

“Mercy shalt thou have,” answered Arthur, “for I believe thou didst not know me; but none the less hast thou plotted my death, and art therefore a traitor. Still I blame not thee so much as my sister Morgan le Fay; for she, by her false arts, has made thee agree and consent to her evil purposes. But I will be so avenged on her, if I live, that all Christendom shall hear of it.”

Then the keepers of the field and all who had watched the battle drew nigh, and Sir Accolon told them that the knight with whom he had done battle was none other than King Arthur. All the people knelt and made their submission to the king. He, on his part, ordered Sir Damas to give Sir Ontzlake his rightful

inheritance, and charged him, on penalty of death, to atone to the knights he had kept in prison for the hurt he had done them, and never more to meddle with knights-errant that might come into his country. Sir Ontzlake he charged to come to his court, because he was a good knight, and promised him honour and advancement. Then the king and Sir Accolon were removed to a rich abbey of nuns a few miles away, where their wounds were dressed, and within four days King Arthur was healed; but Sir Accolon had lost so much blood that he might not be recovered. When he was dead, Arthur bade six of his knights bear his body to Morgan le Fay, and charged them to say that the king sent him to her for a present, and that he had got back his sword Excalibur and the scabbard.

When the tidings came to Morgan le Fay by one of her damsels that Accolon was dead, and that King Arthur had got back his sword and scabbard, she was full of sorrow and anger; so she got leave from Queen Guenever to return to her own country. As she and her attendants journeyed, they passed by the very abbey where King Arthur was still lying. Knowing that he was there, Morgan went into the abbey and asked where the king was. She was answered that he was asleep in his chamber; so she said she would go in and wake him herself. As she was his sister, and a queen, none dare say her nay; so she went into the chamber, intending to steal from him Excalibur. But the king, though he was asleep, had the sword fast in his right hand, so she could not get it. However, she took the scabbard, and then went on her way. When the king woke and missed the scabbard, he was passing wroth, and still more so when he knew who had taken it. So he and Sir Ontzlake armed themselves hastily, and rode after Queen Morgan, and after a while they came in sight of her. When she saw that King Arthur was pursuing, she rode as fast as she could; but ever he drew nearer and nearer. Then she went to the shore of a lake that was there, and threw the scabbard into it, saying, "Whatever may become of me, my brother shall not have the scabbard." After that she rode with her knights into a valley, and there by her enchantments turned herself and them into marble statues.

When King Arthur and Ontzlake came up, they saw the statues, and thought the change had been wrought by a judgment of God. They could not find the scabbard, and so rode back to the abbey. As soon as they were gone, Morgan and her knights returned to flesh and blood, and went on their way to the country of Gore. There Morgan made her castles strong, and garrisoned them, for she greatly dreaded her brother's wrath. But she sent him word that, while she could change herself and her men into the likeness of stones, she had no cause to fear him.

However, though Accolon was dead, Morgan abated no whit of her hatred to

the king, nor of her evil designs against him. But she pretended to be sorrowful because of her deeds, and offered him amends. And she sent a damsel to the court with a mantle, the richest that ever was seen in the world, for it was so covered with precious stones that there was not space to put on another. The damsel said to the king, "Your sister sends you this mantle, and desires that you will take this gift of her; and in what she has offended you, she will amend it at your own pleasure."

The king was greatly pleased with the mantle, but he did not put much trust in his sister. While he was considering what he should say, there came to him the Lady Viviane, who had ever loved him, and she counselled him on no account to put on the mantle, or let it be worn by any in his court, until it had been put on by the damsel who had brought it. King Arthur said he would follow her counsel, and so he called the damsel to him, and bade her put on the mantle.

"Sir," said she, "it will not beseem me to wear a knight's garment."

"By my head," answered the king, "you shall wear it before it come on my back or that of any other that is here."

When she saw that no better might be, the damsel put on the mantle full sorrowfully; and lo! straightway she fell down dead, and was burned to ashes. Then King Arthur saw how great was the treason of his sister Morgan le Fay.



CHAPTER VI. THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE KNIGHTS AND THE THREE DAMSELS,

KING ARTHUR was exceedingly wrathful against his sister Morgan le Fay, and because he suspected that her son, Sir Ewaine, was aware of her plots, he banished him from the court. In this he was wrong, for Sir Ewaine ever held by his father and King Arthur, and hated his mother's treachery. When Sir Gawaine heard that his cousin Ewaine was to be banished, he made ready to go with him, for he said, "Whoso banisheth my cousin, banisheth me also."

So the two set out together, and they rode till they came to a great forest, and presently they saw a tower in a valley. By the tower were two knights, armed and on horseback, and twelve fair damsels, who kept going to and fro by a tree. Gawaine and Ewaine went nearer, and then they saw that the damsels were throwing mire on a white shield that was hanging on the tree "Wherefore do you thus offer despite to the shield?" said Ewaine.

"Sirs," answered one of the damsels, "there is a knight in this country that is the owner of this shield, and he is a very good knight of his hands, but he hates all ladies and gentlewomen, and therefore do we defile his shield. His name is Sir Marhaus, and he is brother to the wife of King Anguisance of Ireland."

"I know him well," said Sir Ewaine; "he is one of the best knights living."

While they spoke, they saw Sir Marhaus riding toward them. Then all the damsels fled into the tower; but one of the knights of the tower put his spear in rest, and cried aloud, "Sir Marhaus, defend thee." Then they ran together, and Sir Marhaus smote that knight so hard that he hurled him from his horse and broke his neck. Thereupon the other knight of the tower came on, and him also Sir Marhaus overthrew. After that he took down the white shield from the tree and put in its place the one he had carried before. Then he rode up to Sir Gawaine and Sir Ewaine, and asked them what they did there. They answered that they came from King Arthur's court to seek adventures.

"Well," said Marhaus, "here am I ready to fulfil any adventure that you require of me;" and he rode back a little way, to get space to run a course with them. Sir Ewaine did not wish that they should joust with him, but Gawaine said they should be shamed if they did not assay him. Then said Ewaine, "I will meet him first, for I am weaker than you; and if he smite me down, then you may

perchance avenge me.”

So Sir Marhaus and Sir Ewaine came together, and Sir Marhaus smote down Ewaine, horse and man, and hurt him in the side. Then he turned to Gawaine, who met him fiercely, but when they came together Gawaine’s spear broke, and Sir Marhaus overthrew him also. Sir Gawaine sprang lightly to his feet, and drew his sword, bidding Sir Marhaus alight, or he would slay his horse. Marhaus dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree; then he also pulled out his sword, and they fought eagerly together, giving each other many sore strokes. As it was after nine o’clock in the morning, Gawaine’s strength ever increased, and Sir Marhaus marvelled at it. But he was a knight of great prowess, and he withstood Sir Gawaine mightily. At noon they were still fighting, and then Gawaine began to grow more feeble, till at last he could no longer endure.

“Sir,” said Marhaus, “I have well felt that you are a passing good knight, and a man of marvellous might as ever I met. Our quarrel is not so great that it need be fought to the death, and I should be loath to do you hurt, for I perceive you are very feeble.”

“Ah, gentle knight,” said Gawaine, “you are more courteous than I.”

Then they took off their helmets, and kissed one another, and swore that they would henceforth be as brethren. Then Marhaus asked Gawaine and Ewaine to lodge with him that night, and he took them to a good lodging he had near by. As they rode, Gawaine asked him why, being so valiant a knight, he hated all ladies. But Sir Marhaus said he did not hate all, but only the damsels of the tower, and such as they, who were nothing but witches and enchantresses. The two knights lodged with him for a week, till their wounds were well healed; but when he knew that they were King Arthur’s nephews, he gave them the best entertainment he could. When they were whole again, he said he would ride with them through the forest. So the three travelled for seven days, till they came to a country that was called Arroy, which was always full of strange adventures. And as they were riding along, they came to a fair fountain, at the side of which sat three damsels. One was threescore years of age, and the second thirty, and the third but fifteen years of age. The knights saluted them, and asked them why they were sitting there.

“We are here,” said the eldest damsel, “to show strange adventures to errant knights. As ye are seeking adventures, each of you must choose one of us, and go forth by a separate way; and this day twelvemonth we will all meet here again to tell our adventures.”

To this the knights assented; and Sir Ewaine, because he was the youngest and

the least experienced, chose the eldest damsel. Sir Marhaus took the second, as her age was the most fitting to his; so the youngest and fairest was left to Gawaine, of which he was well pleased. Then each knight took his damsel, and Sir Ewaine took a way that went west, and Sir Marhaus a way that went south, and Sir Gawaine went north. As he and his damsel rode, they came to a cross by the wayside, and while they were there a knight passed them, the fairest and comeliest they had ever seen, making great moan and sorrow. He saluted Gawaine courteously and wished him much worship, and Gawaine returned him the like wish.

“Alas!” answered the knight, “that may not be for me.”

Then, as he went on, there came against him ten knights, one after the other, and he smote them all down with one spear. When they were all on foot, they went to him, and he sat still as a stone, and suffered them to pull him off his horse, bind him hand and foot, tie him under his horse’s belly, and so lead him away.

“Surely,” said Gawaine, “that is a doleful sight, to see that knight so treated.”

“Sir,” said his damsel, “it would be to your worship and honour to help that dolorous knight, for he is one of the best knights that ever I saw.”

“I would be glad to help him,” answered Sir Gawaine, “but it seems to me that he would not have my help.”

But the damsel said sharply, “It seems to me that you have no heart to help him.” And she was wroth with Gawaine. While they talked there came two knights armed at all points, one of whom cried out, “Sir Gawaine, knight of King Arthur, make thou ready to joust with me.” So they ran together so mightily that both were overthrown. Then they drew their swords and fought hard together. In the meanwhile, the other knight came to Gawaine’s damsel, and asked her to abide with him, promising to be her faithful knight. She said she would go with him, for she liked not Sir Gawaine, because he would not strive for the knight that was led away by the ten knights he had overthrown. So while Gawaine was fighting, the damsel went away with her new companion.

Gawaine and the other knight fought together a long time, and then they agreed together, and the knight took Gawaine to his manor that was near by. As they went, Gawaine asked what knight that was who smote down the ten knights, and afterwards suffered himself to be so shamefully led away.

“Ah,” said the other, “that is the best knight I ever saw, and I do not believe there is a better in the world. His name is Sir Pelles, and he loves a great lady in this country that is called Ettarde. He first beheld her at a tournament which was

held near this place, at which were many ladies and five hundred knights. He who proved to be the best knight was to have a good sword, and a circlet of gold to give to the lady present at the tournament whom he held to be the fairest. Sir Pelles was by far the best that was there; no man could withstand him, and each of the three days the tournament lasted he struck down more than twenty knights. So he won the prize, and forthwith he laid the circlet at the feet of the Lady Ettarde, and said openly that she was the fairest, and he would prove it on the body of any knight that gainsaid him. So he chose her for his sovereign lady, and loved her exceedingly. But she is very proud, and she made scorn of Sir Pelles, and said she would never love him. But he followed her to her own manor, and now he is lodged at a priory near her. Every day she sends knights to fight with him; but he always puts them to the worse, and then suffers them to take him prisoner and lead him to her unworthily, because in no other way can he gain a sight of his lady-love.”

When Gawaine heard this, he was full sorry for the knight Sir Pelles, and said that the next day he would seek him, and offer him what help he could. In the morning he took leave of his host, and sought Sir Pelles, whom he found sorrowing in the forest. Then had they much talk together, and Sir Pelles told Gawaine all that the other knight had told him the day before.

“Now,” said Sir Gawaine, “leave off your mourning, and I promise you by the faith of my body that I will do all that lies in my power to get you the love of your lady.”

“Ah, my good friend,” said Pelles, “I pray you tell me who you are.”

This Gawaine told him, and Sir Pelles entreated him to do as he had promised, and not to betray him. To that Gawaine made oath; and then said he would take Pelles’s horse and armour, and ride to the Lady Ettarde, saying he had slain Pelles. In this way he would gain access to her, and would then strive all he could to win her love for his friend. So they changed horses and armour, and Gawaine rode to Ettarde’s castle. When he told her that he had slain Pelles, she received him cordially, the more when he told her his name, and that he was King Arthurs nephew. She said it was a pity that Pelles was slain, for he was a good knight, but that while he lived she could never have peace; so she entertained Gawaine with the best cheer she had.

Now the Lady Ettarde was exceedingly fair, and when Gawaine saw her he loved her sorely, so that he no longer heeded the oath he had sworn to Sir Pelles, but wooed the lady for himself, and she was gracious to him. They lived together in a pavilion outside the castle, for Ettarde no longer feared Pelles, thinking that he was dead. For three days and nights they stayed there; and then Sir Pelles,

who had been waiting for Gawaine at his lodging, could endure no longer, but armed himself, and mounted his horse and rode to the castle. When he came to the pavilion, both Gawaine and the lady were asleep; and when Pelles saw them, his heart was like to burst for grief, and also because Gawaine had betrayed him and forsworn himself. At first he thought to slay them, and drew his sword; but he could not bring himself to slay them sleeping, so he laid his naked sword across the lady's throat, and rode away making great sorrow. When Ettarde woke and saw the naked sword at her throat, she knew it was Pelless, and then she perceived that Gawaine had betrayed her. She gave him many reproaches, and Gawaine could say nothing for himself, but armed himself and rode away into the forest, well knowing that he had stained his knightly honour.

But one of the damsels of the lake, named Nimue, met a knight of Sir Pelles in the forest, and learned all that had passed, and also that Pelles was lying in his bed, dying out of pure sorrow because he had been betrayed. So she undertook to heal him, and the knight brought her to Sir Pelles, and by her enchantments she wrought so that he loved Ettarde no longer. Also, she brought Ettarde to him, and made her love him out of measure. When Pelles awoke and saw Ettarde, all the love had gone out of his heart, and he hated her more than any woman alive, and said, "Go thy way hence, thou traitress; come no more in my sight." So she wept bitterly, and implored him for his love; but he would have nothing to do with her, and gave his love to the Lady Nimue, who loved him faithfully in return. And afterwards Ettarde died of grief, but Pelles lived happily with the lady of the lake.

Of what befell Sir Gawaine after this till the year was out no mention is made in the old chronicles.

Sir Marhaus, it will be remembered, went with the damsel of thirty years by a way that led south. The road took them into a thick forest, and when night fell they knew not where they were. At last they came to a small lodge in the wood, but the man that dwelt there would not give them shelter at any price. At last he said, "If you will take the adventure of your lodging, I will bring you where you will be lodged."

"What is the adventure?" asked Sir Marhaus.

"That you will know when you come to the place," answered the other.

"Whatever it may be, do thou show us the place," said the knight; "for my lady and I and my horse are all weary, and rest we must have."

Then the man took them a little way farther to a fair castle, and he called the porter, and bid him tell his lord that a knight-errant and a fair damsel were

waiting without, and would lodge with him. "Let them come in," answered the lord, "but it may happen that they will repent it." So then Sir Marhaus and his damsel were shown into a great hall, where the lord of the castle was, with many young men about him. The lord asked Sir Marhaus who he was and whence he came.

"Sir," said Marhaus, "I am a knight of King Arthur's, and I was born in Ireland."

"That will be the worse for thee," answered the other grimly, "for I love not thy lord nor the company of the Round Table. Make what cheer thou canst to-night, for to-morrow thou wilt have to meet me and my six sons."

"Is there no other choice but that I must have to do with you and your six sons all at once?" asked Sir Marhaus.

"No," answered the lord; "and for this reason, that Sir Gawaine once slew seven of my sons in an encounter, and I vowed to have my revenge on any knight of King Arthur's that might come into my power."

Then Sir Marhaus asked him his name, and he said he was called the Duke of the South Marches. "Ah," said Sir Marhaus, "I have heard of you ere this as a great foe to King Arthur and all his knights."

"That shall you feel to-morrow," said the duke.

So that night Sir Marhaus and his damsel were well lodged, and the next morning the knight armed himself, and met the duke and his six sons in the courtyard of the castle. He let them all break a spear upon him, and never moved; and then with one spear he smote them all from their saddles. Then he went to the duke, and called on him to yield; but some of the sons began to recover themselves, and would have set upon Sir Marhaus. "Bid your sons stand back," said Sir Marhaus to the duke, "or I will do the uttermost to you all." So when the duke saw that otherwise he could not escape death, he yielded, and bade his sons do the like. And Sir Marhaus bound them all never more to be foes to King Arthur or his knights, and at the next Feast of Pentecost to present themselves at the court and make submission to the king.

After that Sir Marhaus departed, and two days afterwards his damsel brought him to a place where a great tournament was held. The prize for the best knight was a circlet of gold worth a thousand byzants. At this tournament Sir Marhaus did right nobly, and smote down forty knights, so the prize was awarded to him. Then he and his damsel again rode forth, and after a long journey they reached the castle of a rich earl named Fergus. Near by there dwelt a giant called Taulurd, who wrought much evil against the earl and wasted his lands, and

Fergus complained of him to Sir Marhaus.

“Does he fight on foot or on horseback?” asked the knight.

“On foot,” answered Earl Fergus, “for he is so large that no horse could bear him.”

“Then will I fight him on foot,” answered Marhaus. And the next day he went to seek for the giant, and found him sitting under a tree, with great clubs of iron lying about him. When the giant saw Marhaus coming he sprang up, seized a club, and rushed against him. His first blow was so mighty that it crushed Marhaus’s shield to pieces; and thereafter the knight was in great peril, for the giant was both strong and a wily fighter. At last, however, Sir Marhaus smote off his right arm above the elbow; and then he fled away, and ran into a pool of water that was so deep the knight could not follow him. Then Marhaus made the earl’s men bring him heavy stones, and with these he pelted the giant till he knocked him down in the water and drowned him. Then Sir Marhaus went to the giant’s castle, where he found many knights and ladies, whom he delivered, and so much riches that he was never afterwards in need of wealth to the end of his life.

Sir Marhaus dwelt a long time with the Earl Fergus to recover from his wounds, for he had been sorely bruised by the giant. When he was whole, he and his damsel set out, and reached the fountain that was their trysting-place on the appointed day.

Sir Ewaine, who had ridden westward with his damsel of threescore years, went first to a tournament that was held in a place near the marches of Wales. There he did great deeds, and smote down thirty knights, so that he took the prize, which was a gerfalcon and a white steed with trappings of cloth of gold. After that his damsel brought him to the castle of a great lady in that country, called the Lady of the Rock. Now there were two perilous knights that dwelt nigh the Lady of the Rock, named Sir Edward and Sir Hue of the Red Castle, and they had despoiled the lady of much of her lands. So she complained to Sir Ewaine; and he blamed the knights that they had done that which was contrary to their oaths. He said he would first entreat them to restore to her that which was her right; and if they were not to be persuaded, then he would do battle with them. The knights were sent for accordingly, and they came to the castle with a hundred horsemen. But they cared nothing for Sir Ewaine’s reproaches, and said they would keep what they had.

“Well,” said Sir Ewaine, “then will I fight with either of you, and prove upon his body that you do wrong to this lady.”

“That we will not assent to,” answered the brothers, “for if we do battle, we will both fight with one knight at once; and if thou wilt meet us both, and can conquer us, the lady shall have her lands again.”

To that Sir Ewaine agreed, and the battle was appointed for the next day. When the knights met, both Sir Edward and Sir Hue broke their spears on Sir Ewaine without unhorsing him; but he smote them both down, the one after the other. Then he alighted on foot, and fought them with his sword. They gave him many sore wounds, but at last he struck Sir Edward so hard on the helm that he clove his head to the shoulders, and then he forced Sir Hue to yield. So the lady was restored to her lands, and Sir Hue was sworn to make his submission to King Arthur at the ensuing Feast of Pentecost. But in this battle Sir Ewaine was so much hurt that he could undertake no other adventure before the time appointed for the three knights and the damsels to meet at the fountain.

But on that day all the knights were there, and all the damsels, only Sir Gawaine did not bring his damsel, nor had she much worship to say of him. Then the knights bade farewell to the ladies, and rode again into the forest; but they were met by messengers from King Arthur commanding them to return to the court. When they came there, the king and all else made them heartily welcome, and they were sworn to tell all their adventures. At the Feast of Pentecost came the Lady Nimue, and brought with her Sir Pelles; and King Arthur held a great tournament, where Sir Pelles won the first prize, and Sir Marhaus the second, so they were both made Knights of the Round Table in room of two that had been slain during the twelvemonth. King Arthur was glad that he had got two such good knights; but Sir Pelles never afterwards loved Sir Gawaine, and though he spared him for the king’s sake, oftentimes he overthrew him at jousts and tournaments. And Sir Pelles was ever a knight of great worship; for when Sir Lancelot grew to be the knight of most prowess, the Lady Nimue so contrived that Sir Pelles never had to do with him, and she would not suffer him to be at any tournament where Sir Lancelot was, unless it were to fight on the same side.

CHAPTER VII. LANCELOT DU LAKE

IT will be remembered that King Ban of Benwick and King Bors of Gannes had given right good help to King Arthur when he was fighting for his kingdom. Afterwards they went back to their own country, and carried on their wars against King Claudas of Gaul; but he, having wide lands and many knights at his command, ever put them to the worse, and despoiled them of their territory before Arthur could come or send to help them. So it befell that they both died of grief—King Ban leaving behind him one son, who was named Lancelot, and two younger, called Lionel and Ector de Maris; while King Bors left three sons, named Bleoberis, Blamor, and Bors. After the two kings were dead, Arthur, being eased from his wars at home, sent over to Gaul knights and men-at-arms that beat back King Claudas, and recovered from him the lands of Benwick and of Gannes. Arthur also took charge of the sons of the two dead kings, all save Lancelot, and had them trained in all manner of knightly exercises, so that when they grew to manhood they were all men of great might and valour, and they became Knights of the Round Table. But Lancelot fell to the charge of Viviane the enchantress, who was known as the Lady of the Lake, so that afterwards he got the name of Lancelot du Lake. She nourished and reared him till he was eighteen years of age, and then brought him to the court to receive knighthood at the hands of King Arthur. Even then few knights could withstand him, so strong was he, and so skilled with sword and spear; and when he grew to his full prowess and manhood, he passed all the other knights that ever were in Arthur's court, or in the whole world, so that never was he put to the worse altogether. King Arthur had great joy of Sir Lancelot. But his coming to the court was not in the end for the king's worship, for he grew to love Queen Guenever, and to care for no other lady; and she, since he was not less comely than valiant, loved him also, and forgot her duty to her lord and king, from which cause at the last there arose great sorrow.

Just after Lancelot came to the court, King Arthur had a great war with the Emperor of the Romans. This emperor, whose name was Lucius, had sent ambassadors to Britain demanding tribute, with many haughty threats if it were not given. At this the king was wrathful, and returned for answer that he owed no tribute, nor would pay any, but that he claimed the empire as successor to Constantine, and would shortly come to take possession of it. Accordingly, he

went over sea with a great army and most of his knights, leaving the kingdom in charge of Sir Baldwin and his cousin and next heir Sir Constantine. When he came to Brittany, the king heard of a monstrous giant that lived in a mount there and ravaged all the country, feeding on the flesh of men and children; and Arthur sought out this giant, and after a terrible fight he slew him. Then he and his knights had many-great battles with the mighty armies that had been gathered by the Emperor Lucius, in the which there were many fierce heathen and giants. But always the Britons put their enemies to the worse, and killed thousands of them; and at the last Lucius himself was slain, and Arthur marched to Rome, where, with much pomp and solemnity, he was crowned emperor. Then he came back with his knights to Britain, where the queen and all the people received him with great joy.

In this war Sir Lancelot, though yet but a young knight, did great service; but afterwards, when the knights began again their joustings and tournaments, and sought adventures over Britain, his worship increased marvellously, so that most other knights began to hold him in dread. It happened that one time, after he had long rested him from knightly sports, he went to his brother Sir Lionel, and bade him make ready, for they two would seek adventures. So they armed, mounted their horses, and set forth.

The day was very hot, and Sir Lancelot had a strong desire to sleep; so he lay down under an apple-tree, and fell into a deep slumber. Sir Lionel watched the while; and as he was so sitting, he saw three knights come riding as fast as they were able, and behind them there followed only a single knight. But Lionel thought he had never beheld one that seemed so mighty. Within a little he overtook all the three knights that fled, and smote them down, one after another; then he bound them all fast with the bridles of their own horses, and led them away. When Sir Lionel saw that, he determined to assay that knight himself; so he got on horseback without wakening his brother Sir Lancelot, and followed the strong knight. When he had overtaken him, he bade him turn. Forthwith the other turned and met Sir Lionel, and smote him down as he had done the three knights. Then he bound him fast, threw him across his own horse, and took him, along with the others, to his castle. There the strong knight unarmed his four captives, beat them while naked with thorns, and thrust them into a gloomy prison, where they found many other knights, who made a great lamentation.

It so happened that Sir Ector de Maris, brother to Sir Lancelot and Sir Lionel, when he found that they had gone to seek adventures, was wroth that he did not accompany them, and set out to seek them. As he rode through the forest, he came to a strong castle which stood by a stream. At the ford of the stream, close

by the castle, grew a tall tree, on which Sir Ector saw hanging a great many knights' shields, and among them the shield of his brother Sir Lionel. At the bole of the tree hung a great copper basin. Sir Ector raised his spear, and struck the basin thrice with all his might, so that it sounded like a church-bell. Forthwith there came out of the castle the same knight that had smitten down Sir Lionel, and he bade Sir Ector make ready. So they ran together, and Sir Ector smote the strange knight so hard that he turned his horse thrice about, but still he kept his saddle.

"That was well done," said the other, "and full knightly hast thou stricken me." Then he rushed on Sir Ector, caught him under his right arm, bore him clean out of his saddle, and so rode with him into the hall of the castle, where he threw him down in the middle of the floor. Then said this strong knight, whose name was Sir Turquine, unto Sir Ector,—

"Because you have done more to me this day than has been done by any knight these twelve years, I will grant you your life, if you will be sworn to be my prisoner all your life."

"That will I never promise," said Ector.

"You will suffer the more for it," answered the other. So he unarmed Sir Ector, and beat him with thorns, as he had done the other knights, and threw him into his dungeon, where were many knights his fellows, and especially Sir Lionel. The two brothers made great sorrow together, and Sir Ector asked Lionel where Sir Lancelot was.

"Fair brother," answered Sir Lionel, "I left him asleep under an apple-tree, and what is become of him I cannot tell."

Then all the knights that were prisoners said if Sir Lancelot came not to help them, they could not be delivered, for they knew no other knight but he who could match Sir Turquine.

Meanwhile Sir Lancelot slept long under the apple-tree, and while he lay there, King Arthur's sister, Morgan le Fay, and three other queens, passed by. They saw the knight sleeping, and knew him for Sir Lancelot; and then Morgan put an enchantment on him that he should sleep for six hours, and they had him borne to a castle of hers near at hand. By night-time the enchantment was past, and he awoke; and a fair damsel brought his supper, and told him that he was in the power of an enchantress, but if he kept up his heart she would aid him. The next day the four queens came to him, and Morgan le Fay told him he must choose one of them for his true love, and forget his lady Queen Guenever, or else stay in prison there till he died. He answered boldly that he would be true to his

lady, and would have none of them, so they left him. Afterwards the damsel again came to him, and said she was the daughter of King Bagdemagus, and that she would effect his escape on condition that he would promise to go and help her father in a tournament he and his knights were holding against the King of Northgalis. There had been another tournament some days before between the same parties, and King Bagdemagus was put to the worse because there were three knights of King Arthur's court that helped the King of Northgalis; therefore the damsel wanted Sir Lancelot's help for her father. Sir Lancelot knew King Bagdemagus for a good knight, so cheerfully he promised to help him in the tournament. The next day, early in the morning, the damsel helped him out of his prison, and got him his horse and his armour, and told him where he should find her and her father.

So Sir Lancelot rode away, glad at heart, and after some adventures he came to an abbey where King Bagdemagus was. The damsel was there already, and she gave him a hearty greeting. Nor was Bagdemagus himself behind in that. Lancelot told him how he had been betrayed by the four queens, and how his brother Sir Lionel had left him. "And," said he, "because your daughter delivered me out of my prison, I shall, while I live, do her service, and all her friends and kindred."

"Then am I sure of your help at the tournament," said King Bagdemagus.

"Certainly I will not fail you," answered Lancelot; and he asked what knights of King Arthur's had been on the side of the King of Northgalis. The king said they were Sir Mador de la Port, and Sir Mordred, King Arthur's nephew, and Sir Gahalatine.

The tournament was appointed to take place within three miles of the abbey; and on the day before, King Bagdemagus sent to Sir Lancelot, by his direction, three of his best knights, each with a white shield bare of any device, and a like shield for Sir Lancelot himself. On the morrow the four knights ambushed themselves in a little wood close by the field where the tournament was to be held. Then the King of Northgalis and his knights came into the field on the one side, and King Bagdemagus and his knights on the other, and the three knights of King Arthur's stood by themselves. Then the two parties met with a great dash, and at the first encounter there fell twelve knights of King Bagdemagus, and six of the King of Northgalis, and King Bagdemagus was put much to the worse. Then in came Sir Lancelot with the white shield, and the three knights with him. He thrust into the thickest of the press, and with one spear he smote down five knights. Then he overthrew the King of Northgalis himself, that was a good knight, and broke his thigh. The three knights of King Arthur saw this, and

marvelled who it might be.

“Yonder is a shrewd guest,” quoth Sir Mador de la Port, “therefore will I have at him.”

So they encountered, and Sir Lancelot bore him down, horse and man, so that his shoulder was put out. “Now befalleth it to me to joust,” said Sir Mordred, “for Sir Mador has had a great fall.” But he fared no better, for Sir Lancelot smote him out of his saddle with such might that his neck was well-nigh broken, and he lay long in a swoon. Then came in Sir Gahalatine, and he and Lancelot ran together, and both broke their spears; but when they took to their swords, Sir Lancelot smote Sir Gahalatine so hard on the helm that blood came from his nose and mouth, and he fell stunned from his horse. Thereafter Sir Lancelot got another great spear, and before it broke he had struck down with it sixteen knights, and with another he unhorsed twelve knights more, so that the King of Northgalis’s knights would joust no more, and the prize was given to King Bagdemagus.

Sir Lancelot rode with Bagdemagus to his castle, and there he was well entertained by the king and his daughter. The next day he departed to seek his brother Sir Lionel, and came to the same forest where he had parted from him. As he rode, he met a damsel, and asked her if she knew of any adventures.

“Yes,” she answered, “here are adventures near at hand, if thou darest to prove them.”

“For that cause came I hither,” said Lancelot. Then the damsel undertook, if he would tell her his name, to bring him where was the strongest knight he had ever met. So he told her his name. Then said she, “Sir, here is an adventure that well befits thee. Hard by dwells a knight that can overmatch any other I ever heard of, except it be thee; and I understand that he keeps in his prison more than threescore of King Arthur’s knights that he has conquered with his own hands. But when you have accomplished that adventure, you must promise me, as you are a true knight, to go with me and help me and other damsels that are distressed by a false knight.”

Sir Lancelot promised as she desired, and she brought him to Sir Turquine’s castle, and bid him beat on the copper basin. He smote it so hard and so long that the bottom fell out, but no one answered. Then he rode by the gate of the castle nearly half an hour, and presently he saw coming a great knight, driving before him a horse, on which lay an armed knight bound, and that knight Sir Lancelot presently saw was Sir Gaheris, Sir Gawaines brother.

Then Sir Lancelot rode out to meet them, and the great knight, who was Sir

Turquine, got his spear in readiness. Without many words, they ran together with so much force that both their horses' backs broke. So soon as they could get to their feet, they drew their swords, and smote each other many terrible blows, so that in no long time each was sorely wounded. Thus they fought for more than two hours, till at last both were breathless, and they stood leaning on their swords.

"Now, fellow," quoth Sir Turquine, "hold thy hand awhile, and tell me what I shall ask thee."

"Say on," said Sir Lancelot.

"Thou art," said Turquine, "the biggest man I ever met, and the best breathed, and like one knight that I hate above all others. If thou be not he, I will gladly accord with thee, and for thy love will deliver all the prisoners I have; and if thou wilt tell me thy name, thou and I will be friends together, and I will never fail thee while I live."

"Well," said Lancelot, "who is that knight whom thou hatest above all others?"

"Truly," said Sir Turquine, "it is Sir Lancelot du Lake, for he slew my brother Sir Carados of the Dolorous Tower, who was one of the best knights then living. Him, therefore, I except; and if I ever meet him, one of us shall make an end of the other, for to that I have made a vow. And because of what Sir Lancelot did to my brother have I slain a hundred good knights, and maimed many others; and still have I in my dungeon threescore and four. But all these shall be delivered, if thou wilt tell me thy name, and thou art not Sir Lancelot."

"Sir Knight," answered Lancelot, "wit thou well and know that I am Lancelot du Lake, King Ban's son of Benwick, and Knight of the Round Table; and now I defy thee to do thy worst."

"Ah," said Turquine, "thou art more welcome to me, Lancelot, than ever knight was before, for we shall not part till one of us be dead." So they rushed together like two wild bulls, lashing at each other with their swords, and fought for two hours more, and either gave the other many deep wounds. But at last Turquine grew very faint, and could scarce hold up his shield for weariness. That saw Sir Lancelot, and rushed on him more fiercely than ever, and got him down on his knees; then he loosed off his helm and smote off his head. After that Lancelot released Sir Gaheris, and begged him to go into Turquine's castle and deliver all the knights that were there prisoners; and he begged Gaheris to lend him his horse—for his own was killed—so that he might ride with the damsel and fulfil his promise. Gaheris assented joyfully, for said he, "Fair lord, you have

saved both me and my horse; and surely you are the best knight of the world, for you have slain the best knight except yourself that ever I saw.” And he begged Lancelot to tell him his name; and Lancelot did so, and promised to return to the court at the Feast of Pentecost. So then he departed with his damsel.

Gaheris went into the castle, and found there a porter with many keys. So he threw the porter on the ground so hard that his eyes started out of his head, and then he took the keys, and let out all the prisoners. They thanked Gaheris much, for when they saw that he was wounded they thought he had overcome Turquine. But he told them it was Sir Lancelot who had slain him, and that he had left word for them to await his coming at the court. However, Sir Kay, who was also among the prisoners, with Sir Lionel and Sir Ector, said they would not do so, but would go and seek Sir Lancelot.

Meanwhile Lancelot rode with the damsel, and she told him that on the road they were going there was a false knight called Sir Peers du Forest Savage, who lay in wait for all ladies, and robbed and distressed them. So Sir Lancelot bade her ride on in front, and when that felon knight came out upon her he would be ready. It fell out as they had planned. Sir Peers seized the damsel, and then Sir Lancelot came and rebuked him. Sir Peers drew his sword, and rode to Lancelot, who smote him on the helmet so that he clove him to the throat. Then Lancelot asked the damsel if she required any more service at his hands. She answered him that she did not; but she wished him good fortune in all that he undertook, for he was the courtliest knight and the meekest to all ladies and gentlewomen that she had ever known.

After that they parted; and Lancelot rode on for two days through a thick wood, and had to sleep as well as he could beneath the trees. On the third day he came to a broad river that was crossed by a long narrow bridge. As he was going over the bridge there sprang out all of a sudden a foul-looking churl, who smote his horse on the nose so that it turned about, and then he asked the knight why he came over that bridge without license.

“Why should I not ride this way?” said Lancelot. “There is no other way.”

“Thou must find another,” said the churl, and straightway struck at him with a great club stuck full of pins of iron. The knight warded the blow with his sword, and dealt such a buffet in return that he cut the churl almost in twain. So he passed on over the bridge, and at the farther side was a fair village, with a castle in the midst. Many people cried out to him that he had done an evil deed for himself, for he had slain the chief porter of the castle. Of all this Lancelot took no heed, but went straight into the castle, of which the gate was open, and within he found a green courtyard. Immediately there set upon him two huge giants;

well armed except their heads, carrying heavy clubs. One of them rushed at him, but Sir Lancelot put off the club with his shield, and with his sword he clave the giant's head down to the breast. When the other saw that, he turned to flee; but Sir Lancelot followed hard after him, and smote him on the shoulder, so that he died on the spot. Then he went into the castle, and a great number of ladies and damsels came and thanked him for having rescued them from the giants, who had kept them in bondage for many years.

So Lancelot again rode forth, and passed through many wild countries. One night he lodged in a small house with an old gentlewoman, who gave him a bed in her upper chamber. While he lay there asleep he was awakened by a sound of one riding hard, and presently there came a knocking at the door. Lancelot rose and looked out of the window. It was bright moonlight, and he saw one knight defending himself against three. Forthwith he put on his armour, and got out of the window; then he called out loud, "Turn, you knights, to me, and leave fighting with that knight," As soon as he said that they all three dismounted, and rushed upon Lancelot on foot with their swords, and there began a great battle. The knight whom they had chased would have helped Sir Lancelot.

"Nay, Sir Kay," said Lancelot, who knew him by the device on his shield, "I ask none of your help; leave them to me." So Sir Kay stood back, and very soon Sir Lancelot had stricken all of them to the earth. They cried out, "Sir Knight, we yield to thee as a man of might."

"I will not have you yield to me," answered Lancelot. "If you will yield to Sir Kay the Seneschal, I will spare your lives, but not otherwise."

"Fair Knight," said they, "we are loath to do that, for we should have overcome Sir Kay had not you been here; therefore to yield to him we have no reason."

"As for that," said Lancelot, "make your own choice whether you live or die; but if you yield, it must be to Sir Kay."

So, to save their lives, they did as he commanded, and he swore them to go to King Arthur's court on the next Whitsunday, and put themselves at the grace and mercy of Queen Guenever, saying that Sir Kay had sent them. Then Lancelot suffered them to depart; and he and Sir Kay went into the lodging. Then Sir Kay saw who it was, and he knelt down and thanked him for having twice saved his life.

"I have done no more than I ought to do," answered Sir Lancelot.

When Sir Kay was unarmed, he asked for meat; and as he was sore hungered, he ate heartily. He was lodged in the same chamber with Sir Lancelot; but he

slept very sound, and in the morning Lancelot rose, leaving him still asleep, took Sir Kay's armour and shield, mounted his horse, and rode away. When Sir Kay arose, and saw that Sir Lancelot had got his armour and left him his own, he said,—

“Now, by my faith, I know well that he will grieve some of King Arthur's knights, for they will think that it is I, and they will be bold with him; and because of his armour and shield, I am sure that I shall ride in peace.” So then he thanked his hostess, and departed.

Meanwhile Sir Lancelot rode on through the forest till he came to a fair open country full of rivers and green meadows. On the roadside he saw three pavilions, with white shields hanging before them and great spears leaning beside. The knights who lodged in the pavilions were sitting beside them; and Sir Lancelot rode past, and spoke not a word. Then the knights said to one another, “It is the proud Sir Kay; he thinketh no knight is as good as he, but the contrary is often proved.” Then one of the knights, who was named Sir Gaunter, said, “By my faith I will ride after him, and assay him for all his pride, and you may see how I shall speed.” With that he armed him, took his spear and shield, and rode hard after Sir Lancelot. And when he came near him he called out, “Abide, thou proud knight Sir Kay, for thou shalt not pass quietly.”

So Sir Lancelot turned, and when they encountered, Sir Gaunter's spear broke on his shield, but he smote down Sir Gaunter, horse and man. Then one of the other knights, whose name was Sir Gilmere, said, “Yonder knight is not Sir Kay; he is far mightier.”

“I dare lay my head,” said the third brother, that was called Sir Reynold, “he has slain Sir Kay, and taken his horse and harness.”

“Whether it be so or not,” said Sir Gilmere, “it behoves us to take our horses and rescue our brother Sir Gaunter, though methinks we shall all have enough to do to match that knight.” So they rode to the place as hard as they could; and first Sir Gilmere put forth his spear, and Sir Lancelot smote him down, so that he lay in a swoon. Then came Sir Reynold, and he and Sir Lancelot broke their spears on one another, and then began a hard battle with their swords. The other two brothers rose, and recovered themselves a little, and came to help Sir Reynold. When Lancelot saw that, he first smote Sir Reynold so sorely that he fell from his saddle, and then he served the other two in like manner. So the three knights had to yield; but they asked him to tell them his name, for they were sure he was not Sir Kay.

“Let that be as it may,” said Lancelot, “I charge ye to come to King Arthur's

court on Whitsunday and yield ye to Queen Guenever, and say that Sir Kay sent you.”

This they swore to perform, and then Lancelot rode away from them. In a while he came to a forest, where he saw four Knights of the Round Table sitting on their horses under an oak tree. There were his own brother Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Sagramour le Desirous that was a good knight, Sir Gawaine, and Sir Ewaine. As Sir Lancelot passed, they thought by the device on his shield that it was Sir Kay, and Sir Sagramour said he would prove Sir Kay’s might. Thereupon he rode against Sir Lancelot, who met him, and smote him to the ground, horse and man.

“Lo, my fellows!” quoth Sir Ector, “yonder you may see what a buffet he has got. That knight is much bigger than ever was Sir Kay.” Then he got his spear in his hand, and rode toward Sir Lancelot, who served him as he had done the other, and still his spear held.

“By my faith,” said Ewaine, “that is a strong knight. I am sure he has slain Sir Kay, and I see by his great strength it will be hard to match him.” So in his turn he rode against Sir Lancelot, but fared no better than those who had gone before. “Now,” said Gawaine, “I see that I must needs encounter with that knight.” So he took his spear in his hand, and rode hard against Sir Lancelot, and each smote the other in the middle of the shield; but Gawaine’s spear broke, and Sir Lancelot’s thrust was so strong that Gawaine’s horse reared up and fell over with him. Sir Lancelot passed on smiling, and said, “God give him joy that made this spear; for a better held I never in my hand.”

Then the four knights went to one another, and helped each other as best they might. “What say ye to this jest,” said Gawaine, “that one spear hath felled us four?”

“We would he had been elsewhere,” answered the others; “for he is a man of great might.”

“You may well say that,” quoth Gawaine, “for I dare lay my life it is Sir Lancelot. I know him by his riding. Howbeit we shall know when we come to the court.”

Sir Lancelot still rode on his way, and encountered many strange adventures. At last he came to a castle, and there he saw a falcon that was caught by the legs, and hung to the bough of a great tree in peril of its life. Then came a lady out of the castle, and said, “O Lancelot, as thou art the flower of all the knights in the world, help me to get my hawk; for if it be lost, my lord will slay me.”

“What is your lord’s name?” asked Sir Lancelot.

“Sir,” she answered, “it is Sir Phelot, a knight of the King of Northgalis.”

“Fair lady,” said Lancelot, “since you know my name, and require me on my knighthood to help you, I will do what I may to get your hawk, though I am but an ill climber.” So he alighted, tied his horse to the tree, and prayed the lady to unarm him. When he was unarmed, he put off all his clothes save his shirt and breeches, and then climbed the tree, and rescued the falcon, the which he tied to a rotten branch and threw it down to the lady. Suddenly the lady’s husband, Sir Phelot, came out of the castle all armed, and said, “Now, Sir Lancelot, I have found thee as I would have thee.”

“Ah, lady,” said Lancelot, “why have you betrayed me?”

“She hath done as I commanded her,” answered Sir Phelot. “There is no escape for thee; thine hour hath come when thou must die.”

Lancelot entreated him to let him at least have his sword, and then he would encounter him, even without armour. But Sir Phelot answered, “I know thee too well for that; thou shalt get no weapon, if I can prevent it.”

“Alas,” said Lancelot, “that ever knight should die weaponless!” So he looked about him, and saw over his head a great bough of the tree that was leafless. This he broke off by pure might, and then suddenly sprang from the tree, so that his horse stood between him and Sir Phelot. Then Sir Phelot came round the horse, and struck at him, meaning to have slain him. But Lancelot cunningly warded the blow with the bough, and then struck the knight so mightily on the side of the head with it that he stunned him. Then Lancelot took the sword from his hand, and struck his head from his body. When the lady saw that her husband was dead, she cried out and swooned away. But Lancelot got on his armour as fast as he could, for he feared lest more enemies should come from the knight’s castle. Then he got on his horse and rode away, and thanked God that he had escaped unscathed from that adventure.

So after this Sir Lancelot arrived at the court, two days before the Feast of Pentecost; and King Arthur and all the court were glad of his coming. And all the knights that he had rescued from Sir Turquine came and gave him honour and praise. And those knights whom he had stricken down while he wore Sir Kay’s armour were passing glad when they knew it was Sir Lancelot that had put them to the worse. So at that time Sir Lancelot had the greatest name of any knight in the world, and was the most honoured, both by high and low.



CHAPTER VIII SIR GAWAINE AND THE GREEN KNIGHT.

IT befell that once when King Arthur held his Christmas feast at Camelot, some of the best of his knights, as Sir Lancelot and his kin, Sir Marhaus, Sir Pelles, and the sons of King Pellinore, were absent, wandering in search of adventures. Still there were many good Knights of the Round Table in their places, and no lack of barons and ladies to uphold the high revels. The king kept New-Year's Day with great splendour, bestowing rich gifts on all his knights and ladies. But when the banquet was spread at noontide, Arthur, as his custom was, would not sit at the table until some wondrous adventure should have happened.

He was not long kept waiting, for suddenly there rode into the great hall the tallest knight that had ever been seen by any of the court. His stature was that of a giant, and he had the bulk of four ordinary men. He was clad entirely in green, save that he wore spurs of bright gold. His long hair was green, and a bushy beard of the same colour flowed over his breast. The mighty steed on which he sat was also green, but its mane was decked with gold threads. This strange-looking knight carried neither spear nor shield, but in one hand he bore a holly bough, and in the other a great axe with an edge like a razor and a massive handle of solid iron. He entered without making any salutation; and the marvellous apparition of so huge a man and horse, all as green as grass, awed for the moment the boldest knight there, so that no one spoke to him. At last, in a rough voice, he asked, "Where is the governor of this company?"

At that King Arthur roused himself, saluted the Green Knight courteously, and invited him to sit down at the banquet.

"That will I not do," answered the other. "I come not here to feast, but to seek the most valiant man of thy court, that I may prove him; but methinks here are only beardless children, for I see no man who is worthy to match me. If any one of you be bold enough to strike one stroke for another, this axe shall be his, and I will abide his blow, but he shall receive a stroke in return from me within twelve months and a day."

To this strange challenge none of the knights present was eager to make reply, for all of them felt that after a single blow from so strong an arm and so formidable a weapon as those of the Green Knight, no man would be in

condition either to receive or give another. When all were thus silent, the Green Knight rolled about his red eyes, and tauntingly exclaimed that the famous Knights of the Round Table were no better than a pack of cowards. Then was King Arthur wrathful, and he sprang to his feet and said that he at least feared neither the Green Knight nor his axe, and that he would himself undertake the adventure. So he seized the axe, and the knight, placidly stroking his beard, drew down his garments, bared his neck, and awaited the blow.

When Sir Gawaine saw that, he came from his seat and entreated King Arthur not to hazard his own sacred person in that adventure, but to let him undertake it instead. To this the king was loath to assent, but all the court so entreated him that at last he resigned the axe to Gawaine.

“Who, then, art thou?” said the Green Knight, eying scornfully his new opponent.

“Wit thou well,” answered Gawaine, “that I am Gawaine, son of King Lot of Orkney, Knight of the Round Table, and nephew unto our gracious lord King Arthur.”

The Green Knight smiled grimly. “It pleases me well,” said he, “to receive a blow from thee; but thou must swear that within a year and a day thou wilt seek me to receive a blow in return.”

“Where shall I seek thee?” asked Gawaine. “Tell me thy name and abode.”

“When thou hast smitten me,” answered the knight, “then will I tell thee; and if I cannot speak at all, it will be so much the better for thee. Take now the axe, and let me see how thou canst smite.”

So Gawaine gripped the axe, and the knight, throwing aside his long hair, again bared and bent his neck. Sir Gawaine, lifting the axe on high, smote with all his might, and so great a blow did he give that the knight’s brawny neck was smitten clean through, as if it had been a twig, and his huge head rolled on the floor of the hall, Deeming that now there was an end of their strange visitor, some of the knights pushed it with their feet as it went past them. But they had reckoned without knowing the marvellous vitality of the Green Knight. He received Gawaine’s stroke and the loss of his head as though nothing had befallen him. Striding down the hall, he picked up his head. Then stepping back again to his horse, he mounted, and held up his head at arm’s length, the which, raising its eyelids and gazing sternly at Gawaine, said, “Well and mightily hast thou stricken me. Now be thou ready to go forth according to thy promise, and seek till thou find me. Get thee to the Green Chapel, there to receive from me a blow on New-Year’s morn; and if thou fail, then art thou recreant.” So saying,

the knight, still carrying his head in his outstretched hand, put spurs to his horse and dashed out of the hall. Undismayed either by this fearsome sight or by the warning words which the head had spoken, Gawaine burst out into great laughter, in which the king and his knights presently joined, though Queen Guenever and the ladies were still, in truth, too much afraid to do so. And the banquet proceeded without further thought of the Green Knight.

The year wore round till All-hallowmas, when Sir Gawaine began to think of his ghastly tryst with the headless knight, and prepared him for his journey. King Arthur held a feast in honour of his nephew, and thereafter Gawaine set out amid great lamentations, for there were few that expected to see him again in life, since it was certain that if the Green Knight smote off his head, he would not be able to rise and take it in his hand. But he rode forth showing no sign of fear; and after a long and tedious journey through a wild and desolate country, during which he had many perilous adventures with serpents, wolves, bulls, bears, and wild men, he found himself, on Christmas morning, in a deep forest of ancient oaks. Looking around him, he saw at a little distance the noblest castle he had ever beheld, with walls that rose to a great height, and massive towers of gray stone. Riding up to the gate, he found it shut fast, and the drawbridge raised. Lifting up his voice, Gawaine summoned the castle, and there appeared at the gate a porter, who asked his errand. The knight answered that he sought a lodging. Then answered the porter that he should be welcome to dwell there as long as he would.

Straightway the drawbridge was let down, the gate flew open, and Gawaine entered. When he dismounted from his horse it was well stabled; while many knights and squires came forward to receive the rider, conducted him into the great hall of the castle, and relieved him of his helmet and armour. Then the lord of the castle came forward, courteously bade Gawaine welcome, and embraced him. He was a man of vast stature and great strength, with a stem but noble countenance. He led Gawaine into a splendid chamber, and assigned him a page to wait upon him.

Having donned the rich robes that were provided for him, the knight returned to the hall, where he sat down with his host and the numerous guests to a noble banquet. In answer to the questions which were courteously asked him, Sir Gawaine informed his entertainer that he was a knight of King Arthur's court, whereat there was joy in the hall, and every one in the company made much of him. After dinner all the party went to the chapel to hear even-song. There Sir Gawaine sat by the lord-and his lady, who was young and sprightly, and surpassed even Queen Guenever in beauty. Gawaine, at the bidding of her lord,

saluted her with a kiss, whereat she blushed rosy red, and he begged permission to be her knight and servant. When evensong had been said, all returned to the hall, where they were served with wine and spices, and there was much pleasant converse. The lord took off his hood—the which was adorned with gold and precious stones—placed it on a spear, and said that he who made the most mirth should have it for his guerdon. It was won by Sir Gawaine, who told many stories that he had heard in King Arthur's court; but he bestowed the hood upon the page that served him.

After three days had been pleasantly passed in feasting and merry-making, the guests began to depart, and Gawaine bethought him of the quest he was sworn to follow. But the lord of the castle sought to detain him, and asked him how it happened that he was away from Arthur's court at Christmas-tide. Gawaine answered that he had a tryst at the Green Chapel on New-Year's mom. The lord said he would show him the place, for it was only two miles distant from his castle; and to hear this Gawaine was well pleased. Then the lord said he was going out to the chase. He asked the knight to stay within and keep his lady company the while. "Whatever," he said, "I win in the chase shall be thine, and whatever thou mayst achieve while I am absent thou shalt give to me." To this mirthful bargain Gawaine cheerfully assented. The knight of the castle went forth accordingly into the forest with huntsmen and hounds, and Gawaine in the meanwhile entertained the lady. Very soon she gave him to understand that if he would he might have her love; but he, being mindful of his duty to his host, answered only that he would ever be her knight and faithful servant, nor could she gain more from him even when she kissed him with her rosy lips. At night her lord returned, and gave to Gawaine a deer which he had slain in the chase; and thereupon Gawaine gave him in return the kiss which the lady had bestowed upon him. The lord smiled, and asked him if that were all he had gained; but to that Gawaine made no answer.

The next day the lord again went forth with his men and hounds, and the lady once more sought Gawaine, to whom she again spoke tender words, and bestowed on him a second kiss, to no more purpose than the first. At night the master of the castle brought back with him a wolf's skin for Gawaine, who had only the kiss to give in exchange. On the third day the fair dame openly and eagerly professed her love for the knight; and so marvellous was her beauty, that only by dint of great efforts did Gawaine remain true to his knightly vows. When the lady found that he would in nowise respond to her blandishments save by such courtesies as it was proper for a knight to offer, she drew from her finger a rich ring, and begged him to accept it as a keepsake; but he excused himself.

Then she took off the green girdle she wore, and proffered that to him; but it also he refused.

“Ah, Sir Knight,” quoth she, “surely thou wouldst not refuse the girdle didst thou but know its worth. Whoso weareth that girdle bound about his body can by no means be wounded or slain.”

When Gawaine heard that, he remembered that on the next day he was sworn to receive a stroke from the Green Knight, and he thought that the girdle would then be very welcome to him. So he assented to receive it from the lady. Then said she, “I will not give it thee unless thou promise on thy knightly word to keep the gift secret from my lord.” And Sir Gawaine had by this time become so eager for the girdle that he promised as she desired. Then she bestowed it upon him, and three kisses also. In no long time after this his host came back with a great boar that he had slain, the which he gave to Gawaine, who in return kissed him thrice, but, according to his pledge, said nothing about the girdle.

On the following day Gawaine armed himself, having first wrapped the lady’s girdle about his body, mounted his good horse, and set out for the Green Chapel, having taken an affectionate leave of the lord and lady of the castle. The lord had appointed one of his men to guide him to the place, who led him through the oak-wood, and past huge mountains with their tops all shrouded in mist, till they came to the mouth of a valley all dark and desolate. Therein, said the squire, was the Green Chapel; but he himself would go no farther, for it was the most perilous place in the world. “He who dwells there,” he said, “is full stiff and stern, and bigger than any four knights in King Arthur’s court. No man hath ever yet been to the Green Chapel whom he did not slay by a single blow of his hand. I counsel thee therefore, Sir Knight, to quit this perilous quest, and withdraw thee; and if thou dost, I swear to thee that I will never reveal it.”

But Gawaine, bearing in mind his promise to the Green Knight, and comforted also in heart by knowing the magic power of the girdle, would not hearken to the squire, but bade him farewell, and rode on into the ravine. Long time he rode by a wild and rugged path, amid beetling rocks and huge leafless trees, but saw

nothing, till at last he came where there was a great cave in the rock, and he was aware of a horrible sound, like to the sharpening of a steel blade on a grindstone, but far louder. Nothing dismayed, the knight called out, "Who dwelleth here, with whom I may hold discourse?"

A rough voice answered, bidding him abide where he was; and presently forth from the cave strode the Green Knight, with his grim head again on his shoulders, and carrying in his hand a new axe with a blade full bright and keen.

"Give thee good-morrow, Knight," quoth he to Gawaine. "Well and truly hast thou kept thy time. Have now thy helm off, and take thy pay at once."

"By my faith," answered Gawaine, "I do not begrudge thee thy will."

Then he took off his helm and bared his neck, and calmly awaited the blow. The Green Knight raised the axe, and brought it down with so much might that it hissed as it swept through the air; but he made it pass just by Gawaine, who shrank a little as it came by him. The Green Knight laughed scornfully.

"Behold," he said, "thou art a Knight of the Table Round, and yet showest fear before thou hast felt harm. So did not I when thou didst strike me, and therefore must I be the better man."

"It is true," said Gawaine, "that I have shrunk once, but I will not again. Therefore strike thou, and speedily."

Again the Green Knight brought down the axe close by his neck, but Gawaine moved not at all nor changed countenance. So the third time the knight smote him full on the neck, and the axe just drew blood, but no more. Then Gawaine drew his sword.

"Have a care," said he, "that thou strike not again, for my covenant with thee was only to receive one blow."

Then the other laughed loud, and when Gawaine looked at him, behold, he was no longer the Green Knight, but his late host, the lord of the castle.

"Know thou," said he, "that I sent my lady to thee to try thee, and in the main I found thee true; but thou sinnedst a little for love of thy life when thou didst take the girdle and spoke nothing of it to me."

Then was Gawaine sore abashed, and he denounced bitterly his own cowardice and covetousness, and took off the girdle and threw it to the lord of the castle.

"Nay," said the other, "now that thou art repentant, I hold thee to be as clean as if thou hadst never sinned."

And he gave him the girdle as a token of his adventure, and invited him to

return again with him to the castle. This, however, Gawaine, who was still exceedingly ashamed, would not do, but he desired to be remembered to the fair lady that had beguiled him. He thanked the lord for the girdle, and said he would wear it in memory of his fault. Then he asked the other for his name, and the knight said he was called Bembak de Hautdesert, and that he served Morgan le Fay. She it was who had caused him to go in the guise of the Green Knight to Camelot, to test the renown of the Round Table, hoping to grieve Arthur and Guenever. Then the two parted, and Gawaine rode back to Camelot, where he was joyfully welcomed, and told all his adventures even as they have been here set down.



CHAPTER IX. SIR BEAUMAINS' QUEST

SOON after this, it befell that King Arthur chose to keep the Feast of Pentecost at a fair city and castle of his, named Kinkenadon, that was on the sea-side near the Welsh border. And about noon on the Day of Pentecost, as the king and all his knights were going to their meat, there came into the hall two men richly attired, and between them, leaning on their shoulders, there walked a young man, tall and well made, with very broad shoulders and a comely countenance, and the fairest and largest hands that ever man saw. Room was made for him to go up to the high dais where sat King Arthur and Queen Guenever, and when he stood there he said,—

“God bless thee, O King, and all thy fellowship, and in especial the fellowship of the Round Table. For this cause am I come hither—to pray that thou wilt give me three gifts, the which shall not be unreasonable, but such as may be worshipfully and honourably granted. And as for the first gift, I will ask it now, and the other two on this day twelve months.”

“Now ask,” said King Arthur, “and you shall have your request.”

“Then, sir,” said the young man, “this is now my petition—that you will give me meat and drink sufficient during these twelve months.”

“Ask better, my fair son, I counsel thee,” quoth the king, “for this is but a simple request, and my heart giveth to thee greatly; for, if I be not greatly mistaken, thou art come of men of worship, and wilt thyself prove a worshipful knight.”

“Sir,” answered the other, “let that be as it may; I have asked all that I will ask.”

“Well,” said Arthur, “you shall have meat and drink enough; that I never refused to friend or foe. But what is thy name?”

“That I cannot tell you,” he answered.

“I marvel greatly at thee,” said the king, “that thou knowest not thy name; and yet thou art one of the goodliest young men that ever I saw.”

Then he called up Sir Kay the Seneschal, and charged him to give the youth meat and drink of the best, and to treat him in all respects as though he were a lord's son.

“There is little need to go to such cost for him,” said Kay, “for I dare undertake that he is a villein born, and will never be a good man. Had he come of gentle blood, he would have asked for horse and harness; but even as he is, so hath he asked. Since he has no name, I will give him one, and that is Beaumains, because he hath such fair hands. Into the kitchen I will bring him, and there he shall have good meat and broth every day, so that by the twelvemonth’s end he will be as fat as a pork hog.”

Then the two squires that had brought the young man departed, and left him with Sir Kay, who scorned and mocked him. At this was Sir Gawaine wroth; and so was Sir Lancelot, who bade Sir Kay leave his mocking, for, said he, “I dare lay my head he will prove a man of great worship.”

“That cannot be,” said Sir Kay, “else he would not have asked for bread and drink. Pain of my life, he hath been brought up in some abbey, where they have fallen short of sustenance; so he has come for it hither.”

Then the king and all the court sat down to the banquet, and Beaumains went to the bottom of the table among the squires and boys, and there he ate sadly. Afterwards both Lancelot and Gawaine invited him to their chambers, and would have made much of him; but he refused them, and would do nothing save as Sir Kay commanded. So he was put into the kitchen, and lay every night as the scullions did; and so he endured for the whole year, and never displeased any, but was always gentle and mild. But whenever there was jousting, he would be there to see it if he could; and when there were sports for the servants of the court, he always took part, and none might cast the stone or the bar so far as he by full two yards. Then would Sir Kay say, “How like you my boy of the kitchen?”

The next Feast of Pentecost the king held at Caerleon in great state; and when he and his knights went in to meat, there came a damsel and saluted him, and prayed him for succour.

“For whom?” asked the king. “What is the adventure?”

“Sir,” said she, “there is a lady of great worship who is besieged by a tyrant, so that she may not go out of her castle; and because it is reported that here in your court are the noblest knights of the world, I am come to pray you for succour.”

“What call you the lady?” again asked the king. “Where dwelleth she, and what is his name that besieges her?”

“Sir King,” answered the damsel, “as for my lady’s name, that I may not tell you at this time. But she hath high rank and great estate; and the tyrant that

besiegeth her and destroyeth her lands is called the Red Knight of the Red Lands."

"I know him not," said King Arthur.

"Sir," said Gawaine, "I know him well. He is one of the most perilous knights in the world; it is said he has seven men's strength, and from him I once escaped very narrowly with my life."

"Fair damsel," said the king, "there be knights here that would undertake to rescue your lady, but because you will not tell her name, nor where she dwelleth, none of my knights shall go with you by my will."

"Then must I seek further," quoth the damsel.

But while she was making ready to depart, Beaumains came before the king and said, "Sir King, God thank you, I have been these twelve months in your kitchen, and have had my full sustenance; and now I will ask my two gifts that I spoke of before."

"Ask upon my peril," said the king.

"Then, sir, these shall be my two gifts: first, that you grant me the adventure of this damsel."

"Thou shalt have it," said the king; "I grant it thee."

"And, secondly, that ye bid Sir Lancelot du Lake to make me knight; for of him and no other will I be made knight. And when I am gone, I pray you let him ride after me, and make me knight when I require him."

"All this shall be done," said Arthur.

"Fie on you, Sir King!" said the damsel wrathfully; "shall I have none but your kitchen-boy to undertake my adventure-?" So she took her horse and departed. And just then there came a dwarf, who brought to Beaumains a noble horse and armour, and all else that was fitting. When he was armed, there were few in that court who were so goodly as he to look upon. He took his leave of the king and Sir Gawaine, and prayed Sir Lancelot to ride after him; and then he took his horse and rode after the damsel.

Then said Sir Kay, "I will ride after my boy of the kitchen, to find out whether he will know me for his better."

"You would do better to abide at home," said Gawaine.

But Sir Kay took his horse and spear, and rode after Beaumains, and presently overtook him as he rode with the damsel. He called out, "What, Sir Beaumains, know you not me?"

Then Beaumains turned his horse, and saw that it was Sir Kay.

“Yes,” he said; “I know you for an ungentle knight of the court, and therefore beware of me.”

Thereupon Sir Kay put his spear in rest, and ran upon him. But Beaumains turned aside the spear with his sword, and smote Sir Kay so hard on the side that he fell as though he had been dead. Then Beaumains alighted, and took Sir Kay’s spear and shield; and then he got on his horse again, and continued his way, bidding his dwarf ride Sir Kay’s horse. Then came Sir Lancelot, and Beaumains proffered him to joust. They ran together so mightily that both were borne to the earth and much bruised. When they rose, Beaumains put his shield before him, and asked Sir Lancelot to fight with him on foot; and this they did for well-nigh an hour. Sir Lancelot found Beaumains so strong that he marvelled, for he fought more like a giant than a man. Then Lancelot began to dread lest he should be shamed; so he said,—

“Beaumains, fight not so sore; your quarrel and mine is not so great but we may leave off.”

“That is true,” said Beaumains; “but it doth me good to feel your might. And yet, my lord, I have not shown the uttermost.” Then he asked Sir Lancelot to give him the order of knighthood.

“You must first tell me your name,” said Lancelot, “and of what kin you are born.”

“Sir, if you will not discover it, I will tell you,” said Beaumains.

This Sir Lancelot promised; and then Beaumains disclosed that he was Gareth of Orkney, the youngest son of King Lot and brother to Sir Gawaine. Of this Lancelot was glad, and so made him a knight. Then Beaumains departed with the damsel, and Sir Lancelot came back to Sir Kay, and had him borne back to Caerleon on a shield. He was long disabled by his wound, and escaped narrowly with his life; and all men scorned him, because he had been overthrown by him whom he had so mocked.

But when Beaumains overtook the damsel, she gave him nothing but hard words.

“What do you here?” she said. “You smell of the kitchen. Your clothes are defiled with the grease and tallow you got in King Arthur’s scullery. Think you I hold you any the better for what you did to that knight? Not so, for you overthrew him unhappily and cowardly. Therefore, prithee, return, poor kitchen-knave. I know thee well, for Sir Kay named thee Beaumains. What art thou but a turner of spits and a washer of dishes!”

“Damsel,” he answered, “say to me what you choose, I shall not quit you; for King Arthur has given me your adventure, and I will fulfil it to the end, or else die in it.”

“Thou finish my adventure!” she said “Talk not of it; for thou wilt be met presently by one of such sort that, for all the broth thou hast ever supped, thou wouldst not look him in the face.”

“That shall be seen,” said Beaumains. And as they rode through the wood, there came one on horseback, fleeing in great fear.

“What is the matter?” asked Beaumains.

“O Knight, help me!” cried the other. “Hereby have six thieves taken my lord and bound him, and I fear they will slay him.”

“Take me thither,” said Beaumains, and presently they came to where the thieves were with the knight bound. Beaumains rode upon them, and with his first three strokes he slew three of them, and the other three fled. He followed, whereupon they turned on him, and assailed him hard with swords and clubs; but it was to no purpose, for he slew them all, and then returned and unbound the knight, who thanked him greatly, and begged him to come to his castle, where he would give him rich rewards. “Sir,” said Beaumains, “I will have no reward, and I must follow this damsel.” But when he came near her she bade him ride farther off, because he smelt of the kitchen. Then the knight that Beaumains had released rode after the damsel, and prayed her to lodge with him that night, and because it was nearly dark she assented. But when at supper the knight set Beaumains beside the damsel, she reproached him for placing a common kitchen-knave at the same table with a lady of high parentage. Then the knight was ashamed of her words, and he and Beaumains sat down at another table.

The next morning the damsel and Beaumains thanked the knight, and rode forth again. Presently they came to a great river, where there was but one ford, and on the farther side were two knights that kept the passage.

“What say est thou?” said the damsel. “Wilt thou match yonder two knights, or shall we return again?”

“Nay,” said Beaumains, “I would not return again if there were six more.” So he rushed into the water, and encountered one of the knights in the middle of the ford. The spears of both broke in their hands; and then they fought angrily with their swords, till at last Beaumains smote the other so hard on the helm that he fell stunned into the water and was drowned. Then he spurred his horse to the land, where the other knight fell upon him and broke his spear also, and then again they fought together with their swords, till Beaumains clove the knight’s

head to his shoulders. When the damsel saw that, she crossed over the ford.

“Alas,” said she, “that ever a kitchen-boy should have the fortune to destroy two such doughty knights! Think not thou hast done well; for the first knight’s horse stumbled, and he was drowned in the water, and not conquered by thy might; and as for the other, it was by mishap that thou slewest him.”

“Damsel,” said he, “you may say what you will, but with whomsoever I have to do, I trust in God to match him ere we part.”

“Fie! fie! foul kitchen-knave,” she answered. “Ere long thou shalt see a knight that will abate thy boast.”

So then they rode on together till even-song, and ever she chid him and scoffed at him, and would not cease. So they came to a land that was all black, and there was a black hawthorn by the way-side, on the which hung a black banner, and by its side a black shield. Near by stood a black spear and a great black horse with silk trappings, and close at hand sat a knight, all armed in black harness, who was named the Knight of the Black Lands. When the damsel saw him she bade Beaumains flee down the valley, for the horse was not saddled.

“I thank you,” said Beaumains; “ever you would make me a coward.”

Then the black knight came to the damsel and said, “Fair lady, have you brought this knight from King Arthur’s court to be your champion?”

“Nay, sir,” she answered; “this is but a kitchen-knave that hath been fed in the king’s kitchen for alms.”

“Why comes he in such an array?” asked the knight. “It is a great shame that he bears you company.”

“Sir, I cannot be delivered of him,” said the damsel, “for he rides with me against my will. I would that you put him from me, or else slay him; for he is an unhappy knave, and hath done unhappily to-day through pure misadventure, for he hath slain two knights at the passage of the water.”

“I wonder,” said the black knight, “that any man of worship would have to do with him.”

“Sir, they know him not,” she answered; “and because he rides with me, they think he is some knight of good blood.”

“That may well be,” said the black knight, “especially as he seems a full likely person, and worthy to be a strong man. But this much will I do for you, that I shall put him down on his feet, and his horse and armour shall he leave with me, for it were shame for me to do him any more harm.”

“Sir Knight,” quoth Beaumains, “thou art full large of my horse and my

armour. I let thee to wit it cost thee naught; and whether thou like it or not, this land will I pass in spite of thee. Neither horse nor armour wilt thou get of me, except thou win it with thy hands.”

“Say you so?” said the black knight, smiling. “Now, yield thy lady to me without more words, for it beseems not a kitchen-knave to ride with such a lady.”

“Thou liest,” answered Beaumains. “I am a gentleman born, and of higher lineage than thou, and that will I prove upon thy body.”

Then in great wrath they drew apart with their horses, and ran together with a crash like thunder. The black knight broke his spear to no purpose, but Beaumains’ spear thrust through the other’s side, and broke in his body. Nevertheless, he drew his sword, and smote hard at Beaumains, hurting him sorely, and Sir Beaumains struck again at him; but in no long time the black knight fell down in a swoon on the ground, and immediately afterwards he died there. When Beaumains saw that his horse and armour were so good, he alighted and armed himself in the black knight’s armour, and took his horse, and then rode after the damsel. But ever she gave him many reproaches, and said that he had slain the black knight through mischance; and she warned him that there was a knight near by who would give him full payment, therefore had he better flee. But Beaumains answered that he would not leave her for all that she might say.

Then as they rode together they saw a knight riding by that was all armed and dressed in green, and his horse had green trappings. When he came nigh the damsel he said to her, “Is that my brother the black knight that you have with you?”

“Nay,” she answered; “this is an unhappy kitchen-knave that hath slain your brother through mischance.”

“Alas!” said the green knight, “it is a great pity that so noble a knight should be slain by a knave’s hand.—Ah, traitor!” said he to Beaumains, “thou shalt die for slaying my brother.”

“I defy thee,” answered Beaumains; “for I let thee to wit that I slew him knightly, and not shamefully.”

Then they came together furiously, and the spears of both broke in their hands. So they drew their swords, and fought a full hard battle, and the green knight dealt Beaumains many sore strokes; but at the last, for all he could do, Beaumains got the better of him. So then the green knight yielded to Beaumains, and prayed him to grant him his life.

“All this is in vain,” said Beaumains, “for thou shalt die, except my damsel

pray me to spare thy life and therewith he began to unlace his helm, as though he would have slain him.

“Fie upon thee, kitchen-page!” said the damsel; “I will never pray thee to spare his life, for I will never be so much in thy debt.”

“Then shall he die,” quoth Beaumains.

“Alas!” said the green knight, “suffer me not to die when a fair word would save my life.—O fair Knight,” he said to Beaumains, “do thou spare me, and I will forgive thee the death of my brother, and ever will be thy man, and thirty knights that hold of me shall be at thy commandment.”

“Thou art mad,” said the damsel, “to talk of a dirty kitchen-knave having thirty knights’ service.”

“Sir Knight,” answered Beaumains, “nothing shall avail you, unless my damsel speak with me for thy life so he raised his sword as if to slay him.

“Let be,” said the damsel, “thou base scullion; slay not that knight, or else thou wilt repent it.”

“Damsel,” said Beaumains, “your charge is to me a pleasure, and at your commandment I will spare his life.”

Then the green knight knelt down and did homage to Beaumains, and after that he conducted them both to his castle, for by this time it was dark night. But even as before, the damsel would not suffer Beaumains to sit at the same table with her, so the green knight sat with him at a side-table. “I marvel,” said he to the damsel, “that you rebuke this noble knight as you do, for I know no knight able to match him.”

“It is a shame,” she answered, “that you should say such worship of him.”

“Truly,” quoth the green knight, “it would be shameful of me to say any disworship of him, for he has proved himself a better knight than I am.”

On the morrow they rose early, and after they had broken their fast, the green knight, with the thirty knights that served him, escorted them through a perilous forest; and at parting he said that he and his thirty knights would ever be at Sir Beaumains’ command. So the knight and damsel pursued their way; and still she chid him as sorely as ever, and bade him flee, for they were coming to a place where he would otherwise be put to shame. But of this Beaumains took no heed. And as they rode they came to a great tower, with battlements, as white as snow, and over its gate there hung fifty shields of different colours. By the tower was a fair meadow, on which were standing many pavilions, and thereabout were knights and squires, for on the next day there was appointed to be a tournament

at that castle. The lord of it was called the red knight, because he went all in red. Looking out of the window, he saw Sir Beaumains where he rode with his damsel and his dwarf. "With that knight," said he, "will I joust, for I see that he is a knight-errant." So he armed him hastily, and mounted his horse; and when he drew near Sir Beaumains, and saw his black armour, he thought it was his brother the black knight, and said, "Brother, what do you in these marches?"

"Nay," said the damsel; "this is not your brother, but an unhappy kitchen-knave that hath overcome your brother, and taken his horse and armour; and I saw him also overcome your other brother, the green knight. Now you may be avenged upon him, for I cannot get quit of him."

So without more words the two knights took their distance, and came together with such force that both their horses fell to the earth. Then they took to their swords, and fought sternly therewith for well-nigh two hours. The damsel, who stood by and watched them, at last cried out, "Alas, thou noble red knight, think what worship hath followed thee, and let not a kitchen-knave endure before thee as this one doth." Then the red knight was wroth, and redoubled his strokes, hurting Beaumains so sore that his blood ran down to the ground; but Beaumains answered him full fiercely, and in a little while smote him to the earth. So the red knight cried for mercy, and said, "Noble Knight, slay me not, and I will yield to thee with fifty knights that be at my command."

"This will avail thee naught," said Beaumains, "unless my damsel pray me to save thy life." And he made semblance to strike off his head.

"Let be, thou Beaumains," said the damsel; "slay him not, for he is a noble knight."

Then Beaumains bade the knight stand up and thank the damsel for his life. And the red knight entertained them that night at his castle, where they had merry cheer, except that the damsel still spoke many foul words to Sir Beaumains. On the morrow, before they departed, the red knight came with his fifty knights to proffer their homage to Sir Beaumains, who thanked him courteously. And then he and the damsel rode away together; and when she chid him again he said, "Damsel, you are uncourteous to rebuke me as you do. I have done you great service; and though ever you threaten me that I shall be beaten by the knights we meet, yet hitherto they have all had to lie in the mire. When you see me beaten, or yielding recreant, then may you bid me go from you shamefully; but till then, I tell you plainly, I will not depart from you, for I should be worse than a fool were I to leave you while I win worship."

Then was she somewhat abashed, but she said, "Well, right soon shalt thou

meet with a knight that will pay thee all thy wages, for he is the man of most worship in the world, except Lancelot.”

“The more worship he has,” answered Beaumains, “the more worship will it be to me to have to do with him.”

In a little while they came in sight of a fair city, and between them and the city was a great meadow that was newly mown, whereon were many pavilions. The damsel told Beaumains that the lord of that city was a goodly knight called Sir Persaunt of Ind, whose custom it was in fair weather to dwell in that meadow to joust and tourney, and that he had ever about him five hundred knights and gentlemen. The damsel would have had Beaumains avoid Sir Persaunt, lest he should get some hurt; for they were now near the castle where the Bed Knight of the Bed Lands laid siege to her lady, and Sir Persaunt, she said, though a strong knight, was as nothing to him. But Beaumains answered her fairly and softly that he should think it shame not to prove Sir Persaunt, now they had come so near him. Then said the damsel, “I marvel what manner of man you be. You must surely come of noble blood, for more foully or shamefully did lady never rule or rebuke a knight than I have done to you, and yet you have borne all patiently.”

“Damsel,” said Beaumains, “a knight is worth little that cannot endure a woman’s tongue; but, in truth, the more you said the more you angered me, and I wreaked my wrath on those with whom I had to do, so that all your hard words only furthered me in my battles. As to my blood, though it is true I had meat in King Arthur’s kitchen, yet if I had willed I might have had meat elsewhere, and all I did there was but to prove my friends.”

“Alas! fair Beaumains,” said she, “forgive me all that I have missaid and misdome against you.”

“With all my heart,” answered Beaumains.

While thus they spoke together Sir Persaunt of Ind had seen them, and he sent to know whether Beaumains came in war or in peace. “Say unto thy lord,” said Beaumains, “that I care not; it is as he himself may choose.”

“Then,” said Sir Persaunt, when this answer came to him, “will I have ado with him to the uttermost.” So he armed himself, and rode toward Beaumains. Then they met together so hard that both their spears were broken, and their horses fell dead to the earth. So they drew their swords, and fought for more than two hours, and both were sore wounded and their armour cut in many places; but at the last Sir Beaumains smote Sir Persaunt on the helm so that he fell grovelling to the ground, and leaped upon him, and unlaced his helm to have slain him. Then Sir Persaunt yielded, and cried for mercy, and the damsel came

and asked for his life, which Beaumains readily granted. Then said Sir Persaunt, "Certes, Sir Knight, you must be he that slew my brother Sir Periard the black knight, and conquered my other brothers, Sir Pertolope the green knight and Sir Perimones the red knight. And now, sir, you shall have homage and fealty of me, and a hundred knights to be always at your command."

So they went to Sir Persaunt's pavilion, where they supped merrily together, and afterwards retired to rest. When they had broken their fast the next day, Sir Persaunt asked whither they were going. "Sir," said the damsel, "we are going to the siege of my sister at the Castle Dangerous."

"Ah," said Sir Persaunt, "there is the Red Knight of the Red Lands, who is the most perilous knight that I know, and a man that is without mercy, and it is said he hath seven men's strength. He doth great wrong to the lady, and that is a pity, for she is one of the fairest in the world. If thou art her sister, is not thy name Lynette?"

"Yes," she said; "and my sister's name is Dame Lyons."

So they had more talk together, and under promise that they would not reveal it, Sir Beaumains disclosed to them his real name and lineage.

Then the damsel Lynette sent word to Dame Lyons of her coming, and how she had brought with her a knight that had passed all the perilous passages; and when she heard how he had slain the two knights at the ford, and the black knight, and had overthrown the green knight, the red knight, and the blue knight, which was Sir Persaunt, she was very glad, for she said that he must be one of the best knights of the world. Therefore she sent rich food and wine to a hermitage that was near at hand, and by the dwarf she sent a courteous message to Sir Beaumains. This the dwarf bore, and as he was again returning to the castle, he met with the Red Knight of the Red Lands, who asked him whence he came, and where he had been.

"Sir," said he, "I have been with the lady's sister of this castle, and she has been to King Arthur's court, and has brought a knight with her."

"Well," said the knight, "though she had brought Sir Lancelot or Sir Gawaine, I would think myself good enough for them."

"It may well be," said the dwarf; "but this knight has passed all the perilous places;" and he told the red knight all that Beaumains had done.

"Then," said the red knight, "he is one of those I have named."

"He is none of those," answered the dwarf, "but he is a king's son."

"What is his name?"

“That will I not tell you,” said the dwarf; “but Sir Kay in scorn called him Beaumains.”

“I care not for him,” said the red knight. “What knight soever he be, I shall soon deal with him; and if I win him, he shall have a shameful death, as many others have had.”

“That were a pity,” said the dwarf, and so they parted.

That night Sir Beaumains and the damsel Lynette remained at the hermitage. The next morning they took their horses, and rode through a forest, and came to a plain, where they saw many pavilions and tents, and beyond them a great castle. As they came near the siege, Beaumains saw that upon great trees to the right and to the left hung by the necks more than forty knights, with their shields and swords fastened about them. Then Sir Beaumains abated his countenance, and said, “What is this?”

“Fair sir,” said Lynette, “do not be discouraged by this sight. All these knights came hither to this siege to rescue my sister; and when the Red Knight of the Red Lands had overcome them, he put them to this shameful death without mercy or pity, and in the same way will he serve you, unless you prove yourself the better.”

“Jesu defend me,” cried Beaumains, “from such a villanous death! Rather than I should fare thus, I would be slain in the battle.”

“You need not trust in him,” said the damsel, “for he hath no courtesy, but all that he overcomes are shamefully murdered. And that is a great pity, for he is a full likely man, and of great prowess, and hath wide lands and possessions.”

“He may be a noble knight,” said Beaumains, “but he useth shameful customs; and it is marvellous that none of the good knights of my lord King Arthur have dealt with him before now.”

Now were they come to a tall sycamore tree, on which hung the greatest horn they ever saw, made of elephant’s bone; and Lynette told Beaumains that if he would meet the Red Knight of the Red Lands he must blow that horn. “But, sir, I pray you,” she said, “blow it not till noon; for it is now but prime, and it is said that his strength increases till at noon he has seven men’s strength.”

“Fie for shame, fair damsel,” said Beaumains; “say no more as to that. If he were the best knight that ever was, I would meet him in his most might;” and with that he spurred his horse to the sycamore, and blew the horn so eagerly that all the place rang with the noise. Then came knights from the tents and pavilions to look, and they that were in the castle looked from the walls. As for the red knight, he armed himself hastily, and took a red spear in his hand, and rode out

to a place where all that were in the castle and at the siege might see the battle.

“Sir,” said Lynette to Beaumains, “now be merry, for yonder comes your deadly enemy, and there is my sister;” and she showed him where Dame Lyons was looking from a window in the castle.

“By my head,” said Beaumains, “she is the fairest lady that ever I looked upon, and I ask nothing better than to do battle in her quarrel, for she shall be my lady, and for her will I fight;” and as he looked at her, Dame Lyons made him a courtesy. With that came the Red Knight of the Red Lands, that called to Beaumains,—

“Leave thy looking, Sir Knight, and behold me; for I warn thee that is my lady, and for her have I done many strong battles.”

“If thou hast,” answered Beaumains, “it seems to me it was but waste labour, for she loveth thee not. If I were advised that she were not glad of my coming, I would not do battle for her; but wit thou well, Knight, that now I love her, and will rescue her, or else die in the quarrel.”

“Say you so,” said the red knight. “Methinks you ought to beware, on account of those knights that you see hanging on yonder great elms.”

“For shame,” answered Beaumains, “that you should ever say or do such evil, in the which you shame yourself and the order of knighthood. Think you that the sight of those hanged knights causes me to fear? Truly it is not so: that shameful sight causes me to have more courage and hardihood against you.”

“If thou be a well-ruled knight,” said the other, “make thou ready, and talk no longer.”

So they dashed together with all the might they had, and smote each other in the middle of the shield, so that their spears broke, and both fell to the ground, where they lay for some time stunned; and all that were watching said the strange knight must be a noble jousting, for never before had the Red Knight of the Red Lands been so matched. Then they drew their swords, and rushed at each other like fierce lions, dealing great buffets, till they hewed large pieces from their shields and their armour. And so they fought, hour after hour, till it was past noon, and neither would stint, and then they rested awhile. When they went to battle again, they fought more fiercely than ever, and dashed against each other so hard that often both fell to the ground. Thus they endured till eventide, and none could tell which was the likelier to win the battle. Their armour was so hewn that in many places were they naked, but ever they defended those places. The red knight was a wily fighter, and his cunning taught Beaumains to be wise, but he bought his wisdom full dearly. Then they agreed to

rest again, and took off their helms to catch the cool air. When Beaumains' helm was off, he looked up at the window and saw Dame Lyons, and she gave him such a look that his heart was light and joyful. So suddenly he started up, and bade the red knight make ready. "I am full willing," said the red knight. So they got their helms on again, and the stern combat began once more. But the red knight smote Beaumains on the arm, so that his sword fell out of his hand, and gave him thereafter such a buffet on the helm that he fell on the earth, and the red knight fell over him to hold him down. Then cried the damsel Lynette, "O Beaumains! where is thy courage? Alas! my sister beholds thee, and sobs and weeps so that it makes my heart heavy."

When Beaumains heard that, he rose with great might, and leaped lightly to his sword, caught it in his hand, and rushed upon the red knight, dealing his blows so thick and fast as to smite the sword out of his hand. Then he hurled him to the ground, and unlaced his helm to slay him.

Then the red knight yielded, and cried for mercy; but Beaumains thought of the knights that had been so shamefully hanged, and answered, "I may not with worship spare thy life, because of the shameful deaths thou hast caused so many good knights to die."

"Sir," said the red knight, "hold your hand, and you shall know why I put them to such a death."

"Say on," said Beaumains.

"Sir, I once loved a lady, and she had a brother slain. She said it was by Sir Lancelot du Lake or Sir Gawaine, and she made me swear, as I loved her, to labour daily in arms till I met one of them, and that all I overcame I should put to a villanous death."

Now there came many earls and barons and noble knights, and fell on their knees before Sir Beaumains, and prayed him to give the red knight his life.

"Fair lords," said Beaumains, "I am full loath to slay this knight, for though he has done very shamefully, it was all at a lady's request, so he is the less to be blamed. So I will release him upon this covenant, that he shall go within the castle and yield there to my lady, and ask her forgiveness. He must also make her amends for all the trespasses he has done upon her lands. And when that is done, he must go to the court of King Arthur, and crave pardon of Sir Lancelot du Lake and of Sir Gawaine for the ill-will he has borne against them."

"Sir," said the Red Knight of the Red Lands, "all this will I do as you command." Then he and all his barons did homage and fealty to Sir Beaumains. After that the damsel Lynette, who was a right skilled leech, came and searched

the wounds of both. For ten days they sojourned in the tents, and when they were healed, the Red Knight of the Red Lands went into the castle and made his peace with Dame Lyons, making amends to her for all the wrong he had done her. After that he departed, and rode to the court of King Arthur, where he craved pardon of Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawaine, and told how he had been overcome, and of all Sir Beaumains' battles.

"By my head," said King Arthur, "I marvel much of what blood he hath come, for he is a passing good knight."

"Be assured," said Lancelot, "that he is come of right noble blood; and as for his might, there are few knights now living that are so good as he."

"From your manner of speech," quoth the king, "you know his name, and of what kin he is."

"I suppose I do," said Lancelot, "else would I not have given him the order of knighthood; but he gave me at that time a charge that I should not disclose it till he required me, or till otherwise it were openly made known."

In the meanwhile Beaumains, being whole of his wounds, greatly desired to see his lady, Dame Lyons, so he armed himself, took his spear, and rode to the castle; but when he came to the gate, he found it shut. He marvelled why they would not suffer him to enter; and as he looked up at the castle, he saw there the lady herself, who said to him,—

"Go thy way, Sir Beaumains, for as yet thou shalt not wholly have my love till thou be called one of the number of worthy knights. Therefore go and labour worshipfully in arms these twelve months, and then shalt thou hear new tidings."

"Ah, fair lady," said Beaumains, "I have not deserved that you should show me this strangeness. I thought to have had good cheer with you, and sure am I that I have bought your love with part of the best blood in my body."

"Fair knight," answered Dame Lyons, "be not displeased, nor over hasty, but believe me that what I have ordered is for the best. A twelvemonth will soon be over, and I promise you that I will not betray you, but unto my death I will love you and none other."

So Beaumains went away from the castle very sad at heart, for his love for Dame Lyons was exceedingly great. He rode hither and thither without heeding where he went, and his dwarf followed him. That night he lodged at a poor man's house, but could get no rest for thinking of his lady; so the next day about noon he was very sleepy, and he lay down on the grass with his head on his shield, bidding the dwarf watch his horse. Now no sooner had he gone from the castle than Dame Lyons, who loved him no less sorely than he her, began to

repent her that she had sent him away, and the next morning she sent for her brother, Sir Gringamor, that was a good knight, and entreated him to follow Beaumains and watch an opportunity to get his dwarf from him. And she asked him to carry the dwarf to his own castle, whither she would herself go, and then they might, by questioning the dwarf, learn who Beaumains really was. Sir Gringamor undertook to do all as she desired; so he followed Beaumains, and came where he was asleep, with the dwarf watching. Then suddenly he came behind the dwarf, and carried him off in his arms to his castle; but as they rode away, the dwarf cried out on his master. At this Beaumains awoke, and saw Gringamor, whose armour was all black, carrying away his dwarf. So he sprang up lightly, mounted his horse, and followed as hard as he could; but he knew not the way, and so lost sight of him that he pursued. However, as he rode he met a countryman, and asked him whether he had not seen a knight in black armour, bearing a dwarf in his arms.

“Sir,” said the man, “here passed by me a knight called Sir Gringamor, with a dwarf that mourned and complained, and he went to his castle, which is near by. But I counsel you to follow him not unless you owe him good-will, for he is a very perilous knight.”

This counsel Beaumains regarded not, but rode toward the castle, whither Gringamor had already come with the dwarf. There Dame Lyons and her sister questioned him so sharply that he told them his master was the son of King Lot and brother to Sir Gawaine, and that his name was Sir Gareth of Orkney. At this Dame Lyons was greatly rejoiced. “Truly, madam,” said Lynette, “he may well be a king’s son, for he is the most courteous and long-suffering man I ever met. I dare say there was never gentlewoman that reviled a man as I reviled him; and at all times he gave me goodly and meek answers again.”

As they thus sat talking, there came Sir Gareth to the gate, with an angry countenance and his drawn sword in his hand, and cried aloud, “Thou traitor, Sir Gringamor, give me my dwarf, or, by the faith I owe to the order of knighthood, I shall do you all the harm I can.”

Then Sir Gringamor looked out at a window, and said, “Sir Gareth of Orkney, cease thy boasting words, for thou gettest not thy dwarf again.”

“Thou coward knight,” returned Sir Gareth, “bring him with thee and do battle with me, and win him if you can.”

“So will I do if I choose,” answered Gringamor; “but for all thy angry words, thou wilt not get him.”

“Ah, brother,” said Dame Lyons, “I would he had his dwarf again, for I do not

wish that he should be wroth. Know you that I love him before all others; and now I wish you would bring him here within that I may speak with him, but do not let him know who I am.”

So Gringamor went down to Sir Gareth, and said, “Sir, I cry you mercy, and all that I have misdone against you I will amend at your pleasure. Therefore, I beg you to alight and take such cheer as I can give you in this castle.”

“But shall I have my dwarf again?” said Sir Gareth.

“Yea, sir,” answered Gringamor; “for as soon as your dwarf told me who you were, and what noble deeds you had done in these marches, I repented of what I had done.”

Then Sir Gareth alighted, and Gringamor led him into the castle. And in the hall Dame Lyons met him, arrayed like a princess, and gave him a hearty welcome. When Sir Gareth beheld her he was greatly struck with her beauty, and said to himself, “Would that the lady of the Castle Dangerous were as fair as she.” So ever his love grew hotter, and he could not keep his eyes from her. This Sir Gringamor noted, and he took his sister aside, and asked her whether she willed to marry Sir Gareth, for his love for her was plain. And she answered that she loved him better than any other man in the world, and deemed no better than to have him for a husband. This told Gringamor to Sir Gareth, who was right glad; and thereafter he went to Dame Lyons, and either made great joy of the other. Then she told him she was the lady for whom he had done battle, and also how she had caused her brother to take away his dwarf that she might certainly know who he was. And she brought to him the damsel Lynette. At this Sir Gareth was more glad than before, and they were agreed to be married as soon as might be.

In the meanwhile, the Feast of Pentecost came round, and King Arthur held his court at Camelot. Then came the green knight with thirty knights, and they yielded to the king; and also the red knight with fifty knights; and Sir Persaunt the blue knight with a hundred knights. They all told King Arthur how they had been overcome by Sir Beaumains, and had come to court at his bidding. There also came the Red Knight of the Red Lands, that was named Sir Ironside, with five hundred knights. And all of them could never say enough in praise of the might and gentleness of Sir Beaumains. So the king and all his court went in to their meat, and presently there entered the Queen of Orkney with a great number of knights and ladies. She said to her brother King Arthur, “What have you done with my young son Sir Gareth? He was here with you a twelvemonth, and you made of him a kitchen-knave, which is a great shame to you all. Alas! what hath become of my dear son, who was my joy and bliss?”

“Oh, dear mother,” said Gawaine, “I knew him not.”

“Nor I,” said the king, “which I sorely repent. But, God be thanked, he has proved himself a worshipful knight as any now living of his years, and I shall not be glad till I find him.”

So they devised means to find him, and the king sent a messenger to Dame Lyons to summon her to court. She sent word back that she would come as soon as might be; and Sir Gareth advised her not to reveal where he was, but to give her advice that the best way to find him would be to appoint a tournament, at which the knight who was proved the best should take her and her lands. Then Dame Lyons went to King Arthur, and was full royally received. But always she would not tell where Sir Gareth was, but said that she would hold a tournament at her castle, where her knights should be against King Arthur’s, and then she was sure they should hear of Sir Gareth.

So great preparations were made for the tournament, and Sir Gareth summoned to Dame Lyons’ castle Sir Ironside and Sir Persaunt, and the green and red knights with their following. Also many other noble knights came to take part against King Arthur’s. Among them were Sir Epinogris, son of the King of Northumberland, Sir Palomides the Saracen, and his brothers Sir Safre and Sir Legwarides that were christened, Sir Brian of the Isles, a noble knight, and Sir Grummore Grummorsum, a good knight of Scotland. There came also Sir Tristram de Lyons—who by this time was reckoned the best knight of the world after Sir Lancelot, but was not yet a Knight of the Round Table—and many more. But there came with King Arthur to the tournament most of the Knights of the Round Table. There were Sir Gawaine and his brethren Sir Agravaine and Sir Gaheris; Sir Tor, Sir Percivale de Galis and Sir Lamoracke de Galis, sons of King Pellinore, and all of them, especially the last, passing good knights; Sir Lancelot, with all his kin; Sir Sagramour, Sir Dinadan, King Anguisance of Ireland, King Carados of Scotland, King Urience of Gore, King Bagdemagus and his son Sir Meleagans; and Sir Galahaut the high prince, with other good knights whose names need not be here given. And great provision was made in and about the castle for the lodging of all the knights.

Now Sir Gareth begged all the knights that were on his side that they should not make him known; and his lady, Dame Lyons, gave him a magical ring, that had the virtue of changing the colours of him who wore it every time he chose, and also the knight who wore it could lose no blood. Of this ring Sir Gareth was very glad, because it would prevent him from being known.

When the tournament began on the first day, there came from the castle Sir Epinogris, and Sir Sagramour met him on King Arthur’s part, and both broke

their spears. Then Sir Palomides, a knight of the castle, encountered Sir Gawaine, and both were overthrown. Then the knights on either part rescued their fellows, and remounted them. And soon there was a great concourse of knights. Sir Aglovale and Sir Tor, Knights of the Round Table, smote down Sir Brian and Sir Grummore. Sir Tristram, Sir Sadocke, and Sir Dinas, knights of the castle, encountered Sir Bedivere, Sir Petipace, and Sir Ewaine. Sir Tristram overthrew Sir Bedivere, but Sir Sadocke and Sir Dinas had the worse. Then came in Sir Persaunt of Ind; but with him met Sir Lancelot, and smote him down, horse and man. Sir Pertolope the green knight encountered Sir Lionel, and smote him out of his saddle; and Sir Perimones the red knight ran against Sir Ector de Maris in such wise that both were unhorsed. Then came in Sir Ironside and Sir Gareth from the castle, and against them were Sir Bors and Sir Bleoberis, cousins to Sir Lancelot. Sir Bors and Sir Ironside struck each other so hard that both their spears broke and their horses fell to the earth; but Sir Gareth overturned Sir Bleoberis, and with the same spear he smote down Sir Galihodin, Sir Galihud, Sir Dinadan, Sir Brewnor, and Sir Sagramour. When King Anguisance saw Sir Gareth do this, he marvelled who it might be, for at every course Sir Gareth changed his colours, and at one time he was in green, at another in red, and again in blue. Then King Anguisance encountered Sir Gareth, who smote him down, horse and man; and in the same wise he served King Carados, King Urience, King Bagdemagus and his son Sir Meleagans. Thereafter came in Sir Galahaut the high prince, who cried,—

“Knight of the many colours, well hast thou jousted; now make thee ready, that I may joust with thee.”

When Sir Gareth heard that, he took a new spear, and the two ran together. The prince broke his spear, but Sir Gareth smote him on the left side so that he reeled in his saddle, and would have fallen had not his men come round him and recovered him.

“So God me help,” said King Arthur, “that knight with the many colours is a good knight;” and he prayed Sir Lancelot to joust with him. But Sir Lancelot, who was ever courteous and noble, said that the knight had had travail enough for that day, and ought to have the honour. “Though it lay in my power to put him from it,” he said, “yet would I not do so.”

Then followed a great tournament with swords, wherein Sir Lancelot did marvellously. Between Sir Lamoracke de Galis and Sir Ironside there was a strong battle, and also between Sir Palomides and Sir Bleoberis. Sir Gawaine encountered with Sir Tristram; but there he had the worse, for Sir Tristram pulled him off his horse. Sir Lancelot encountered with two strong knights of the

castle at once, and fought right worshipfully with both; but Sir Gareth came between and put them asunder, and would strike no blow against Sir Lancelot, wherefore Sir Lancelot suspected who he was. Shortly after, Sir Gareth met his brother Sir Gawaine, and unhorsed him; and so he did to five or six other knights, so that all who beheld said that he did better than any. Then Sir Tristram, who had seen how well he had done, went to Sir Ironside and Sir Persaunt and asked them who that knight was that went in so many different colours. So they told him, and related the great deeds he had done when he rode with the damsel Lynette.

“By my head,” said Sir Tristram, “he is a good knight and a big man of arms; and if he be young, he will yet prove a full noble knight.”

So Sir Tristram, Sir Ironside, Sir Persaunt, and Sir Perimones rode together to help Sir Gareth, who went on one side to repair his helm and drink water. And he gave his dwarf his ring to hold while he drank, and then forgot to get it again; of which the dwarf was glad, because he desired that Sir Gareth should be known. So then Sir Gareth went always in yellow colours, and King Arthur sent a herald to espy who he was. The herald went close to him, and saw written round his helm, in letters of gold, “This is Sir Gareth of Orkney.” So at King Arthur’s command all the heralds proclaimed aloud that the knight in yellow colours was Sir Gareth of Orkney. When Sir Gareth saw that he was known, he was wroth, and redoubled his strokes, and he smote down his brother Sir Gawaine.

“O brother,” said Gawaine, “I thought not you would have stricken me.”

At that Sir Gareth got out of the press, and came to his dwarf, and took his ring, and changed his colours again. But Gawaine saw where he had ridden, and followed him. Thereupon Gareth rode far into the wood, so that Gawaine knew not whither he had gone. Then Gareth sent back her ring to his lady, Dame Lyons, and let her know that he would come to her soon; and he rode forth, and had many perilous adventures. After three days, he met with an armed knight whom he did not know, and they fought fiercely together more than two hours, and hurt each other sore. Presently there came riding the damsel Lynette, and she called out, “Sir Gawaine, Sir Gawaine! leave fighting with thy brother Sir Gareth.”

Then they knew each other, and rejoiced greatly. And Lynette rode to King Arthur, who was within two miles, and brought him and all his court to the place. And the joy that King Arthur and Sir Lancelot had when they saw Sir Gareth cannot be told.

FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

In no long time after this were Dame Lyons and Sir Gareth married at Kinkenadon, and at the same time the damsel Lynette was married to his brother Sir Gaheris. Great was the splendour of the marriage, and there was much rejoicing. A three days' tournament was held; but Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris did not joust, because they were newly married. On the first day, Sir Lamoracke de Galis overthrew thirty knights, and won the prize; and on that day were Sir Persaunt of Ind and his two brethren made Knights of the Round Table. On the second day Sir Tristram overthrew forty knights, and won the prize; and then was Sir Ironside made a Knight of the Round Table. On the third day Sir Lancelot du Lake came in, and he overthrew fifty knights, so the prize was given to him. But the feast was kept up for forty days, because King Arthur was wishful to do honour to his nephew Sir Gareth.

And thus ends the story of the quest that was undertaken by. Sir Gareth, who was always a good knight; for he was mighty in the field, and would do nothing that was shameful, and was always courteous and gentle to ladies.



CHAPTER X. SIR TRISTRAM.

IT is now time that something should be told of Sir Tristram de Lyons, one of the best knights that ever were in Britain, and one who in his time gained scarcely less worship than Sir Lancelot himself.

South of Cornwall there was in King Arthur's days a rich and fair country called Lyonesse or Lyons, which is now all sunk under the sea. The king of this country was named Meliodas, a good knight and a wise king. He was wedded to a fair and virtuous lady, the sister of King Marke of Cornwall. It befell that one time, while King Meliodas was abroad hunting, he was taken prisoner by an enchantress that had long loved him. When he did not return, the queen his wife, who loved him exceedingly, became very sick with sorrow; and at the last she died, after giving birth to a son, who at her request was christened Tristram, because he was born in her time of sadness. A little while after, the king escaped from his prison; and when he found that his queen was dead with grief, his heart was passing heavy. He named his son as the queen had wished, and the boy grew apace, and seemed likely to be a comely man. When Tristram was seven years old, the king took for a second wife a princess of Brittany; and when she had born him children, she began to hate Tristram, because that after his father's death he would be lord of the country. So at last she plotted to poison him, and put a silver cup with a poisoned draught in the room where he and her children were together, so that when he was athirst he might drink of it. But it befell that her own son drank of the cup, and very soon died. Notwithstanding, the queen would not leave her wicked intent, but again she put a cup with poison in Tristram's way. This time her husband the king took up the cup, and was going to drink, when suddenly she snatched it out of his hand. Then the king remembered how his child had died suddenly after drinking, and he drew his sword and swore that if she did not tell him what was in the cup he would slay her. She, being afraid, confessed all her intent, and what she had done. The king loved Tristram exceedingly; so he declared that she should be punished. Therefore was the queen brought to trial before the barons, and condemned to be burned. But when she had been led out to the stake, Tristram kneeled down before his father, and besought him to grant him a boon; and when King Meliodas promised him, he asked for the queen's life. To that the king was full loath to assent, but he could not go back from his word. Thus Tristram saved his

stepmother from the fire; and afterwards he contrived to reconcile her to the king. But Meliodas would not then suffer his son to remain at the court; so he appointed a gentleman named Governale to be his tutor, who was very learned, and also a great master of the arts of hunting and hawking, and sent him with this gentleman into France. So Tristram was abroad with Governale for seven years, and learned all that he could teach him, and was also well skilled in all knightly sports and exercises of arms. When he was nineteen years of age he returned home, and was joyfully welcomed by his father, and also by the queen his stepmother, who had loved him as much as any mother could, after he saved her from the fire.

Soon after his return it befell that King Anguisance of Ireland sent over to Cornwall to demand from King Marke a tribute that had long been paid, but had not been asked for seven years. But King Marke refused to pay the tribute, and said that if King Anguisance would send over a knight to fight for his right, he would find another to defend the right of Cornwall. To this King Anguisance readily assented, because he had in his court Sir Marhaus, who was his wife's brother, and was at that time reckoned one of the noblest of the Knights of the Round Table, while the Cornish knights were of little might or worship. So Sir Marhaus undertook the adventure, and came over to Cornwall to do battle for his brother-in-law. When King Marke and his barons heard of his coming, they were greatly discouraged, for there was not one among them that would meet Sir Marhaus; and well knew they that it would be of no purpose to seek for a knight at King Arthur's court, because Sir Marhaus belonged to the Round Table, and none of his fellows would fight against him.

When the news came to King Meliodas' country that Sir Marhaus was come to Cornwall to fight for the tribute, and that King Marke could get no knight to meet him, Tristram was sore wroth and ashamed, and he got leave of his father to undertake the adventure. So he went to his uncle King Marke, who knew him not, and said that if he would make him knight, he would encounter Sir Marhaus. King Marke saw that he was strong and well made, and a likely man, so he assented, and made him knight, and then sent word to Sir Marhaus that he had found a champion.

"That is well," said Marhaus; "but let King Marke know that I will fight with no knight that is not of royal blood."

This King Marke told to Sir Tristram; who answered, "Since he says so, let him know that I am come of better blood than himself; for now shall you know that I am the son of King Meliodas and of your own sister."

When King Marke heard that, he made great joy of Sir Tristram, and sent

word to Sir Marhaus who it was that would meet with him. It was agreed that the battle should be on a small island near where Sir Marhaus' ships were lying; and thither went Tristram with his horse and armour, and all else that he needed. When Sir Marhaus saw him he said,—

“Young knight Sir Tristram, what dost thou here? I am sorry of thy too great courage, for I have matched with some of the best knights of the world. Therefore I counsel thee to return again to thy ship.”

But Tristram answered him courteously that he could not do that, for he had undertaken on his own request to fight in his uncle's quarrel to the uttermost. Moreover, as that was his first battle, he was glad that it was to be with a well-proved knight, for he hoped to win worship.

“Well, fair knight,” said Marhaus, “if you seek to win worship on me, I will tell you that you will lose no worship if you can withstand but three strokes from me.”

Then they set their spears in rest, and ran together so fiercely that both went to the ground, horse and man; but Marhaus gave Tristram a sore wound in the side with his spear. Then they drew their swords and fought full hard for more than half the day, giving each other many great wounds. But at the last Sir Tristram waxed fresher and better winded than Sir Marhaus, and with a mighty stroke he smote Sir Marhaus so hard on the helm that the sword edge went through and stuck in the brain-pan. Then Sir Marhaus fell on his knees, and Tristram pulled thrice at his sword ere he could withdraw it, and even then a piece was broken out of the edge and remained in the wound. Suddenly Sir Marhaus rose, threw his sword and shield from him, and fled to his ships. But Tristram cried,—

“Ah! Sir Knight of the Round Table, dost thou withdraw? Thou dost thyself and thy kin great shame. I am but a young knight, and never fought till now; but rather than withdraw, I would be hewn into a hundred pieces.”

To that Sir Marhaus answered nothing, but went his way groaning; and as soon as he was on board his ship, he caused her to set sail for Ireland. When he reached King Anguisance' court his wounds were searched, but the piece of Sir Tristram's sword could not be got out of his skull; so he died. Then the queen, his sister, kept the piece of the sword always by her, for she meant to have vengeance for her brother's death, if ever she might.

Though Sir Tristram had won the battle, yet he was very badly hurt, and he lay in bed for more than a month. Then all his wounds were healed save that which Sir Marhaus had given him in the side with his spear; and this could not be made whole, because the point of the spear had been in some manner envenomed.

King Marke sorrowed greatly, because he began to fear that his nephew would die, so he sent for all the skilled leeches and surgeons he could hear of; but none of them could do anything. Then at last a wise woman told the king that Sir Tristram could not be healed save in the country whence came the poison that was in the wound. Thereupon King Marke fitted up a fair vessel, and sent Tristram over to Ireland, with his tutor Govemale to attend him. By chance he came to land close by a castle where King Anguisance and his queen were; and then Tristram, who was a very skilful harper, took his harp and sang and played in such fashion as never before had been heard in Ireland. This was told to the king, who sent for Tristram to his court, and asked him his name, and why he came there. Tristram said,—

“I am of the country of Lyonesse, and my name is Tramtrist. I have been sore wounded in a battle I fought for a lady’s right, and am come hither to, be healed if I may.”

“Well,” said the king, “you shall have all the help I can give you.”

So he gave Tramtrist in charge to his daughter, who was a very fair lady, and was called La Beale Isoude, and she was one of the most skilful leeches in the world. When she had searched his wound, she found the poison at the bottom of it, and in a little while she had healed it. Tristram soon began to cast great love to Isoude, and he taught her to harp, so that she grew also to love him. But at that time there was in Ireland Sir Palomides, a Saracen knight, who was a man of great worship, and he was much cherished both by the king and the queen. Now Sir Palomides also loved Isoude, and gave her many great gifts; and between him and Tristram there rose much jealousy and envy,—the more as Isoude told Tristram that Palomides was willing to be christened for her sake.

It happened that King Anguisance gave a great tournament, to which knights came from all parts of Britain. La Beale Isoude came to Tristram and told him of it; and when he said that he was yet but feeble, and might not joust, she asked him to do so for her sake, lest Sir Palomides should win the prize. Then he assented, on the condition that she would not let any one know of it. On the first day of the tournament, Sir Palomides came into the field with a black shield, and he won great worship; for he overthrew Sir Gawaine, Sir Gaheris, King Bagdemagus, Sir Sagamore, Sir Dodinas le Savage, and many other good knights. Then came King Anguisance to Tristram and said,—

“Sir Tramtrist, why will you not joust?”

“Sir,” said he, “I was but late hurt, and dare not adventure.” While they spoke together, there came a squire named Hebes that had known Sir Tristram in

Cornwall, and made a low reverence to him. Sir Tristram begged him not to discover his name, and that Hebes promised. But Isoude had seen him bow to Tristram, and therefore she thought he must be some great knight, and was much comforted. On the morrow Sir Palomides again went into the field, and did as well as he had done before.

Then Isoude armed Tristram in white armour with a white shield, and let him into the field by a private postern. Anon Sir Palomides saw him, and rode at him with a great spear; but there Sir Tristram smote him to the ground, horse and man. So there arose a great cry all over the field that Sir Palomides had had a fall; and then was Isoude exceedingly glad. After that none of the other knights would meddle with Sir Tristram. But Palomides was sore wrathful and ashamed, and withdrew out of the field. That Sir Tristram saw, and he rode after him and bade him turn, for they would be better proved ere they parted. When Palomides heard that, he turned angrily, and they fought together with their swords; but very soon Sir Tristram smote him so mighty a stroke on the helm that he fell on the ground.

“Now yield thee,” said Tristram, “or else will I slay thee.”

So Palomides yielded, and Tristram charged him, on pain of his life, to forsake La Beale Isoude; and also for twelve months and a day to bear no armour. This Sir Palomides was sworn to perform.

“Alas!” said he, “now am I utterly shamed;” and in his great despite and anger he took off his armour and flung it away.

Sir Tristram returned to the castle by the same secret postern by which he had left it, and found there La Beale Isoude, who gave him a full tender greeting. But in a while it became known that Sir Tramtrist, as he was called, was the knight that had overthrown Sir Palomides; so then he was still more honoured than before.

But, unhappily, one day it befell that the queen happened to take up Sir Tristram’s sword, and she drew it from the scabbard; and there, within a foot and a half of the point, was a great piece broken out of the edge. As soon as the queen saw that, she remembered the piece of a sword that was taken out of the head of her brother Sir Marhaus.

“By Heaven!” said she to Isoude, “this is the same traitorous knight that slew my brother, thine uncle.”

Then the queen hastened to her own chamber, and took out of a coffer the piece of the sword, which she had kept by her ever since Sir Marhaus’ death; and when she put it to Sir Tristram’s sword, she found it fitted exactly. So she went

to King Anguisance, her husband, and made her complaint. King Anguisance was much grieved, for he liked Tristram well; but he went to seek him, and found him all armed and on horseback, because Isoude had already told him what her mother had discovered.

“Nay,” said the king, “if I chose to have thee slain, resistance would not avail thee. But I will give thee leave to depart from this court in safety, if thou wilt tell me who thou art, and if thou slew my brother Sir Marhaus.”

“Sir,” said Tristram, “now will I tell you all the truth. My father is King Meliodas of Lyonesse, and my name is Tristram. It was I that did battle with Sir Marhaus, for love of my uncle King Marke; and before I encountered with him had I never fought with any knight.”

“Well,” said the king, “I cannot but say that you did as a good knight should; but I cannot maintain you in this country, lest I should displease my wife and her kin.”

So Tristram thanked him for all the goodness he and his daughter had shown, and promised him that if ever he needed a friend in England he would serve him. Then he asked leave to say farewell to Isoude; and the king assented. Tristram went to Isoude, and told her who he was, and why he had come into Ireland. They parted full tenderly, and Isoude swore that for the next seven years she would not be married save with his consent. Then Tristram went into the court, and took his leave of all the knights and barons; and he offered, if he had done wrong to any, to make amends, and said that if any had a quarrel with him, he was ready to make it good in open field. But though some of the knights were of Sir Marhaus’ blood, not one of them dared to meddle with him.

So Sir Tristram with his tutor Governale and the squire Hebes, whom he had made knight, returned to England; and for a while he lived with his father, King Meliodas, who was right glad to see him. Then he went again to the court of King Marke, and lived there a long time in much honour. But at last it chanced that both the king and Tristram loved the same lady, who was the wife of a knight named Segwarides; and King Marke was from that time jealous of Sir Tristram, and grew to hate him. Now, one day there came to the court the good knight Sir Bleoberis de Ganis, cousin to Sir Lancelot du Lake, and asked King Marke for a boon. King Marke assented, and then Sir Bleoberis said,—

“I will have the fairest lady of your court, the one whom I may choose.”

The king had given his promise, and so could not refuse; and then Sir Bleoberis chose Sir Segwarides’ wife, and led her away with him. When Sir Segwarides saw that, he armed himself to rescue his wife, and rode after

Bleoberis. The ladies of the court knew that Tristram had loved that lady, and rebuked him because he had suffered her to be taken away.

“Nay,” said Tristram, “it was not my part to have to do in the matter, while her lord and husband was there. But if Sir Segwarides do not fare well, it may happen that I will speak with that knight before he quit the country.”

Presently came Sir Segwarides’ squire, and reported that his lord had been overthrown and sore wounded by Sir Bleoberis. Then Sir Tristram took his armour and his horse, and rode forth to rescue the lady. As he went, he met his cousin, Sir Andret, who had been out to meet two knights of King Arthur’s that were going through the country seeking adventures. Sir Tristram asked him what tidings.

“Never worse with me than now,” said Andret; “for King Marke sent me to bring to him two of King Arthur’s knights, and one of them overthrew and wounded me, and they set naught by my message.”

“Well,” said Sir Tristram, “if I meet with them, I may happen to avenge you.” So he rode on after the two knights, who were Sir Sagramore le Desirous and Sir Dodinas le Savage. In a little while he overtook them, and asked them whence they came, and what they were doing in that country. They looked scornfully on Sir Tristram, and Sir Sagramore said:

“Fair knight, are you a knight of Cornwall?”

“Why do you ask?” said Tristram.

“Because it is seldom seen,” answered Sagramore, “that you Cornish men are valiant with arms. Within these two hours there met us a Cornish knight, and great words he spake, but anon with little might was he laid on the earth; and I trow you shall have the same hansel that he had.”

“Fair knights,” answered Sir Tristram, “it may happen that I shall withstand you better than he did; and whether you will or not I will have to do with you for it was my cousin that you overthrew.” When Sir Dodinas heard that, he took his spear and cried, “Knight, keep well thyself.” So they rode together, and Sir Dodinas’ spear broke, but Sir Tristram smote him clean over his crupper, and well-nigh broke his neck. When Sir Sagramore saw his fellow have such a fall, he marvelled who the strange knight might be, and he put his spear in rest, and rode at Sir Tristram with all his might; but Sir Tristram bore him also to the earth, and in the fall he broke his thigh. Then said Tristram: “Fair knights, will you have any more? Are there no stronger knights in King Arthur’s court? It is a shame to speak disworship of Cornish knights, for here has one knight of Cornwall matched you both.”

This they had to confess; and then they asked him his name. When he told them they were glad, and begged him to remain in their fellowship; but he said he must follow Sir Bleoberis. So they bade him farewell, and in a little while he overtook Sir Bleoberis riding in a fair valley, with Sir Segwarides' wife riding behind his squire on a palfrey.

"Abide, Sir Knight," said Tristram; "bring back that lady, or deliver her to me."

"I will not," answered Bleoberis, "for I dread no Cornish knight so sorely that I need to obey him."

"Why," said Tristram, "may not a Cornish knight do as well as another? Within three miles of this place, there were two knights of King Arthur's met me but now, and ere we parted they found one Cornish knight good enough for them both."

"What were their names?" asked Sir Bleoberis; and when Sir Tristram told him, he said, "They are two good knights, and if you have beaten them both you must needs be a man of great worship. Still, for all that, ere you get this lady you must beat me also." Then they met together like thunder, and either bore the other down to the earth. Thereafter they took to their swords, and fought eagerly and mightily for near two hours. At last Sir Bleoberis asked Sir Tristram to hold his hand and tell him his name.

"I fear not to tell you my name," answered Tristram. "I am Tristram, the son of King Meliodas of Lyonesse."

"Truly," said Bleoberis, "I am right glad to meet with you. Are you not the same knight that slew Sir Marhaus, and overthrew Sir Palomides at a tournament in Ireland?"

"Yea," quoth Tristram. "And now tell me your name."

"With a good will. I am Bleoberis de Ganis, cousin to Sir Lancelot, who is called one of the best knights of the world."

"That is truth," said Sir Tristram, "for Sir Lancelot is peerless of courtesy and of knighthood; and for his sake I would fight no more with you."

Sir Bleoberis thanked him for his courtesy, and proposed that the lady should choose with which of them she would go. Sir Tristram assented, for he thought she would come to him. But the lady was angered because he had not at the first undertaken to rescue her, and she reproached him sharply, and begged Sir Bleoberis to take her to her lord. Sir Tristram was wondrous wroth, and answered that if her lord had been away he would have been the first to ride after

her. So Bleoberis took the lady to her husband Segwarides, and she told him that Sir Tristram had rescued her, at which Sir Segwarides was well pleased.

After this King Marke ever plotted to destroy Sir Tristram, and he bethought him to send him into Ireland to ask for La Beale Isoude to be given to King Marke for his queen, for he was unwedded. But King Marke hoped that Sir Tristram would fall into some peril and be destroyed on the journey. However, Tristram undertook the adventure, for he knew nothing of his uncle's malice against him. Accordingly he set sail, but a tempest drove him back on the coast of England, not far from Camelot; and there he set up a pavilion, and hung his shield over the entrance. Anon there came by two of King Arthur's knights, Sir Ector de Maris and Sir Gringamor, and they touched the shield, and bade him come forth and joust. Sir Tristram made ready, and smote both of them down with one spear, bruising them sorely. Then they asked him whence he came. "Fair knights," said Tristram, "I am of Cornwall."

"Alas!" said Sir Ector, "now am I ashamed that any Cornish knight should overcome me." And in his mortification he put off his armour, went on foot, and would not ride.

Now it chanced that at that time Sir Bleoberis de Ganis and his brother Sir Blamor had accused King Anguisance of Ireland of treason before King Arthur, and he was summoned to come to Camelot by a given day and make answer, on forfeiture of all his lands. King Arthur was at that time with Sir Lancelot, at his castle of Joyous Gard; but he had appointed King Carados of Scotland and another king to be the judges. When the day came, King Anguisance was there before the judges, and Sir Blamor came forward and charged him with having murdered a cousin of his by treasonable means. King Anguisance was much abashed, for he understood that he must meet Sir Blamor in open field to disprove his charge, or find a knight to meet him; because in those times all such accusations were determined by the ordeal of battle. Now the king knew that Sir Blamor was a noble knight, and he did not know where to find one to meet him. But the judges gave him three days wherein to make ready, and he went to his lodgings greatly cast down.

All this heard Govemale, who was riding near Camelot, and he told Tristram. "By my faith," said Sir Tristram, "that is the best news I have heard this seven years; for now will the King of Ireland be in need of my help, and for his love will I undertake the battle." So he sought King Anguisance, and told him that in gratitude for the kindness he had shown him in Ireland, and for La Beale Isoude's sake, he would take the battle in hand for him on two conditions—namely, that King Anguisance would swear the accusation was unjust, and

would promise him after the battle to give him what boon he might ask. To all this the king gladly assented, and sent word to the judges that he had found a champion. On the day set the two knights met in the field, and when they withdrew to make ready, Sir Bleoberis said to Sir Blamor: "Brother, you will find that knight the mightiest you ever had to do with. I know him right well, for I have had to do with him. But do thou remember of what kin we are come, and that none of our kindred was ever shamed in battle, but would rather suffer death than be shamed."

"Brother," answered Sir Blamor, "you need have no doubt of me. I know that knight, Sir Tristram, is one of the best in the world; but though he may overcome me, he shall not shame me, for rather than yield recreant will I die."

Then each took his horse to an opposite end of the lists, and they met together with great force in the midst; and there Sir Tristram smote Sir Blamor from his horse. After that they did a great battle with their swords; but at the last Sir Tristram struck Sir Blamor so heavy a blow on the helm that he fell down, and might not rise again. As soon as Sir Blamor could speak, he said: "Sir Tristram, I require thee, as thou art a noble knight, and the best that ever I met, to slay me out of hand; for yield will I never, and I would not live shamed to be lord of all the world."

Sir Tristram knew not what to do, for he remembered of what blood Sir Blamor was come, and for Sir Lancelot's sake he was right loath to slay him; but yet Sir Blamor would not yield, and so King Anguisance would not be acquitted. With that Sir Tristram went to the judges, and besought them to take the matter into their hands. "For," said he, "it were pity that that noble knight should be slain, and you hear that shamed he will not be; and I pray to God that he never be slain or shamed by me." And he asked King Anguisance, for whom he fought the battle, to have mercy on Sir Blamor. To that King Anguisance assented gladly; and after further talk, Sir Bleoberis and Sir Tristram took up Sir Blamor, and the two brethren were accorded with King Anguisance, and swore friendship with him for ever. And for that gentle battle all the blood of Sir Lancelot loved Sir Tristram ever after.

Then King Anguisance sailed with Sir Tristram into Ireland; and when it was known what Sir Tristram had done for the king, the queen and all the barons received him with great joy, and especially La Beale Isoude. So there Sir Tristram asked for the boon the king had promised him, and that was that Isoude should be given for wife to his uncle King Marke; for so he had sworn to him. King Anguisance assented, though he said he had rather Tristram had asked her for himself. However, in a little while a ship was got ready, and Isoude went into

it with Tristram; and she took with her as waiting-woman an ancient lady named Bragwaine. To this lady, just before they set sail, the queen, Isoude's mother, gave a flask containing a potion, and charged her to let Isoude and King Marke drink of it on the day they were married. "And then I undertake," said the queen, "that they will love each other all their life long." But as they sailed in the ship, it chanced that Tristram saw the flask standing in the cabin. "Madam," said he to Isoude, "here is choice wine which your servant Bragwaine and my servant Gove-male have put on one side for themselves; but we will disappoint them." So they drank to each other merrily, thinking no evil; but from that time they loved each other, and their love never changed in weal or woe.

Now the ship put into a harbour by a castle that was named Pluere, and Sir Tristram and Isoude went on shore to refresh themselves. But as soon as they came within the castle they were taken prisoners; for the custom of the castle was that whatever knight came there with a lady must fight with the lord, who was named Sir Brewnor, and his lady must be shown against Sir Brewnor's lady. If Sir Brewnor overcame the strange knight, then was the other put to death; and if Sir Brewnor's lady were the fairer, then must the other lady lose her head. That custom had been kept up for many winters, and therefore was the castle called Pluere; that is, the Castle of Tears.

When Sir Tristram was told of the custom, he said it was a right foul and shameful one. "But," said he, "one advantage have I, that my lady is the fairest I ever saw, and I do not fear that for lack of beauty she will lose her head; and as for me, rather than lose my head, I will fight for it on a fair field."

On the morrow Sir Tristram got his horse and armour brought him, and was led with Isoude to an open place within the castle, where was a great assemblage to see what should take place. Then came Sir Brewnor with his lady all veiled, and said to Tristram: "If thy lady be fairer than mine, with thy sword smite off her head; and if my lady be fairer than thine, I will do the like by thy lady. And if I win thee, then shalt thou lose thy head."

"Sir," answered Tristram, "this is a foul and horrible custom that you use. Rather than that my lady should lose her head, I would choose to lose mine own."

"Not so," said Brewnor; "the ladies shall first be shown and judged."

"I fear me that there are none here who will give rightful judgment," quoth Tristram. "Howbeit, I doubt not that my lady is fairer than yours, and whoever may say the contrary, I will prove it upon his body." Thereupon Sir Tristram unveiled La Beale Isoude, and turned her round thrice, so that all might see her,

the while he held his naked sword in his other hand. Sir Brehnour did the like with his lady; but as soon as he had beheld Isoude, he thought he had never seen a fairer lady, and all the people that were present gave judgment that she was the fairer.

“How now?” said Sir Tristram. “Because you and your lady have long used this wicked custom, and have caused the destruction of many good knights and ladies, it were no great damage to destroy you both.”

“Well,” said Brehnour, “it is true that thy lady is fairer than mine; and if thou slay mine, I doubt not I shall slay thee, and so win thy lady.”

“Thou shalt win her dearer than ever lady was won,” answered Tristram; “and because of thine evil custom give me thy lady.” So he took the lady from him, and she bent her neck, and without more words he smote off her head.

“Well, knight,” said Brehnour, “thou hast done me a despite.” Then they took their horses, and ran together; and Sir Tristram unhorsed Sir Brehnour, who thereupon drew his sword, and thrust Sir Tristram’s horse through the shoulders, so that he fell dead to the earth. And Sir Brehnour strove to slay Tristram as the horse fell; but Tristram was too nimble for him, and got out his sword before the other could give him more than one or two strokes. So they fought a long time, for this Sir Brehnour was a proved and wily knight; but at last he was getting the worse, when he rushed on Sir Tristram and took him in his arms with intent to throw him on the ground, for he trusted much in his strength. But at that time Tristram was reckoned the strongest knight in the world, for he was stronger than even Sir Lancelot, though Lancelot was the better winded. He thrust Sir Brehnour on the earth, undid his helm, and struck off his head.

Most of those that belonged to the castle came now and did homage to Sir Tristram, and asked him to abide there a little while; and he assented. But one of the knights of the castle rode to Sir Galahaut the high prince, Sir Brehnour’s son, who was near by with the King of the Hundred Knights, and told him what had happened. So they came forthwith to the castle with a great fellowship of knights. Sir Galahaut challenged Sir Tristram to fight, and they had a long tussle, but in the end Tristram got the better; and then all the knights fell fiercely upon him, so he yielded to Sir Galahaut, but told him that he had done unknighly to suffer his men to meddle. The King of the Hundred Knights would have had Sir Galahaut kill Sir Tristram because he had slain Sir Brehnour; but Sir Galahaut would not, and said he could not blame Sir Tristram, because of the shameful custom that his father had used. And when the King of the Hundred Knights heard what the custom was, he also said it was an evil one. Then Sir Tristram told his name and the errand he was on to Sir Galahaut, who set him at liberty on

a pledge that as soon as he might he would go in fellowship with Sir Lancelot.

After that, Tristram brought La Beale Isoude to Cornwall, where she and King Marke were married with much ceremony; but ever she gave all her love to Sir Tristram. Now it befell that some of Queen Isoude's ladies were jealous of Dame Bragwaine, who had come with her from Ireland, and they got some churls to set upon her while she was gathering herbs in a forest, and bind her to a tree. There she was three days, and then by chance Sir Palomides found her, and saved her from death, and took her to a nunnery near by to be recovered. Queen Isoude greatly loved Bragwaine, and much lamented her absence; and one day she was walking in the forest and lamenting, when Sir Palomides overheard her. So he came to her, and said, "Madam, if you will grant me a boon, I will undertake to bring you Dame Bragwaine safe and sound."

To hear this Isoude was so glad that, without thinking, she agreed to his offer; and straightway he went to the nunnery, and brought out Bragwaine to her. Then he reminded her of her promise; and she said, "Sir Palomides, I know not what your desire is, but though I promised you largely, I thought no ill, nor will I consent to any." Palomides said he would make his request before her husband King Marke. Then Isoude went back to the court, and Palomides soon followed. He laid his case before the king, and told him what the queen had promised; and she had to confess that she had promised to give him any boon he might ask.

"Well, madam," said the king, "if you were hasty to make such a bargain, I must still see that you hold to your word."

"Then," said Palomides, "I will have the queen, to lead and govern her as I will."

At this King Marke was dismayed; but he bethought him of Sir Tristram, and deemed that he would rescue her, so he answered hurriedly, "Take her with the adventures that may befall, for I suppose thou wilt not long keep her."

"As for that," said Palomides, "I dare well abide the adventure." And he took Queen Isoude by the hand, and led her away. Anon King Marke sent for Sir Tristram; but he could not be found, for he was hunting in the forest. Then a knight of Sir Tristram's named Sir Lambegus proffered to go and essay the rescue of the queen. He followed after Palomides, and challenged him, and they fought a strong battle; but at the last Sir Palomides smote down Sir Lambegus, so that he lay as if dead. But while they were fighting, the queen had run away into the forest. She came to a well, and was going to drown herself in it; but a knight named Sir Andret that had a castle thereby prevented her, and took her into his castle. When he knew what had happened, he armed him, and went out

to seek Sir Palomides, to avenge the queen. So he met Palomides, who fought with him, wounded him well-nigh to death, and forced him to say where the queen was. So Palomides rode to the castle; but Isoude saw him coming, and caused all the gates to be shut fast. When Palomides found that he could not gain entrance, he put his horse to pasture, and sat down at the gate raging like a man that had lost his wits.

In the meanwhile, Sir Tristram had come home from hunting, and learned how Sir Palomides had taken away the queen. "Alas!" he cried, "this day am I shamed, for well I know that Sir Lambegus hath not might to withstand Sir Palomides." He armed as quickly as he might, and followed after them. From Sir Andret, whom he found sore wounded, he learned all that had happened, and that Isoude was safe within his castle. So he thanked that knight much, and rode on till he came to the castle, and there he saw Palomides sleeping at the gate. So he sent Govemale to say that his mortal enemy, Tristram, was there. When Govemale had delivered that message, Sir Palomides arose without saying a word, took his horse and his spear, and ran at Sir Tristram, who smote him over his horse's tail. Then they took to their swords, and both fought eagerly, for it was for the love of the same lady; and Isoude sat within, and watched them fight. But ever Palomides got the worse, and Queen Isoude said to herself, "Well, I know that by the end Sir Palomides will be but a dead knight, and because he is not yet christened I am loath that he should die a Saracen." So she came out of the castle, and implored Sir Tristram to fight no more.

"Madam," he cried, "what mean you? Will you have me shamed? You know well I will be ruled by you."

"I wish not your dishonour," answered the queen; "but I ask that for my sake you spare this unhappy Saracen Sir Palomides."

"Madam," said Tristram, "at your bidding I will leave fighting for this time."

"This," she said to Palomides, "shall be your charge, that you quit this country while I am within it."

"I will obey your bidding," answered Palomides, "but sorely against my will."

"Take then thy way to the court of King Arthur," said the queen, "and commend me to Queen Guenever, and tell her I send her word that there are in this land but four true lovers—Lancelot du Lake and Guenever and Tristram and Isoude."

So Sir Palomides departed sadly, and Sir Tristram took home the queen, who was joyfully received by King Marke. Then for a while Tristram was much honoured and cherished at court; but ere long the king grew very suspicious of

his love for Queen Isoude; and one day, as they were talking in a window-place, he suddenly drew his sword, and ran at Tristram to take his life, calling him a false traitor. Tristram caught the sword from him, and smote him five or six times on the back with the flat of it, so that he fell on his face. Then he and his knights went into the forest, and waged such warfare against King Marke's knights that the king was glad to make friendship with him again. So for a time all went smoothly; and the king held a jousting in the forest, to the which came Sir Lamoracke de Galis, who was one of the best knights of the world, and he did mightily, overthrowing thirty knights. Then King Marke asked Sir Tristram to joust with Sir Lamoracke. That he was loath to do, because, he said, both the knight and his horse were tired, and it would be shame to rob him of the worship he had gained. The king, however, required him to joust; so with no good will he rode forth. Sir Lamoracke met him mightily, but his horse was so wearied that with the force of their meeting it fell to the ground, Sir Lamoracke still keeping his seat in the saddle. Then Lamoracke was wroth, and required Sir Tristram to fight on foot; but Sir Tristram would not, and said he had only jousted with him because he was so commanded. But his refusal only made Sir Lamoracke the more angry, and he swore to be quits with Sir Tristram.

Shortly afterward Sir Lamoracke met a knight of Morgan le Fay that was going to King Arthur's court with a magic drinkinghorn that Morgan had contrived to shame Queen Guenever and Sir Lancelot; for it was of such kind that any wife who did not love her husband best could not drink from it without spilling. When Sir Lamoracke understood the virtue of the horn, he made the knight bear it to King Marke's court to spite Sir Tristram. The king made his queen Isoude and a hundred ladies of his court drink from it, and very few of them drank clean. Then was the king angered, and swore that the queen and the ladies who had failed should be burned. But his barons plainly said they would not suffer it. Sir Tristram was wroth at Sir Lamoracke because he had sent the horn. And he had cause, for soon fresh quarrels arose between him and the king; and at the last he was driven from the country, and Queen Isoude shut in a close prison. Sir Tristram went to Brittany, and fought in the wars there, and had many adventures; but after a while he returned to Britain to seek Isoude. There he met Sir Lamoracke sitting by a well, and they had a great battle together; but neither could prevail, so they swore friendship together, and that neither of them should fight against the other. Then both of them chanced to meet Sir Palomides, who at that time had taken up the quest of following a strange and dreadful beast that was called the questing-beast. It had a head and neck like a serpent, a body like a leopard, and legs and feet like a deer, and the noise it made was like the cry or

questing of thirty couples of hounds. It was while he was seeking this beast that Sir Palomides met Sir Lamoracke and Sir Tristram; and there with one spear he smote them both down; which shows that sometimes the worse knight may put the better knight to reproach.

After that, Sir Tristram and Sir Lamoracke parted; and as Sir Tristram rode he fell in with Sir Kay, who asked him of what country he was come. Sir Tristram answered that he was a knight of Cornwall. "It may well be," said Sir Kay, "for I never yet heard that any good knight came out of Cornwall."

"That is evil said," quoth Tristram; "but if it please you to tell me your name, I require it."

"Sir, wit you well that I am Sir Kay the seneschal."

"Is that your name?" said Tristram. "You are called the shamefullest knight of your tongue that is now living; howbeit it is said that you are a good knight."

In a while there joined fellowship with them Sir Tor, the half-brother of Sir Lamorâcke, and Sir Brandiles. These two and Sir Kay spoke much shame of Cornish knights; and Sir Tristram sat by and said nothing, but he thought the more. In a while Sir Brandiles asked him to joust; and Sir Tristram smote him down, and afterwards served Sir Tor in the same manner. Then he rode on his way, and the three knights followed till they overtook him. He proffered them to joust; but they said they had had enough of that, and they required him to tell them his name. This he did, and they were right glad, and said that he ought to be a Knight of the Round Table, all the fellowship of which desired his company. Sir Tristram said he was not worthy to be of that fellowship; but they all said he was the knight of most power alive, except Sir Lancelot. After much conversation they parted.

Now King Arthur had at this time fallen into the crafts of an enchantress named the Lady Annowre, that had brought him into a place called the Forest Perilous with intent to have his love; and when she could not get that, she sought to destroy him. But the Lady of the Lake, called Nimue, that was ever friendly, to King Arthur, came into the forest where Sir Tristram was, to seek him or Sir Lancelot, to rescue the king; for she knew that unless she got the aid of one or other of them he would be slain. As she rode she met Sir Tristram, and cried, "Oh, my lord Sir Tristram, well be we met, for within these two hours, unless you prevent it, will be done the foulest deed that ever was wrought in this land."

"Fair damsel," said Tristram, "can I amend it?"

"Come with me," quoth she, "and make what haste you may; for you shall see the man of most worship in the world sorely bestead. It is none other than King

Arthur himself.”

“God forbid that he should be in such peril,” said Sir Tristram. And they rode together at a great pace till they came to a castle, and at its base there was a knight fighting on foot against two others. Even as Sir Tristram came up, the two had smitten down the one knight, which was King Arthur, and were unlacing his helm to slay him, while the enchantress Annowre had got the king’s sword in her hand to have stricken off his head. Then Tristram cried out, “Traitor! traitor! leave that!” and he smote first one of the knights and then the other, so that they both fell dead. In the meanwhile the damsel of the Lake cried out to King Arthur, “Let not that untrue lady escape.” So King Arthur overtook her, and, having got his sword again, he smote off her head with it, and the damsel took it up, and hung it on her saddle-bow.

Then Sir Tristram horsed King Arthur again and rode with him. The king thanked him most heartily, and begged for his name; but Sir Tristram would not give it, saying only that he was a poor knight adventurer, and would bear the king company till he came to some of his own knights. In a little they met Sir Ector de Maris, and he, not knowing King Arthur or Sir Tristram, desired to joust with one of them. Sir Tristram rode to him and smote him off his horse. When he had done that, he said to King Arthur: “My lord, yonder is one of your own knights, so I will depart; but I trust you will believe that I shall always be ready to do you service.”

“Alas! good knight,” said King Arthur, “will you not tell me your name?”

“Not at this time,” answered Tristram, and so departed.

Soon after this, Sir Tristram found means to meet again with Queen Isoude—who had returned to her husband’s court—to the great joy of both of them. But by mishap Sir Tristram was led mistakenly to believe that Isoude had proved false to him, and he grieved so sorely that he went out of his mind, and ran wild in a wood among herdmen, where he remained a long time. And there he soused Sir Dagonet, King Arthur’s fool, in a well; and also slew a great giant named Taüleas and rescued a knight whom Taüleas had conquered. When King Marke heard of the wild man that did such deeds, he had him brought to his castle. There Sir Tristram came to his wits again; and when King Marke knew who it was, he would have had him put to death. But this the barons would not agree to, and so at last it was agreed that he should be banished from Cornwall for ten years. As he went to the ship there came to him a knight of King Arthur’s named Sir Dinadan, who had travelled to Cornwall to seek fellowship with him, and this knight asked leave to go with him. Sir Tristram assented, for Dinadan was a good knight, and ever full of mirth. Then he and Sir Dinadan went into the ship

together, and Sir Tristram sent back a message of defiance to King Marke, that he would come again when he chose.

After he and Sir Dinadan had landed in King Arthur's realm, there came to them a damsel that was seeking good knights to defend Sir Lancelot against the treason of Morgan le Fay, who had ordained thirty knights to lie in wait for him. The damsel knew of this plot, and sought for knights to hinder it. When she told Sir Tristram, he said,—

“Fair damsel, bring me to the place where they are to meet Sir Lancelot.”

“Why!” cried Dinadan, “what will you do? It is not for us to fight with thirty knights. I am ready enough to deal with one or two, but to fight with fifteen will I never undertake.”

“Fie for shame,” said Tristram; “surely you will do your part?”

“Nay,” answered Sir Dinadan, “I will meddle not. But if you will go, lend me your shield, for it bears Cornish arms, and yon knights of Cornwall have such a name for cowardice that you are forborne, so I shall be left in peace.”

“No,” said Tristram, “I will not part with my shield, for her sake that gave it me. But if you will not go with me, I swear that I will slay you; for I only ask of you to answer one knight, and if that be too much, then stand by and look on.”

“Sir,” said Dinadan, “I promise to do what I can to save myself, but I heartily wish I had never met with you.”

Then were they aware of the thirty knights that passed by to lie in wait for Sir Lancelot. Sir Tristram cried out, “Lo! here is a knight against you for the love of Sir Lancelot;” and he slew two with his spear and ten with his sword. Thereafter came in Sir Dinadan, and he did passing well; and in the end, of the thirty knights there went but ten away, and they fled. So Sir Tristram and Sir Dinadan rode on and sought lodging, and they came to a castle where it was the custom that any who wanted lodging must joust with two knights that dwelt there. Sir Tristram and Sir Dinadan smote them both down, and then they went within and had good cheer. But just as they were about to take their rest, came Sir Palomides and Sir Gaheris requiring to have the custom of the castle.

“What is this?” said Sir Dinadan; “I would have my rest.”

“That may not be,” said Tristram. “We must needs defend the custom of the castle now that we have got the better of the lord of the castle, so you must even make you ready.”

“In an evil hour came I into your company,” answered Dinadan, and with much grumbling he made him ready. When they encountered, Sir Tristram met

Sir Gaheris and gave him a fall, but Sir Palomides unhorsed Sir Dinadan and bruised him much. Then they were for fighting on foot, and Sir Tristram was ready enough, but Sir Dinadan would not. "You fare like a madman," said he to Tristram; "and I may curse the hour when I saw you. There are not in the world two knights that crave after fighting as do you and Sir Lancelot. Once I fell in his company, and he set me work that kept me in bed for a quarter of a year."

"Then will I fight them both," said Tristram; but to this the others would not agree, so he encountered Sir Palomides alone, and in a while he drove Palomides backward, and then the two other knights parted them. After that, Sir Tristram desired that all four should lodge together; but Dinadan would stay no more in that place, and took his horse and harness and departed. The others followed, and found him in a priory, where they had good cheer.

In the morning Sir Tristram rode forth; but Sir Dinadan was so bruised that he could not ride, and he remained behind. There was a knight at the priory named Sir Pellinore, and he desired to know Sir Tristram's name; but he would not tell it. When Sir Tristram had departed, this knight said he would follow him, to make him tell his name. "Beware, Sir Knight," said Dinadan; "for if you follow him, I warn you you will repent it." The other took no heed, but went after Sir Tristram and required him to joust. Then Sir Tristram smote him down, and gave him a great wound in the shoulder. And so he went his way.

About this time the King of Northgalis and King Carados of Scotland agreed to hold a tournament against each other at a great castle called the Castle of Maidens, and Sir Tristram bethought him to go to that tournament. On the way he met with Sir Gawaine, and they had many adventures together. The tournament lasted three days, and on each day Sir Tristram smote down so many knights that the prize was given to him. But on the third day Sir Lancelot, by misadventure, hurt Sir Tristram badly with a spear, and Sir Tristram left the field, because he would not be known by King Arthur. When his wound was healed, he rode forth again and encountered many knights; and at last he rescued Sir Palomides from a felon knight named Sir Breuse sans Pitie that had set upon him with a great fellowship. When Sir Tristram found who it was he had rescued, he appointed a day to meet Sir Palomides in mortal combat, because there was ever enmity between them on account of the love that both bore to Queen Isoude. A solemn compact was made that they should fight at the tomb of Sir Lanceor, the knight of Ireland that was slain long before by Balin le Savage. On the day set, Sir Tristram came to the tomb, and there was he aware of a seemly knight that came riding in white armour, with a covered shield. When he came near Sir Tristram he cried out, "You are welcome, Sir Knight, and well and truly have

you kept your promise.” So they rode together with all their might, and both were overthrown. After that they fought on foot for more than four hours, and each dealt the other many sore strokes. At the last, the strange knight said, “Sir Knight, you fight wondrous well, as ever I saw knight; therefore I require you, if it please you, tell me your name.”

Tristram, who knew by this time that the stranger could not be Palomides—for he was too mighty—answered, “I am loath to tell thee my name.”

“Truly,” answered the other, “when I am required I am never loath to tell any man my name.”

“Then,” quoth Tristram, “I require thee to tell me thy name.”

“Sir,” said he, “my name is Lancelot du Lake.”

“Alas!” cried Sir Tristram, “what have I done? You are the man in all the world that I most love.”

“Fair knight,” said Sir Lancelot, “tell me now thy name.”

“Truly, I am Sir Tristram de Lyons.”

“Alas!” said Lancelot, “what an adventure hath befallen me.” So they both sat on the stone, took off their helms, and kissed each other, and they had great joy at their meeting. And so was the prediction of Merlin fulfilled, that at that tomb the two best knights of the world should do battle.

Sir Lancelot conducted Sir Tristram to Gamelot, where King Arthur, who had long desired him, and all the Knights of the Round Table, received him with the greatest honour. And forthwith he was made Knight of the Round Table, and the seat that was given him was that of Sir Marhaus, whom he himself had slain. So he abode a while at King Arthur’s court, and then again he went into Cornwall for the love of Queen Isoude, and after many hardships and perils he brought her with him to England. There they fell in with Sir Lancelot, who took them to his castle of Joyous Gard, and put it in their governance as if it had been their own. So they lived at Joyous Gard very happily together; and there for the present we will leave them.



CHAPTER XI. GERAINT AND ENID.

ONE Whitsuntide King Arthur held his court at Caerleon upon Usk, and he had with him Queen Guenever and most of his knights. While he was holding high feast in his hall, there came to him one of his foresters from the Forest of Dean, and reported to him that he had seen there a white stag of wondrous size and beauty. King Arthur resolved to hunt that stag on the following day; and Queen Guenever craved leave to ride with him and see the chase, which Arthur granted her with a good will. But on the morrow the king and his huntsmen rose full early, and the queen overslept herself, so when she awoke they were all gone. She took her horse as soon as she might, and rode forth with her maidens to follow the hunt. Presently there met her a good knight of the court, Sir Geraint, the son of Erbin, who was lord of the country of Devon. While they held converse together, they saw a dwarf riding along on a great horse, and behind him a knight and a lady riding together. The knight was fully armed, and seemed to be a man of much prowess.

“Sir Geraint,” said the queen, “knowest thou the name of that knight?”

“I know him not,” answered Geraint; “and because of his helm I cannot see his face.”

Then the queen bade one of her maidens go and ask the dwarf who the knight was. She obeyed; but when she asked the dwarf he would not tell her. “Since,” she said, “thou art so churlish, I will go and ask him myself.”

“Thou shalt not ask him, by my faith,” said he.

“Wherefore?” asked the maiden.

“Because thou art not of honour sufficient to befit thee to speak to my lord.”

Then the maiden turned her horse’s head towards the knight, upon which the dwarf struck her across the face with a whip that he carried in his hand, so that the blood flowed forth, and the maiden returned to Guenever complaining of the hurt she had received.

“Very rudely has the dwarf treated thee,” said Geraint. “I will myself go to ask who the knight is.” So he went to the dwarf, who, however, said and did to him as he had done to the damsel. Very wroth was Geraint, and he put his hand to his sword; but he considered that it would be no vengeance to him to slay the dwarf

and be attacked unarmed by the armed knight, so he returned to the queen, who said he had acted wisely and discreetly.

“Madam,” said Geraint, “I will follow them yet; and in time they will come to some inhabited place where I may get arms, so that I can encounter the knight.”

To this the queen assented, but cautioned him not to attack the knight until he got arms; and she said she should be anxious concerning him till she got good news of him.

“If I am alive,” quoth Geraint, “by to-morrow afternoon, madam, you shall hear tidings of me;” and so he departed, and followed the knight, the lady, and the dwarf. They rode past Caerleon, and over the ford of the Usk, and then went up a lofty ridge of ground till they came to the top of it. There stood a fair town, and on the other side of it a great castle. As the knight passed through the town all the people in it saluted him and the lady. The three rode on and went into the castle, where Geraint saw many people welcome them. He himself looked into every house in the town, to see if there were any that he knew, from whom he might borrow a suit of armour; but he had never seen any of the people before. Every house he saw was full of men and arms and horses; and the people were polishing shields, and burnishing swords, and washing armour, and shoeing horses.

Geraint looked about him, to see where he should lodge, and he perceived at a little distance from the town an old palace that once had been full nobble, but now was falling into decay. He went toward it, and found that it was approached by a bridge of marble. On the bridge he saw sitting an old man, clad in poor and tattered garments. Upon him Geraint gazed steadfastly for a long time.

“Young man,” said he, “wherefore art thou thoughtful?”

“I am thoughtful,” answered Geraint, “because I know not where to go to-night.”

“Wilt thou abide with me?” said the old man, “and thou shalt have of the best that I can give thee.”

So he led the way into the hall, and Geraint followed him. In the hall Geraint dismounted and left his horse, and his host took him into an upper chamber where were two women. One was old and decrepit, but it seemed to Geraint that when she was young she must have been exceedingly fair. The other was a young damsel, and he thought he had never seen a maiden more full of comeliness, grace, and beauty than she. But both of the women were attired in old and worn-out garments. The old man bade the girl attend to their guest; and she disarrayed him, and then unsaddled his horse and gave it straw and com.

After that the old man bade her go to the town and bring the best she could find, both of food and liquor. While she was away, the old people conversed pleasantly with Geraint. In a while she returned, bringing with her a youth who bore a flagon of mead and the quarter of a young bullock. In her hands and in her veil she carried a quantity of bread "I could not obtain better than this," she said, "nor with better would I have been trusted."

"Surely it is good enough," said Geraint. So the food was made ready, and Geraint and the old people sat down to the table, while the maiden waited upon them.

When they had finished eating, Geraint talked with the old man, and asked him to whom the palace belonged "Truly," answered the other, "it was I that built it, and to me also belonged the town and the castle you have seen."

"Alas!" said Geraint, "how comes it that you have lost them?"

"I lost a great earldom as well as these," answered the other, "and it was in this wise. I had a nephew, the son of my brother, and I took his possessions to myself; and when he came to his strength he demanded his property of me, but I withheld it from him. Thereupon he waged war against me, and took from me all that I possessed."

"Good sir," said Geraint, "will you tell me wherefore came the knight, lady, and dwarf that I just now saw go into the castle; and also why there is such preparation and furbishing of arms going forward in the town?"

"The preparations," answered the old earl, whose name was Uniel, "are for a tournament that is to be held to-morrow by the young earl, my nephew. In a meadow hard by will be hung a silver sparrow-hawk on a silver rod, and that is the prize. Any man may joust for it if he have with him the lady that he loves the best. The knight you saw has won the sparrow-hawk these two years, and if he win it to-morrow it will then be sent to him every year, and he will no more come-for it himself; but he will thenceforth be called the Knight of the Sparrow-Hawk."

Then Geraint told Earl Uniel of the quest he was on, and of the insult which the knight's dwarf had given to him and to Queen Guenever; and he asked what it were best for him to do.

"It is not easy to counsel thee," said the earl, "because thou hast neither dame nor maiden with thee for whom thou couldst joust. Yet have I arms here which thou mightst have."

"Ah, sir," said Geraint, "may Heaven reward you! And if you will permit me to-morrow to challenge for this fair maiden your daughter, I will engage, if I

come alive from the tournament, to love her ever after; and if I do not escape she will be nothing the worse.”

To this the old earl gladly assented; nor was the maiden sorry, for Geraint was a right comely and noble man, and was ever courteous to ladies. So the next morning they all went forth to the meadow. And the knight that had previously won the sparrow-hawk came forth with great pride, because he deemed that none would, dare to encounter him. He bade his lady to take the sparrow-hawk, because she was the fairest, and if any denied her, by force would he defend it for her.

“Touch it not,” said Geraint; “for there is here a maiden who is fairer, and more noble, and more comely, and has a better claim to it than thou hast.”

Then said the knight scornfully, “If thou maintainest the sparrow-hawk to be due to thy lady, come forward and do battle for it with me.”

Geraint came forward accordingly. He and his horse were arrayed in the Earl Uniers old armour, which was heavy and rusty, and of uncouth shape; so that few thought he would be likely to keep his ground against that strong knight. Then three or four times the two ran together and broke their spears on each other without doing any hurt. Then said the old earl to Geraint, “O knight, since no other lance will hold, here is the good spear which I took in my hand on the day when first I was knighted, and a better never held I in my hand.”

Geraint thanked him and took the spear. Then the dwarf also brought a lance to his lord, and said, “Bethink thee that no knight has ever withstood thee so long as this one.”

“I vow by Our Lady,” quoth Geraint, “that if I be not slain and this spear hold, he shall fare none the better for thy service.” So again they rushed together, and this time Geraint by pure might broke the other knight’s shield in twain and burst his saddle-girths, so that he fell back to the ground. Then quickly Geraint dismounted and drew his sword, and the other knight also rose and pulled out his sword; and they fought fiercely on foot, striking each other such heavy blows that the fire flashed like stars from their armour, and their vision was obscured with blood and sweat. After a while the stranger knight seemed as though he would prevail, at which the young earl and all his party rejoiced; but Earl Uniel and his wife and the maiden were heavy of heart. So Earl Uniel went near to Geraint and cried, “O knight, bethink thee of the insult that thou and Queen Guenever had from the dwarf.” At that Geraint put forth all his might, and struck his enemy so mightily on the helm that it broke, and the sword cut through to the skull.

Then the knight fell on his knees, yielded, and craved mercy of Geraint. “I will grant thee grace,” answered Geraint, “on one condition—that thou go to King Arthur’s court and make amends to Queen Guenever for the insult that was offered her by thy dwarf. As for the insult he gave to me, for that I have myself taken amends.” The knight promised to obey; and in reply to Geraint he said his name was Edeym, the son of Nudd. So he got on his horse and rode sadly toward Caerleon, and his lady and dwarf went with him.

In the meantime the young earl came and greeted Geraint, and asked him to come to his castle; but Geraint said he would lodge that night where he had lodged before, and so returned with Earl Uniel and his wife and daughter to the old palace. But the young earl sent thither a great many servants, who put the house in order, and brought large store of provision, and set out the feast in the great hall. Also they brought fine garments for Uniel and the two women; but Geraint entreated that the maiden should wear no other array than the old worn vest and veil in which he had seen her first. Then a great company sat down to the feast, and in the highest places were Geraint, the young earl, the old earl, his wife, and the maiden, who was called Enid. So they feasted, and afterwards they talked together. Geraint said plainly that if he lived Earl Uniel should not be long without his possessions.

“As to that,” answered the young earl, “it is not my fault that he lost them; and with regard to the disagreement between us, I will gladly abide by thy decision, and agree to what thou judgest right.”

“I but ask thee,” said Geraint, “to restore to him what was his.”

This the young earl did, and Uniel received back his town and castle and all that he had lost. Then said he to Geraint, “O knight, here is the maiden for whom thou didst challenge at the tournament. Well hast thou won her, and I gladly give her to thee.”

“She shall go with me,” said Geraint, “to the court of King Arthur; and she shall wear still the raiment in which I first saw her, till for my sake Queen Guenever arrays her in richer garments.” And he looked on Enid with joy, for his heart was full of love toward her. The next day, accordingly, Geraint and Enid rode forth toward Caerleon.

In the meantime King Arthur had killed the white stag he hunted; and at the queen’s wish he agreed not to decide to whom its head should be given till Geraint returned from the quest he was on, because if he were successful the queen wished that some mark of honour should be bestowed upon him. So the next day Guenever caused a watch to be set on the battlements of the palace to

tell when Geraint might appear. A little after mid-day, the porter who was without came and informed the queen that at the gate was a knight who said his errand was to her; that his armour was all broken and blood-stained, and his whole aspect pitiful.

“Knowest thou his name?” asked the queen.

“He says,” answered the porter, “that his name is Edeym, the son of Nudd.” So the knight was brought in, and Guenever saw that it was the knight whom Geraint had followed; and she could not but pity him, even although the churlish dwarf was with him. So he told Guenever all that had befallen him, and what Geraint had done; and it was settled that he should be put in charge of the leeches, and, when he was recovered, should give such satisfaction to the queen as the Knights of the Round Table might judge fitting. The next day Geraint came to Caerleon with Enid, and both of them were nobly received. Queen Guenever attired the maiden in some of her own rich raiment, and then all said that they had never seen any one who was more beautiful. Before long she and Geraint were wedded, and Geraint abode with her at the court, and won great honour in joustings and in the hunt.

But after three years Erbin, because he was grown old and feeble, sent for his son to take charge of his territories. King Arthur was loath to let him go, and Guenever was sorry to part with Enid; but inasmuch as the parting was unavoidable, they sent them away with a noble following of knights and ladies. So Geraint went into Devon, and ruled in his father’s place. He governed the country well and wisely, and at tournaments there was no knight of that country strong enough to withstand him. But after a while he grew to love Enid so much that he neglected knightly sports, and spent all his time with her in the palace; and in this way he began to lose the love of his people, and his fame was no longer great in the land. This became known to Enid, and she sorrowed much on account of it. One morning in summer they were lying on the couch in their chamber, and Enid was awake, but Geraint slept. The clothing had fallen off his arms and breast, and as she gazed on him she exclaimed, “Alas! and am I the cause that these arms and this breast have lost their glory and the warlike fame which once they so richly enjoyed.”

As she spoke thus, the tears dropped from her eyes and fell on her husband’s breast, so that he awoke; and hearing her words imperfectly, the thought entered his mind that she loved some other man more than him, and wished for other society. So Geraint was sore troubled, and he sprang quickly from his couch, and calling his squire, bade him get ready his horse and arms. “And do thou arise,” he said sternly to Enid, “and apparel thyself in the worst riding-dress thou hast in

thy possession, and cause thy horse to be got ready. Evil betide me if we return here till thou knowest whether I have lost my strength so completely as thou didst say. If that be so, then will it be easy for thee to seek the society of him whom thou desirest.”

Enid arose, and clothed herself in her meanest garments; but she said, “My lord, I know nothing of your meaning.”

“Neither will you know at this time,” he answered roughly. Then Geraint went to Erbin, and told him he was going on a quest, and it was uncertain when he would return. After that he rode forth with Enid, and charged her to ride before him, and, whatever she might hear or see, not to turn back, or to speak to him unless he spoke first to her. And he chose a road that was wild and beset by thieves and robbers. In a while they came to a great forest; and Enid saw four armed horsemen lying in wait, of whom one said to the others, “Here is a good opportunity for us to capture this lady and the horses and armour; for we can easily master yonder knight, who hangs his head so heavily.” When Enid heard this, she knew not what to do, for Geraint had charged her not to speak to him. “Yet,” she said to herself, “I would rather have my death from his hand than from that of any other; and though he slay me, yet will I speak to him, lest I endure the misery of seeing him slain.” So she waited for Geraint till he came near.

“My lord,” she said kindly, “did you hear the words of those men concerning you?”

Then he raised his eyes, and looked at her angrily.

“Did I not bid thee hold thy peace?” he said. “I only wished for silence, not for warning. And thou—thou shouldst desire to see me slain by these men; yet do I feel no dread.”

Then the foremost of the robbers couched his spear, and rushed at Geraint, who received the stroke on his shield, and thrust his own lance through the other’s body. And so he served the other three. After that he dismounted, took the arms of the dead men, fastened them on their saddles, and tied all the bridles of the horses together. Then he bade Enid ride before, and drive the horses; and again he forbade her to speak to him unless he first spoke to her. In that manner they went through the forest, and then came out on a vast plain, across which Enid saw three armed knights coming toward them; and she heard them say that it would be easy to take all that spoil from one dolorous knight. Again was she terrified for Geraint, because she thought he was wearied with his former combat; so she warned him of the purpose of the three knights.

“I declare to Heaven,” he said, “that all they can do is less grievous to me than that thou wilt not be silent as I bid thee.”

“My lord,” she answered meekly, “I feared lest they should surprise thee unawares.”

“Hold thy peace, then,” replied Geraint. “Do not I desire silence?”

Straightway the three knights attacked Geraint, but they fared no better than the others had done before; for he slew them all, and added their arms and horses to the other spoil which was in Enid’s charge. Yet again, when they were nearly across the plain, did Enid break silence to warn her lord of five horsemen who were preparing to attack him; and he was exceedingly wrathful, and rebuked her sorely. But he slew all the five robbers, and added their arms and horse to the others. Then they rode toward a wood, there to pass the night, and even in his anger Geraint was troubled at heart to see so fair and tender a woman as Enid toiling to guide so many horses. In the wood Geraint slept all night; but he bade Enid watch, and she obeyed him.

In the morning they came to a fair city, and there Geraint hired a lodging, and had all his horses stabled. He commanded Enid to sit on the side of the chamber opposite to where he sat. Then both of them slept; and when they awoke, the earl to whom the city belonged, and who had been told of the arrival of this stranger knight with a passing fair lady and many horses and much spoil, came to visit Geraint, bringing with him twelve knights; and his name was the Earl Doorm. He asked Geraint the object of his journey. “I have none,” said he, “but to seek adventures and follow my own inclination.” Then the earl saw Enid where she sat apart, and he thought he had never seen so comely a maiden as she. So he said to Geraint, “Have I thy permission to go and converse with yonder maiden?”

“Thou hast it gladly,” he answered.

Then the earl went to her, and said, “Fair maiden, it cannot be pleasant to thee to travel thus with yonder knight.”

“It is not unpleasant to me to journey with him,” she answered.

“I will give thee good counsel,” he said; for her beauty inflamed him exceedingly. “All my earldom shall be at thy disposal if thou wilt dwell with me.”

“That will I not,” she replied. “Am I to be faithless to my lord?”

“Thou art foolish,” quoth he. “If I slay thy lord, I can take thee with me in thine own despite, and turn thee away when I please. But if thou wilt go with me

of thine own goodwill, I swear that I will remain true to thee as long as I may live.”

Then Enid took counsel with herself how she might save her lord. So she said to the earl, “Then must you, to save me from any needless shame, come, here tomorrow, and take me away as though I knew nothing of the matter.”

To that he assented gladly, and went away. She and Geraint retired early, but about midnight she woke him and told him all that had passed between herself and Earl Doorm, and said it would be well that they should flee. He was wroth with her for speaking, but did as she advised; and in payment to his host gave him all the horses and armour he had taken from the robbers, asking only of the man that he should guide them out of the town by a different way from that by which they had entered. To this the man agreed readily; but when he returned, he found Earl Doorm at his house with many knights. The earl was wrathful to find that Geraint and Enid were gone, and rode hard after them with his knights. Enid was uneasy as she rode along, and ever she looked behind her. Some time after dawn she saw a great cloud of dust behind them, that came nearer, and in a while she perceived a knight coming through the mist. So she could not refrain from warning Geraint, who was wrathful, and reproached her because she would not keep silence in obedience to his orders. However, he turned his horse, and every knight that came up he overthrew. The earl assailed him the last, and they fought long together; but Geraint compelled him to sue for mercy, the which he granted him.

So Geraint and Enid pursued their journey till they came to a passing fair valley, with a river running through it. Over the river was a bridge, and on the other side a walled town. As they rode, they met a knight, and Geraint asked him to whom the valley and town belonged. He answered that they were in the hands of a perilous knight that was called the Little King.

“Can I go by yonder bridge and the highway that runs past the town?” asked Geraint.

“You cannot go that way,” answered the knight, “unless you intend to combat with the Little King; for it is his custom to combat with every knight that comes upon his lands.”

“Nevertheless,” said Geraint, “I shall pursue my journey that way.”

“If you do,” said the knight, “you will probably meet with shame and disgrace in reward for your daring.”

Then Geraint rode on over the bridge, and Enid with him. And on the other side he saw a knight, that was very small of stature, mounted on a great war-

horse.

“Tell me, knight,” said he, “whether it is through ignorance or presumption that you seek to insult my dignity and infringe my rules? Come with me now to my court, and give me satisfaction.”

“That will I not,” answered Geraint.

“Then will I have satisfaction, or receive my overthrow at thy hands,” returned the Little King. So they fought together a long time on their horses, and it was exceedingly difficult for Geraint to strike the Little King, because he was so small of stature; but at the last he threw him headlong on the ground. Then they encountered on foot, and each gave the other painful wounds. At length Geraint grew enraged, and struck the other so fierce a blow that it shattered his helmet and wounded him on the head, even to the bone. Then the Little King dropped his sword, and entreated for mercy; which Geraint granted on condition that the Little King should always be his ally, and engage to come to his assistance if ever it were needed. To this the Little King pledged himself: and then he begged Geraint to come with him to his court, so that he might recover from his fatigue; but to this Geraint would not assent for all his entreaty, and insisted on continuing his journey, wounded as he was.

The heat of the sun was very great, and so when Geraint and Enid had ridden a little further, his wounds began to pain him more than they had done at first, and to escape the sun’s rays he went into a wood and stood under a tree. Enid followed after, and stood under another tree. Suddenly they heard a great noise, the reason of which was that King Arthur and many knights and ladies of his court were come into the wood. A foot-page of Sir Kay the seneschal saw the knight and lady standing silent under the trees, and he hastened to tell his master, who took his spear and shield, and rode to where Geraint was.

“Ah, knight,” said Sir Kay, “what dost thou here?”

“I am standing under a tree to avoid the rays of the sun.”

“Wherefore is thy journey, and who art thou?”

“I seek adventures, and go where I list.”

“Indeed,” quoth Kay. “Then come with me to King Arthur, who is near at hand.”

“That will I not,” answered Geraint curtly. He knew Sir Kay well, but Sir Kay knew him not.

“Thou must needs come,” said Kay; and therewith he couched his spear and attacked Geraint, who, becoming angry, smote him with the shaft of his lance,

and rolled him headlong on the ground. Sir Kay got on his feet again as well as he could, and rode back to the tents, where he met Sir Gawaine.

“There is yonder in the wood,” said he, “a wounded knight, with battered armour. Will you go and ascertain who he is?”

Gawaine assented, but Kay warned him to take his spear and armour, because the knight was not over courteous. This Gawaine did, and then he went to Geraint, and asked him who he was, and whether he would go with him to King Arthur; but Geraint would not tell his name, and refused to go to the king. “I will not leave thee,” said Gawaine, “till I know who thou art.” Then he charged Geraint with his spear, and it splintered on his shield, and their horses stood front to front. Gawaine gazed fixedly at the other, and saw who he was.

“Ah, Geraint,” he cried, “art thou here?”

“I am not Geraint,” said the knight, who, what with the pain of his wounds and the agony of his mind, divided between jealousy of Enid and sorrow and love, was well-nigh out of his wits.

“Geraint thou art, I know well,” answered Gawaine, “and a wretched and insane expedition is this.” Then he looked round, and saw Enid, and welcomed her gladly. Again he entreated Geraint to come to the king.

“I will not,” he answered; “for I am not in a fit state to see any one.”

So Gawaine contrived that King Arthur should be brought to the place; and when he came, he commanded that Geraint should not be allowed to go forth till he was healed, and committed him to the charge of his physicians. A whole month they abode in that place; and Queen Guenever took charge of Enid, and tended her lovingly. But ever Enid was sorrowful, for still she knew not why her lord had so utterly changed to her; and as for him, though his body was healed, he remained sad and silent.

At last Geraint went to the king, saying that he was whole, and asked leave again to go forth, which Arthur unwillingly granted. So he and Enid once more set out, and Geraint desired her to ride before him, as she had formerly done. As they journeyed along the road, they heard loud wailing; and there, in an open glade of the wood, they saw a lady, young and fair, standing by a dead knight.

“What hath befallen thee, lady?” asked Geraint.

“Sir,” she answered weeping, “I was journeying here with my beloved husband, when there came upon us three giants, and without any provocation they slew him.”

“Which way went they hence?” said Geraint. She pointed out the way, and he

bade Enid stay with the lady, and rode after the giants. Presently he overtook them. Each was as great in stature as three men, and carried in his hand a huge club. Geraint rushed upon them, and thrust his lance through the body of one, then drew it forth and slew another in the same way. But the third turned upon him, and struck him with his dub, so that the blow crushed his shoulder, and opened all his wounds anew. Then Geraint drew his sword, and smote the giant so fiercely on the crown of the head that it was split down to his shoulders, and he fell dead in that place. So Geraint left him thus, and returned to Enid; and as soon as he came to her he sank down at her feet as though he were dead. Then Enid uttered a cry, piercing and loud and thrilling; and it chanced that a wild earl called Limours, with a great company, was travelling on the highroad, and he heard the cry, and turned aside to see what was the cause of it. The earl said to Enid, "Fair lady, what hath befallen thee?"

"Alas!" she answered, "the only man I ever loved, or shall love, is slain."

Then he asked the other the cause of her grief.

"They have slain my dear husband also."

"Who was it that slew them?" asked the earl.

"Some giants," she answered, "slew my best beloved; and the other knight went in pursuit of them, and came back as thou seest."

The earl caused the dead knight to be buried; but it seemed to him that there was still some life left in Geraint, so he had him carried along on a shield. And the two women followed. When they came to the earl's mansion, Geraint was placed on a couch in the hall, and Enid sat by his side. The earl and his companions changed their travelling dress; and he came and asked Enid to do likewise, but she refused.

"Do not be sorrowful for this matter," said he, "and take no heed whether yonder knight live or die. Behold, a good earldom, together with myself, will I bestow upon thee. Be therefore happy and joyful."

"I shall never henceforth be happy while I live," said Enid.

"Come, then, and eat," quoth the earl.

"No, I will not," she answered.

"By our Lady thou shalt," he cried, and forced her to come to the table, where he many times bade her eat. Then said Enid, "I call all here to witness that I will not eat till he that is on yonder couch eateth likewise."

"Thou canst not fulfil that pledge," said the earl, "for the man is already dead."

“Still will I abide by what I have said.”

Then he offered her a goblet of wine, and bade her drink, and then she would change her mind.

“Evil betide me,” she replied, “if I drink aught till he drink also.”

Then the earl grew angry. “Truly,” said he, “it is of no more avail for me to be gentle with thee than ungentle;” and, un-knightly, he struck her with his hand on the face. And Enid raised an exceedingly loud and bitter cry;—not so much, indeed, because of the pain of the blow, as because it reminded her more strongly of the calamity that had befallen her, since she felt that if Geraint had been alive no man dared have smitten her. But all at once, at the sound of her cry, Geraint rose up from the couch. His sword was still in his hand as it had been when he swooned, and with it he rushed to the earl, and gave him so stern a blow that it clove him in twain till the sword was stayed by the table.

Then, at the sight of that terrible stroke, all who were there fled away with loud outcries. Geraint was sore grieved when he looked upon Enid, for her face was pale, and she wept bitterly.

“Lady,” said he, “knowest thou where our horses are?”

“I know where thy horse is, my lord,” she answered, “but I know not where the other may be.” She showed him where his horse was, and he mounted, and took up Enid and placed her before him, and so they rode forth. Presently something was heard like the sound of a host approaching, and Geraint put Enid on the other side of a hedge by the wayside, and made him ready. Immediately a knight rode forward and couched his lance. Then Enid could not restrain herself, but sprang to her feet, and cried. “O knight! whoever thou art, what renown wilt thou gain by slaying one that is already well-nigh dead?”

“O Heaven!” cried he, “is it Geraint?”

“Yes, in truth,” she answered; “and who art thou?”

“I am the Little King. I heard you were in trouble, and was coming to your assistance.—And if thou, Geraint, had followed my advice, none of these hardships would have befallen thee.”

“Nothing can happen,” said Geraint, “without the will of Heaven, though much good results from counsel.”

So he and Enid went with the Little King to the house of a baron that was the son of his sister, and there Geraint abode till he was perfectly well. After that, the Little King said to Geraint, “Now will we go to my court, to rest and amuse ourselves.”

“No,” said Geraint; “I will journey first for one day more and return again.”

So they set forth together, and presently came to a place where the road divided into two. There they met a man walking on foot, and the Little King asked him which was the best road to follow. “This,” said he, pointing to the one by which he had come, “is the best to follow; for if you go by the other you will never return. It leads to a hedge of mist, within which are enchanted games, and no one who has gone thither has ever come back. The court of the Earl Owain is there, and he permits no one to lodge in the town except he will go to his court.”

But Geraint said they would go by that road; and they travelled till they came to the town, whence the Earl Owain sent for them to his court, whither they went willingly; and when Geraint said he wished to go to the games, the earl assented. After they had eaten, Geraint took his arms and his horse and rode forth, the earl and all the company going with him. When they came to the hedge of mist, it was so high that no one could see the top. “Which way may I enter?” asked Geraint.

“I know not,” answered Owain, “but enter by the way that seems easiest.”

Then fearlessly Geraint dashed through the mist; and beyond it he found a fair orchard, within which was a pavilion of red satin. In front of it was a great apple tree, to one branch of which hung a hunting-horn. Geraint dismounted, and entered the tent. Within there was only a maiden, sitting in a golden chair; and opposite to her was another like chair that was empty. Geraint went and sat down in it.

“Ah, knight,” said the maiden, “I would not counsel thee to sit in that chair.”

“Wherefore?” said Geraint.

“Because he to whom it belongs has never suffered another to sit in it.”

“I care not,” answered Geraint, “though it displease him that I sit in the chair.”

Thereupon there arose a mighty tumult about the pavilion; and Geraint looked to see what was the cause of it, and he saw a great knight, fully armed, mounted on a mettlesome war-horse.

“Tell me, knight,” said he, “who was it bade thee sit on that chair?”

“Myself,” quoth Geraint.

“It was wrong of thee,” said the other, “to do me this shame and insolence. Arise now, and give me satisfaction.”

Then Geraint went forth, mounted his horse, and encountered him. Again and again they rushed at each other and broke spears; but at last Geraint cast him on the ground, a whole spear’s length beyond his horse’s crupper. Thereupon he

sued for mercy, and promised to grant all that Geraint asked.

“I only desire,” he answered, “that this enchantment shall cease.”

“Sound yonder horn,” said the knight, “and the hedge of mist will immediately disappear; but it will not go hence unless the horn be sounded by the knight by whom I have been vanquished.”

Then Geraint went and sounded the horn, and at the first blast the hedge of mist vanished; and there Geraint was visible to Enid, who had been sorrowful with anxiety concerning him, and to all the others. So on the morrow Geraint returned with his wife to his own dominions. All the distrust and grief between them had gone like the hedge of mist, because he had proved her to be faithful and loving to him beyond all women. Thenceforth he reigned prosperously, and his warlike fame and splendour lasted thereafter as long as he lived.



CHAPTER XII. SIR EWAIN AND THE ADVENTURE OF THE FOUNTAIN.

ONE time, as King Arthur was at Caerleon, it befell that though, because it was not the time of any high festival, most of the Knights of the Round Table were absent seeking adventures, yet there were in the palace Sir Kay, and Sir Gawaine, and Sir Ewaine his cousin, the son of Morgan le Fay, and Sir Konon, a good knight of the kings household, and some other knights. They were sitting one night about the fire in Sir Kay's chamber relating adventures; and Sir Konon told a marvellous story, how, some time before, he had found his way to a strange fountain—seeing many wonderful sights by the road—and had there been overthrown by a knight in black armour. To this story Ewaine especially listened with close attention, and when it was ended he asked Sir Konon which way he had taken to go to the fountain. Konon described it to him; and the next day Ewaine took his horse and armour and a great spear in his hand, and rode forth determined to pursue the adventure.

In a while he came to a beautiful valley, with green meadows on either side and a river in the midst. By the side of the river was a path, and Sir Ewaine followed this path till evening. Then he came to an immense and stately castle, the largest he had ever seen; and in front of it were two fair youths, with yellow curling hair, and wearing garments of yellow satin, shooting with bows made of ivory and arrows of whalebone, pointed with gold. Standing by was a stately knight, richly dressed. Ewaine advanced and saluted him; and he courteously returned the greeting, and led him into the castle. There, in a splendid hall, were four and twenty damsels working at embroidery and tapestry, and they were the fairest women Ewaine had ever beheld. As soon as the lord and his guest entered, six of the damsels advanced and took charge of Ewaine's horse; six others relieved him of his armour, which they proceeded to clean; the third six prepared a banquet; while the others brought to the guest rich attire in place of his travel-soiled garments. Then all sat down to the banquet, which was the most splendid that Ewaine had ever partaken of. After they had eaten, the knight informed the lord of the castle that he had come to achieve the adventure of a certain wonderful fountain, where was a knight in black armour. The lord smiled, and said that the quest would not end to his advantage; but as Sir Ewaine persisted, he said:—

“Sleep here to-night, and to-morrow rise early, and take the road upward through the valley till you come to a wood. A little way within the wood you will find a road branching off to the right; and this you must follow till you come to a great glade with a mound in the centre. On the top of the mound you will see a black man of great stature, who will show you the way to the fountain.”

Ewaine thanked the lord for his courtesy, and on the next day he set out according to the instruction which had been given him. In due time he arrived at the wood, which he found to be swarming with all kinds of wild animals, in such numbers as he had never before beheld. When he came to the mound, there sat the black man on the top of it. He was of vast bulk, and exceedingly ill-favoured, for he had but one eye in the middle of his forehead. In his hand he held an iron club, which would have been a burden for four strong knights. He said nothing to Ewaine, but looked at him steadfastly. Then said Ewaine, “Hast thou any power over all these animals that I see about thee?”

“That shalt thou soon see, little man,” answered the black; and he raised his club and smote a stag that was feeding near him, so that it cried out vehemently. Immediately all the animals in the wood crowded round the black man, in such numbers that Ewaine could scarce find room to stand in the glade. Then their master bade them go and feed; and straightway they bowed their heads to him in homage and dispersed. Ewaine now asked of him the way to the fountain.

“Take,” he answered, “the path that leads to the head of the glade, and ascend the wooded steep to its summit. There thou wilt find a large open space, and in the midst a tall tree with thick spreading branches. Under this tree is the fountain; and by its side a marble slab, on which is a silver bowl fastened by a chain of silver. If thou wouldst prove the adventure of the fountain, take the bowl and throw some water on the slab.”

Ewaine went up the steep as the black man had told him, and came to the fountain. There he took the bowl and cast some water on the slab; and immediately there came the loudest burst of thunder he had ever heard, as though heaven and earth were meeting. Then followed a terrible shower of hail, the stones of which were so large and so many that no man nor beast could have endured them unprotected and lived. Ewaine sheltered himself and his horse as well as he could under the tree with his shield. When he looked on the tree, not a leaf was left upon it; but the sky became clear, and a flight of birds came to the tree and sang a strain of such ravishing sweetness as the knight had never heard before. While he was listening to it, he heard a voice that cried to him, “O knight, what has brought thee hither? What evil have I done to thee, that thou shouldst act toward me and my possessions as thou hast done to-day? Dost thou

not know that the shower has left in my dominions neither man nor beast alive that was exposed to it?" Then Ewaine looked forth and beheld approaching a knight clad in black velvet, armed in black armour, and riding a coal-black horse. The two encountered with great force, and both broke their spears without losing their saddles. Then they drew their swords and fought some time, till at last Ewaine smote the black knight so hard on the helm that the sword cut through his skull to the very brain. The black knight felt that he had received a mortal wound, and fled; and Ewaine followed hard after him. Presently they came to a great castle. The fleeing knight entered through the gate, but the portcullis was let fall upon Ewaine, and it struck his horse just behind the saddle, cutting him in two, and striking off the rowels of the knight's spurs. Then was Ewaine shut in between the two gates, and he knew not what to do. But through an aperture in the gate he could see a street with a row of houses on each side. There came to the gate a maiden, richly clad, who desired him to open it.

"Heaven knows, fair lady," said he, "it is no more possible for me to open the gate than it is for thee to set me free."

"Truly," she answered, "I will do what I can to release thee, for thou art a full gallant knight." She passed to him through the aperture a ring, and said, "Take this ring, and put it on thy finger with the stone inside thy hand; and so long as thou concealest it, it will conceal thee. When they have consulted together, they will come forward to seize thee in order to put thee to death; but they will not be able to find thee. I will wait within, and thou wilt be able to see me, though I cannot see thee; therefore come and place thy hand on my shoulder, and accompany me where I shall go."

Ewaine did all as the damsel had told him. The people of the castle came presently and opened the gate to seize him; and when they could find nothing but the half of his horse, they were sorely grieved. But Ewaine went to the maiden and put his hand on her shoulder, and she led him to a large and beautiful chamber that was richly adorned. There she served him with delicious food in vessels of gold and silver. While Ewaine was eating, he heard a great clamour in the castle, and asked the cause of it.

"The lord of this castle has just died," answered the maiden. Then she prepared for him a noble couch, on which he lay down and slept all night. In the morning he was awakened by a loud sound of wailing. "Wherefore is this outcry?" he asked.

"They are carrying the body of the dead lord to the place of burial," answered the damsel. Then Ewaine rose and looked out of the window. In the street he beheld an immense crowd of armed men and of women in rich attire, and in the

midst of the throng was a bier, on which lay the body of the knight he had slain. Behind it walked a lady with long yellow hair that fell over her shoulders, and her dress of yellow satin was all rent; she smote her hands together, and wailed bitterly. She was the fairest lady Ewaine had ever seen, and as soon as he beheld her he became inflamed with love for her. He inquired of the maiden who the lady was.

“She is my mistress, and one of the fairest and most noble of women. She is called the Countess of the Fountain; and the knight whom thou didst slay yesterday was her husband.”

“Verily,” said Ewaine, “she is the woman that I love best in all the world.”

“Then,” said the damsel, “she shall also love thee not a little.”

So after she had waited on Ewaine when he broke his fast, she bade him lie on the couch and sleep and she would go and woo for him. Then she shut the door of the chamber after her and went straight to the castle. There was nothing but mourning and sorrow, and the countess in her chamber could not bear the sight of any one through grief. The damsel, whose name was Luned, and who was a favourite attendant of the countess, went in and saluted her; but the countess sharply reproached her for not mourning as all the rest did.

“Truly,” said Luned, “I thought thy good sense was greater than I find it to be. Is it well for thee to mourn for that good man, or for anything else that thou canst not have?”

“I declare solemnly,” said the countess, “that in the whole world there is not a man equal to him!”

“Not so,” answered Luned; “an ill-favoured man that is alive is now as good as or better than he.”

At this the countess was exceedingly wrathful, and declared to Luned that she would banish her. Luned replied that the only cause for it was her desire to render her a service of which she stood in need; and she was going away affecting great anger, when the countess called her back.

“In truth,” said she, “evil is thy disposition; but if thou knowest what is to my advantage, declare it to me.”

“That will I,” quoth Luned. “Thou knowest that unless thou canst defend the fountain thou canst not maintain thy dominions; and no one can defend the fountain except a knight of King Arthur’s court. Now will I go thither, and ill betide me if I return hence without a warrior who can guard the fountain as well or better than he who kept it formerly.”

“That will be hard to perform,” said the countess. “Go, however, and make proof of that which thou hast promised.”

Luned accordingly set out under pretence of going to the court; but in reality she only returned to the chamber where she had left Ewaine, and remained there with him as long as it would have taken her to go to Caerleon and return again. Then she went again to the countess, who asked her what news she brought from the court.

“I bring you the best of news,” said Luned, “for I have compassed the object of my mission. When shall I present to you the knight who has accompanied me hither?”

The countess appointed the next day at noon for the interview; and at that time, accordingly, Luned conducted Ewaine, for whom she had provided suitable attire, to the chamber of the lady, who gazed steadfastly upon him, and said, “Luned, this knight has not the look of a traveller.”

“What harm is there in that, lady?” answered Luned boldly, as was her wont.

“I am certain that he it was, and no other, who conquered and slew my lord.”

“So much the better for thee,” returned Luned; “for had he not been stronger than thy lord he could not have slain him. For what is past there is no remedy.”

Ewaine feared for what would come next, for as he gazed on the countess his passion had grown greater than before. But not unmoved had she herself looked upon the comely knight.

“Go back to thine abode,” she said to Luned, “and I will take counsel.”

The next day she assembled all the chief men among her subjects, and showed them that her dominions could not be defended except by some knight of great prowess. “Therefore,” she said, “if you can choose such an one from among yourselves, let him take me; and if not, give your consent that I should take a husband from elsewhere to defend my dominions.”

They came to the determination that it would be better for the countess to marry some one from elsewhere; and thereupon she caused her nuptials with Ewaine to be straightway solemnized; and the men of the earldom did him homage. He defended the fountain against all comers, and for three years he reigned in that country, and was much beloved by his subjects.



FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

At the end of that time King Arthur, who had grown very uneasy because of Ewaines protracted absence, set out with many knights to the Valley of the Fountain to find what had become of him. They were all entertained as nobly as Ewaine himself had been by the knight who dwelt in the stately castle with the twenty-four damsels. The next day they went forward to the place of the fountain; and there Sir Kay, with the king's permission; undertook the adventure, and threw the water on the marble slab. After the thunder and the hail-storm, came a knight in black armour, who encountered Sir Kay and easily overthrew him. Then Arthur and his company encamped on the plain, and the next day Sir Kay, who was not satisfied with his first repulse, again challenged the knight, who this time not only unhorsed him, but wounded him severely. Thereafter all the knights the king had brought with him, except Sir Gawaine, successively encountered the black knight, and were all overthrown one after another. Then at last Gawaine met him, but he did not carry his own shield. For two days the two met and fought on horseback with spears, and neither could gain the advantage. On the third day they fought with increased fury, and both were unseated. Then they fell to with their swords, and struck many terrible blows. At last a blow from Ewaine turned Sir Gawaines helm on one side, so that his face could be seen. "Ah!" cried Ewaine, "I knew thee not for my cousin, because thou hadst not thine own shield. Take my sword, for thou hast conquered." But Gawaine said that Ewaine was the victor, and they disputed this till the king decided that neither had vanquished the other. Then they embraced, and Arthur and his knights were exceedingly rejoiced to see Sir Ewaine once more. He led them all to the Castle of the Fountain, where they were splendidly entertained for three months.

After that King Arthur returned to his own dominions, and he entreated the countess to permit Ewaine to go with him for three months. She assented, though it was very painful to her. But when Ewaine was once more among his kindred and friends, he forgot all about his lady and his territory, and remained about three years instead of three months!

Now one day, as Ewaine was sitting in the hall of the king's palace at Caerleon, there came in a damsel riding on a bay horse; and she dismounted and went up to him, and took the ring off his finger. "Thus," said she, "should be treated the deceiver, the traitor, the faithless, the disgraced." Then she got on her

horse again and departed. But Ewaine suddenly remembered the countess, and how he had deserted her; and his mind was so filled with shame and sorrow that he well-nigh lost his reason. He wandered away from Caerleon into wild and desert places, and remained there till his apparel wore out, and his hair and beard grew long, and his body was sore wasted. And as he wandered, he came to a fair park belonging to the countess whom he had deserted. There he lay down by a small lake; and he was so weak that he became insensible. It happened that the countess came forth with her maidens to walk in the park, and they saw him lying there. They saw that life was still in him; and the countess went back to her palace, and gave to one of her maidens a flask containing precious ointment. "Go," said she, "with this balsam and a horse and clothing to that man who lieth in the park, and anoint him with the balsam near the heart. If there is life in him, he will arise; and then watch what he will do."

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FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

The maiden obeyed, and poured the whole of the balsam upon Ewaine; then she withdrew a little-and watched. Soon he rose up and looked at his person, and became ashamed of the unseemliness of his appearance; so he clothed himself, and with some difficulty mounted on the horse. Then the damsel saluted him; and he asked her what land that was. "Truly," she said, "it belongs to a widowed countess. At the death of her husband she had two earldoms, but now this park and castle are all that are left to her, the rest having been taken from her by a young earl, her neighbour, because she refused to become his wife."

"That is pity," said Ewaine. Then she led him to the castle, and took him to a pleasant chamber, where she waited on him till he was quite recovered; and in three months he had become more mighty and more comely than ever he was before. One day he heard a great tumult outside the castle walls, and he asked the maiden what was the cause.

"The earl of whom I spoke to thee," she said, "has come before the castle with a numerous army to subdue the countess." Then Ewaine asked her to obtain for him from the countess the loan of a horse and arms; and when he had got them he went forth, and penetrated the hostile army till he came to the earl himself, whom he dragged out of his saddle, and carried him off, in spite of all the efforts

of his knights, to the castle. Then he took him to the countess, and threw him down before her, and said, "Behold, here is a gift in requital for thy precious balsam."

Then the earl restored to the countess all that he had taken from her; and as a ransom for his life he gave her the half of his own dominions, and much gold and silver. After that Ewaine took his departure; and as he rode through a wood he heard a loud yelling, which was repeated a second and third time. He went to the spot whence the sound proceeded, and came to a huge craggy mound, whereon a black lion and a horrible serpent were fighting. Ewaine drew his sword and smote the serpent in twain. Then he continued on his way; but the lion followed him, and played about him as though it had been a hound. Thus they journeyed on together. When it was time to rest for the night, Ewaine dismounted, turned his horse loose to graze, and kindled a fire; and the lion, having left him, presently returned with a large roebuck, which it threw down before him. Ewaine roasted some of the flesh for himself, and the rest of it he gave to the lion. While he was eating, he heard a deep sigh that seemed to come from within a rock near at hand. He called out to know whether the sigh proceeded from a mortal; and a voice answered that it did. "Who art thou?" asked Ewaine.

"I am," said the voice, "Luned, the handmaiden to the Countess of the Fountain. I am imprisoned here on account of the knight that came from King Arthur's court and married the countess. He was the friend I loved most in the world; and after he had departed, two of the knights of the court traduced him. I told them that they two were not a match for him alone. So they have imprisoned me in this stone vault; and I am to be put to death if he come not to deliver me by a certain day, which is no further off than the day after to-morrow. I have no one to seek him for me. His name is Ewaine, the son of King Urience."

"Art thou certain that if he knew all this the knight would come to rescue thee?" asked Ewaine.

"I am most certain of it," she answered.

In the morning Ewaine asked the damsel if there were any place near where he could get lodging. She directed him to an earl's castle near. Thither he went, and the lion with him; and at the castle was he right nobly entertained. But he found the earl and everybody else in the castle exceedingly sorrowful; so he asked the reason.

"I have two sons," said the earl, "and yesterday they went to the mountains to hunt. Now there is on the mountain a horrible giant that kills men and devours

them, and he seized my sons. To-morrow he has fixed an hour to be here; and he threatens that he will then slay my sons before my eyes, unless I will deliver into his hands my only daughter, whom you see here." The maiden sat beside her father; and she was exceedingly fair, but very sorrowful.

Ewaine said that was very lamentable, and then talked of other matters. The next morning there was a great clamour, which was caused by the coming of the giant with the two youths. Then Ewaine put on his armour, and went forth to attack the giant; and his lion went with him. When the giant saw that Ewaine was armed, he rushed fiercely upon him; and the lion fought against the giant more strongly even than Ewaine did "Truly," said the giant, "I could deal easily with thee were it not for this lion that is with thee." Upon that, Ewaine took the lion back to the castle and shut the gate upon him, and then returned to fight the giant as before. The lion roared furiously, and climbed up till he got to the top of the castle, and then sprung down from the wall, and rushed again upon the giant, giving him a stroke with his paw that tore him from the shoulder to the hip, so that he fell down dead. Then Ewaine restored the two youths to their father.

The earl besought Ewaine to remain with him, but he would not, and set forth to the place where Luned was imprisoned in the stone vault. When he came there he found a great fire kindled, and the two knights were leading the maiden to cast her into it. Ewaine asked what charge they had against her; and they told him of the compact that there was between-them. Then, without making himself known, he proffered himself to do battle for her in place of Ewaine; and the knights assented. They attacked Ewaine, and, inasmuch as he had not his usual strength, he was sore beset by them; but his lion fell upon them and put them to the worse. So thus was Luned saved from being burned. And Ewaine returned with her to the dominions of the Countess of the Fountain; and thence he took the countess with him to the court of King Arthur, where they lived afterwards in great happiness and renown.

CHAPTER XIII. THE TOURNAMENT OF LONAZEP.

WHILE Tristram was with La Beale Isoude at Joyous Gard, he often rode hunting, of which pastime he was exceedingly fond; and by Isoude's advice he always rode armed. One day as he was returning from the chase, with his helm on, he met Sir Dinadan, who had come into that country to seek him. Sir Dinadan told his name; but Sir Tristram would not, at which Sir Dinadan was angry, and reproached him; and at last said that he must either tell his name or do battle. Tristram would do neither; so then Dinadan chid him for a coward. As they talked there came by a knight, Sir Epinogris, and Dinadan challenged him to joust. Sir Epinogris was nothing loath, and when they ran together he smote Sir Dinadan out of his saddle.

"How is it with you now?" said Tristram.

"Fie upon thee, coward," cried Dinadan. "If thou be anything of a knight, avenge my shame."

"Nay," answered Sir Tristram. "I will not joust at this time; but take your horse and let us go from hence."

"God defend me," said Dinadan, "from thy fellowship, for I have not sped well since I met thee."

"Well," said Tristram, "peradventure I could give you tidings of Sir Tristram."

"I will not believe," answered Dinadan, "that Sir Tristram would ever be in thy company; if he were, he were so much the worse."

And so they parted; and Tristram rode home to Joyous Gard, where he alighted and unarmed him. He told Isoude of his meeting with Sir Dinadan, and how he was full of mirth, and the best companion among all knights. "Why have you not brought him with you?" asked Isoude.

"Do not be afraid," said Sir Tristram. "He has only come here to seek me, and I guess we shall soon hear of him."

Even as he spoke, one of the servants in the castle came to tell Sir Tristram that an errant-knight had come to the castle seeking lodging; and by the device of his shield Tristram knew it was Sir Dinadan. So Tristram bade Isoude send for him, saying that he would himself keep out of sight; and he told his lady that if

she spoke in praise of lovers, against whom Sir Dinadan ever railed, she would have great diversion. Dinadan was accordingly welcomed to the castle, and when he was brought to Isoude, she questioned him as to his name, and whence he came, and wherefore he rode in that country. He told her all she would know. Then she led the talk to lovers, and he railed greatly against them. "Now, I pray you," said she, "to tell me, will you fight for my love against three knights that have done me great wrong? Inasmuch as you be a knight of King Arthur's court, I require you to undertake this battle for me."

"Madam," answered Dinadan, "I will say plainly to you that though you are the fairest lady I ever saw, and much fairer than is my lady Queen Guenever, yet will I not fight for you or for any other against three knights." So Isoude laughed heartily at him; and they had pleasant diversion together. In the morning Tristram armed him early, to ride to Lonazep, where a great tournament had been appointed, to which knights were coming from all parts; and he promised to meet with Sir Dinadan on the way, and ride with him. Afterwards Sir Dinadan departed, and in a while he overtook Sir Tristram.

"Ah!" said he, "art thou that coward knight with whom I met yesterday? Make ready; for thou shalt joust with me whether thou wilt or not."

"To that I am loath," answered Tristram; and so they ran together. But Tristram missed him purposely, and he broke his spear on Tristram. Then he drew out his sword; but Tristram refused to fight with swords.

"Well," cried Dinadan, "thou art as goodly and large a man as ever I saw; but a greater coward I never met. What wilt thou do with those great spears thou hast with thee?"—for Tristram's squires were bearing spears for his use at the tournament.

"I shall give them," said Tristram, "to some good knight when I come to the tournament; and if I see you do the best, I will give them to you."

As they rode on together and talked, they saw in the way a knight that stood ready to joust.

"Do thou meet him," said Tristram. "I will not, for he seems to me to be a shrewish knight."

"Shame on thee!" answered Dinadan.

However, he encountered with the knight, who smote him clean out of his saddle. Then Sir Dinadan rose to his feet very angry, and challenged the other to fight on foot.

"What is thy name?" asked the knight.

“Wit you well, I am Sir Dinadan.”

“And I am Sir Gareth, brother to Sir Gawaine.”

Then were both glad of the meeting, for Sir Gareth was the best knight of his kin, and was greatly loved of all true knights; so there was no more talk of fighting. But as Dinadan and Gareth rode together, they spoke of Tristram, and of his great cowardice (for they knew him not); and he heard all they said, but only laughed at them. Presently they overtook another knight, who wished to joust.

“Let one of you encounter with that knight,” said Tristram, “for I will not have to deal with him.”

“Then I will,” said Gareth.

So they ran together, and the stranger knight smote Sir Gareth over his horse’s croup.

“Now,” quoth Tristram to Sir Dinadan, “do thou avenge that good knight Sir Gareth.”

“That will I not,” answered Dinadan; “for the stranger hath stricken down a much stronger knight than I am.”

“Ah,” said Sir Tristram, “now, Sir Dinadan, I perceive that your heart begins to fail you; so you shall see what I can do.” Then he rode to the other knight, and, when they met, smote him clean out of his saddle. Then Sir Dinadan marvelled who this man might be that he thought such a coward. But the knight that was overthrown drew his sword, and demanded to fight on foot.

“What is your name?” asked Tristram.

“Sir,” answered the other, “my name is Palomides.”

“What knight do you most hate?” then said Tristram.

“Sir Knight,” said Sir Palomides, “I hate Sir Tristram to the death; and if we meet, then one of us shall die.”

“Then,” answered Tristram, “you may know that I am Sir Tristram; and so now do your worst.”

When Sir Palomides heard that, he was astonished; and he begged Sir Tristram to forgive his evil words, and promised ever to serve him knightly. So they were friends, and all four rode on together; but Sir Dinadan complained of the manner in which Sir Tristram had mocked him. As they went, Sir Palomides told of a shameful deed that had been wrought by Sir Gawaine and his brothers Gaheris, Agravaine, and Mordred. They had ever had ill-will to King Pellinore and all his kin, because King Pellinore had killed in battle their father King Lot,

and they had many years before compassed the death of King Pellinore. But even this vengeance had not satisfied them; and they had lately beset Sir Lamoracke de Galis, his son, as he was riding alone from a tournament, and had killed him feloniously, giving him his death-wound from behind. Of this deed Sir Tristram and the others spoke strongly in blame; and Sir Gareth, though he was the brother of those who had done it, said as much as any of the others, declaring that because of that murder he should never love his brethren or keep fellowship with them.

The four knights went back again together to Joyous Gard, because the day of the tournament was not yet come, and there they had good cheer together. After some days they set out for Lonazep, and Queen Isoude rode with them, richly attired, to see the tournament. As they went along they saw a large body of knights: it was Sir Galihodin, who had twenty knights with him. When Sir Galihodin beheld Tristram and his party, he said,—

“Fair fellows, yonder ride four knights and a beautiful lady. I am disposed to take their lady from them.”

So he sent a squire to Sir Tristram to ask whether he and his fellows would joust or deliver up their lady.

“Tell your lord,” answered Tristram, “to come with as many as he will, and win her and take her.”

“Sir,” said Palomides, “I pray you to let me have this adventure.”

“With all my heart,” said Sir Tristram.

Then Sir Galihodin and three of his fellows approached them; but Sir Palomides, with one spear, unhorsed all of them. When the rest of Sir Galihodin’s knights saw his downfall, six more of them came, and would have set on Sir Palomides; but he stood still and awaited them; and Sir Galihodin forbade them to meddle with him; so, as Sir Palomides saw that they would joust no more, he returned to Tristram and the others.

“Right well and worshipfully have you done,” said Tristram, “as a good knight should.”

Presently they fell in with four knights more—Sir Gawaine, Sir Ewaine, Sir Sagamore le Desirous, and Sir Dodinas le Savage. Now, Sir Palomides was eager to prove himself a good knight before Queen Isoude, and he begged Sir Tristram that if these knights sought to joust they also might be left to him. Sir Tristram again assented. So Sir Palomides rode forward, encountered the four knights one after another, and smote them all to the ground. After that, they rode on quietly to Lonazep; and there Sir Tristram had two pavilions pitched beside a

well and he and his company abode in them.

At and about the castle of Lonazep were gathered a noble assembly of knights and kings. King Arthur was there, with the most of the Knights of the Round Table; and on the other side the kings of Scotland, Ireland, Surluse, Northumberland, Listenoise, Northgalis, and others, with their knights.

Sir Tristram and the three knights who were with him went in green colours; and when the pavilions had been pitched, Sir Tristram and Sir Dinadan rode into Lonazep to hear what might be doing there, and Sir Tristram rode Sir Palomides' horse, which was white. Sir Gawaine and Sir Galihodin saw him, and they thought it was the same knight who had stricken them down; and so they told King Arthur that that knight on the white horse had unhorsed them and six of their fellows. Thereupon King Arthur sent for Sir Tristram, and asked him his name; but Tristram would not tell it.

"Upon what side will you be in the tournament?" asked the king.

"Truly," replied Sir Tristram, "I cannot tell that till I come to the field, and then I will go on the side to which my heart inclineth."

So then he and Sir Dinadan rode again to their pavilions.

"Now, upon what party," said Sir Tristram, "shall we be to-morrow?"

"Sir," said Palomides, "if you will take my advice, we shall be against King Arthur, for on his part will be Sir Lancelot and many other good knights; and the more worshipful they, the more worship shall we win."

"That is full knightly spoken," said Tristram; "and we will do according to your counsel."

So the next morning the four knights rode into the field, arrayed with trappings, shields, and spears of green; and Queen Isoude sat at a high window where she could see the jousts. The knights went straight to the party of the King of Scotland. When King Arthur saw them do that, he asked Sir Lancelot who they were.

"I do not certainly know," answered Lancelot; "but I should guess that Sir Tristram and Sir Palomides are among them."

Two knights that were brothers, named Sir Edward and Sir Sadocke, asked leave of King Arthur to have the first jousts; and straightway they met the kings of Scotland and Northgalis, and smote them from their saddles. At that was Sir Palomides wroth, and he rode first against Sir Edward and then against Sir Sadocke, and with the same spear he overthrew them both. Then came in Sir Tristram on a black horse, and ere he stinted he smote down with one spear four

good knights; and Sir Gareth and Sir Dinadan supported him manfully.

“By my head!” cried King Arthur, “that knight on the black horse does marvellously well.”

“Wait a little,” said Gawaine; “that knight has scarcely yet begun.”

And Sir Tristram remounted the kings of Scotland and North-galis, and then he pressed in among the knights of the opposite party, and smote with his spear and his sword to the right and left, till he had struck down thirty knights, and Sir Palomides twenty; and most of these were proved knights of King Arthur’s court.

“As I live,” said the king to Lancelot, “it is a great shame to see those two smite down so many knights of mine. Therefore make you ready, for we will have to do with them.”

“Sir,” said Sir Lancelot, “they are two passing good knights, and it will be little worship to us to have to do with them now, for they have this day had sore travail.”

“Nevertheless,” answered King Arthur, “I will be avenged. Therefore take Sir Bleoberis and Sir Ector, and I will be the fourth, to do with them and the other two that ride with them.”

“Sir,” said Lancelot, “you shall find us ready.”

So the four rode into the field; and there Sir Lancelot smote down Sir Tristram, and Sir Bleoberis Sir Palomides, and Sir Ector Sir Gareth, and King Arthur overthrew Sir Dinadan. Then there was a great cry that the four green knights had a fall; and the King of Northgalis, remembering how Sir Tristram had helped him, rode straight to him and said,—

“Noble knight, I know not who thou art; but for the great deeds thou hast done this day take now my horse, and I will help myself as well as I can; for God knows thou art better worthy to have my horse than I myself.”

“Sir,” said Tristram, “I thank you; and mayhap I shall be able to requite your courtesy.”

Then Sir Tristram mounted and rode to King Arthur, and gave him with his sword such a buffet on the helm that he fell from his saddle. Then Sir Tristram gave the king’s horse to the King of Northgalis. There was a great press about King Arthur to horse him again; but Sir Palomides would not suffer it, but smote with his sword to the right and left mightily. Then, leaving Sir Palomides still on foot, Sir Tristram rode through the thickest of the press, smiting down many knights as he went, and passed to his pavilion. There he changed his horse, and

put on red harness; and then he dashed lightly into the field again, and overthrew five knights with a single spear. Very soon he had again horsed Sir Palomides, Sir Gareth, and Sir Dinadan; and they again began to do marvellous deeds of arms; but they knew not who had succoured them, because Tristram had changed his armour. Now La Beale Isoude, who had watched Sir Tristram quit the field and return again, was well pleased when she saw him doing such great deeds, and she smiled as she sat at the window. It chanced that Sir Palomides looked up and saw her, and he was so rejoiced—because his love for her was still unabated—that he felt as though he could have overcome any knight, even Sir Lancelot or Sir Tristram himself. And he did so mightily that all men marvelled at his deeds; for he fared like a lion, and no knight could withstand him.

“By our Lady,” quoth Sir Tristram to Sir Dinadan, “I always knew Sir Palomides for a good knight, but never before have I seen him do so well.”

“It is his day,” answered Dinadan.

But he had seen how Palomides looked up at Isoude, and he said to himself that if Tristram knew for whose love he wrought these great achievements he would not be so well pleased. But all that were in the field gave Sir Palomides the prize. Just then came in Sir Lancelot, and when he heard the cry that Sir Palomides had done best, he got a great spear and rode against him. But Sir Palomides smote the spear with his sword and struck it in twain; and then, as he rode past Sir Lancelot, he struck at his horse and slew it, so that Sir Lancelot fell to the ground.

Then was there a loud outcry, and many knights said that Sir Palomides had acted contrary to the rules of the tournament. When Sir Ector de Maris saw how his brother Sir Lancelot had fared, he rode eagerly against Sir Palomides, and smote him out of his saddle. Then came Sir Lancelot with his sword to Sir Palomides and cried,—

“Thou hast this day done me the greatest despite that ever was done me in tournament or joust. Therefore defend thee, for I will be avenged.”

So Sir Palomides entreated him to forgive his unkindness, and to spare him; “for,” said he, “I know well I have not might to withstand you; and if you put me from my worship now, you put me from the greatest worship I ever had or shall have.”

“Well,” said Lancelot, “it is true that you have done marvellously well this day; and I have a guess for whose love it is. If my lady were here, you should not have borne away the worship; but as she is not here, you shall have it for me, and I will forbear you. But beware that your love be not discovered, for if Sir

Tristram knew it, you would have cause to repent.”

So he, of his great nobleness, suffered Palomides to depart. Then Sir Lancelot was remounted, in spite of all the knights of the other side, and did great feats on King Arthur’s part, as Sir Tristram and Sir Palomides did on the other. But Sir Lancelot and Sir Tristram always spared one another. But when the tournament was ended for the day, King Arthur and all the kings gave Sir Palomides the prize, for he had begun at the first and had endured to the end. When King Arthur was praising Sir Palomides, Sir Lancelot said,—

“Sir, as for Palomides, he has this day well deserved the prize; and yet, there was on the field a far better knight than he, and that will be proved before the tournament is over.”

When Sir Tristram and his fellows returned to their pavilions, Sir Dinadan was angry because Sir Tristram had let Sir Palomides carry off the prize, and he reproached him with intent to provoke him, so that he might the next day put forth all his powers. Early the next morning Sir Tristram, Sir Palomides, Sir Gareth, and Queen Isoude rode out into the forest to take the fresh air; and as they went, it chanced that King Arthur and Sir Lancelot came near them. “Yonder,” said Sir Lancelot, “rideth the fairest lady in all the world except my lady Queen Guenever.”

“Who is it?” asked King Arthur: and when Lancelot told him, he said he would go nearer and greet Queen Isoude.

“Sir,” said Lancelot, “it is not wise to go too near, for there are with her two as good knights as any now living, and if we come suddenly upon them, they may be displeased.”

“As for that,” replied the king, “I will greet her, for I care not who may be displeased.”

“Sir,” said Lancelot, “you put yourself in great jeopardy.”

“Well,” quoth the king, “we will take the adventure.” So he rode straight to Queen Isoude, and saluted her, and said, “God save you, gracious lady.”

“Sir,” she answered, “you are welcome.”

Then the king looked at her steadfastly, and admired her beauty. With that came Sir Palomides, and said, “Thou uncourteous knight, what seekest thou here? Thou art uncourteous to come upon a lady so suddenly; therefore withdraw thee.” King Arthur took no heed of his words, but still looked on Queen Isoude. Then was Sir Palomides wroth, and he rode against King Arthur with his spear, and smote him from his horse. When Sir Lancelot saw that, he said to himself, “I

am loath to have to do with yonder knight, not for his own sake, but because of Sir Tristram; for if I smite down Sir Palomides, I must encounter Sir Tristram, and I cannot match them both. Still, whether I live or die, needs must I avenge my lord." And then he bade Sir Palomides make ready, and when they rode together, he gave him a great fall. That saw Sir Tristram, and cried to Lancelot, "Sir Knight, keep thee, for I must joust with thee."

"I have no fear to joust with thee," answered Lancelot, "but I am loath to do it. I was compelled to avenge my lord, when he was unhorsed unwarily and unknighly; but though I have done so, you should take no displeasure, for he is such a friend to me that I could not see him shamed."

Then Sir Tristram understood that it was Sir Lancelot who spoke, and he suspected that it was King Arthur whom Palomides had struck down. So he put down his spear, and suffered Lancelot and the king to withdraw; and he chid Sir Palomides sharply for having shown such discourtesy to King Arthur. Sir Palomides was sore grieved at his words; and when the tournament began, he forsook Sir Tristram, and went against him to the opposite party. There he did great deeds of arms, and Sir Tristram marvelled that he had gone against him, and said to Gareth, "He is weary of my company."

"Sir," answered Gareth, "he desires to win worship and honour from you. That Sir Dinadan saw yesterday, and it was for that reason that he reproached you yesternight; for he loveth you better than any other knight in the world, and he wished to stir you up to win worship."

"I may well believe you," said Tristram; "and since I now understand Palomides' evil will and envy, you shall see how long his worship shall endure." With that he went into the press, and did so mightily that all the cry forsook Sir Palomides and followed Sir Tristram; for he smote down forty knights with his spear, and many others with his sword.

"How now?" said Sir Lancelot to King Arthur. "I told you that this day a better knight than Sir Palomides should play his part. See how well yonder knight is doing; he has both strength and wind."

"You say truth," answered the king: "I never saw a better knight. He far surpasses Palomides."

"It needs must be so," said Lancelot, "for it is the noble knight Sir Tristram himself."

When Palomides saw Sir Tristram doing so well, he wept from pure anger, for he knew that if Sir Tristram put forth his might he himself should get little worship. In a while Sir Tristram left the field, and went to his pavilions, where

he found Sir Dinadan still sleeping in his bed; and he woke him up, and bade him come to the field. Sir Dinadan rose up and armed him; but when he looked on Tristram's shield and helm, and saw there the dints of many blows, he said, "Well was it for me that I slept; for had I been with you, I must for shame have followed you, and I see by the marks on your shield that I should have been well beaten."

"Leave your japes," said Tristram, "and come with me." Then he changed his harness, and put on black armour.

"Ah," said Dinadan; "have you plucked up your spirits? You are not in the same mood you were in yesterday."

Sir Tristram only smiled, and bade Dinadan come with him.

Now Sir Palomides saw Tristram change his armour, and so did Queen Isoude. And Palomides thought to do Tristram a shame. So he changed his own armour with a wounded knight that was sitting by a well near the field, and then returned again to the tournament. This also Queen Isoude saw, but none of the knights in the field knew of it. Then Sir Palomides met Tristram, and both broke their spears, and after that they fought with their swords. Sir Tristram wondered who the other knight might be, for he felt that he was passing strong; and each gave the other many sore strokes. Then came in Sir Lancelot; and there came knights to him, and begged him to undertake the battle with the knight in black armour, because he had almost overcome the good knight with the silver shield,—which was Sir Palomides. Sir Lancelot knew not Sir Tristram, because he had changed his armour; so he rode between Tristram and Palomides, and said to Palomides, "Sir, let me have the battle, because you have need of rest." Sir Palomides assented gladly, for he knew Sir Lancelot well, and hoped that he might beat or shame Sir Tristram. Sir Tristram also knew Sir Lancelot, but he met him full knightly, and they fought long and sorely together; and Queen Isoude well-nigh swooned for sorrow. Then said Sir Dinadan to Sir Gareth,—

"That knight in the black harness is Sir Tristram, and Sir Lancelot must needs get the better of him, for Sir Tristram hath had sore travail this day."

"Then let us smite him down," said Sir Gareth.

"It were better we should do so than that Sir Tristram should be shamed," answered Dinadan, "for yonder there waits the strong knight with the silver shield, ready to fall on Sir Tristram if need be."

Then forthwith Sir Gareth rushed on Sir Lancelot, and gave him such a stroke on the helm that he was well-nigh stunned; and immediately Sir Dinadan came upon him from the other side with a great spear, and smote him such a buffet that

he fell to the ground, horse and all.

“For shame!” cried Tristram to Gareth and Dinadan; “why have you smitten down that good knight while he was fighting with me?” Then came in Sir Palomides, and struck Sir Dinadan from his horse; and Sir Lancelot, because Dinadan had smitten him down before, assailed him with his sword. Then Sir Palomides came fresh on Sir Tristram, who, being wishful to help Sir Dinadan, gave Palomides a mighty buffet, and then pulled him from his horse; and he himself leaped lightly down, and went between Lancelot and Dinadan, so that he and Lancelot again did battle together. Straightway Sir Dinadan got Tristram’s horse and brought it to him, and said aloud, so that Lancelot might hear, “My lord Sir Tristram, take your horse.”

“Ah!” cried Sir Lancelot, “what have I done? Now am I dishonoured. Ah, my lord Sir Tristram! why are you disguised? You have put yourself in great peril. But I pray you, noble knight, pardon me; for if I had known you, we should not have done this battle.”

“Sir,” answered Tristram, “this is not the first kindness you have shown me.” Then were they both horsed again; and all the people on King Arthur’s side said that Sir Lancelot had that day done the best, and on the other side that Sir Tristram had done the best. But said Sir Lancelot, “I have no right to the honour, for Sir Tristram has been longer in the field than I, and has smitten down many more knights; and therefore he has won the degree.” And so was it proclaimed.

Then the tournament ended for that day, and Queen Isoude returned to the pavilions, wroth out of measure with Sir Palomides, for she had seen all that he had done; and as Sir Tristram rode to the pavilions with Gareth and Dinadan, Sir Palomides came with them, still disguised in the armour of the wounded knight, and bearing the silver shield. Sir Tristram knew him not for Palomides, and therefore said they had no need of his fellowship; and thereupon Palomides made himself known. Sir Tristram reproached him sorely for what he had done, but he swore that he had not known him because of the changed armour. This excuse Sir Tristram received; but when they came to the tents, and Queen Isoude saw Palomides, she changed colour for anger.

“Madam, wherefore look you so angrily?” asked Sir Tristram.

“My dear lord,” she answered, “how can I be otherwise, when I saw this day how you were betrayed, and well-nigh brought to your death? I will not suffer in my presence such a felon and traitor as this Sir Palomides; for I saw how he watched you quit the field, and then, when he beheld you return, he changed armour with a wounded knight and came against you. For what he could do I

was not greatly afraid, but I dreaded because of Sir Lancelot that knew you not.”

“Madam,” said Palomides, “you may say what you will. I must not contradict you, but by my knighthood, I knew not Sir Tristram.”

“Sir Palomides,” said Tristram, “I will hold you excused; and though you spared me not, all is pardoned on my part.”

Then La Beale Isoude hung down her head, and said no more. But while they sat at their meat, two armed knights came into the pavilion. “Sirs,” said Tristram, “you do not well to come upon us armed at all points.”

“Nay,” said one of them, “we come not with any evil intent, but as friends. I am come to see thee, Sir Tristram, and this knight to see Queen Isoude.”

Then Sir Tristram requested them to take off their helms; and when they did so, they were Sir Lancelot and King Arthur. So they were joyfully welcomed, and there was much merry talk about the tournament and other things.

“For what cause,” said King Arthur, “are you, Sir Tristram, against us? You are a Knight of the Round Table, and of right should be with us.”

“My lord,” said Sir Tristram, “here are Sir Dinadan and your own nephew, Sir Gareth, that have made me be against you.”

“My lord,” quoth Sir Gareth, “though I have the blame, it was Sir Tristram’s own will.”

“And that have we cause to repent,” said Dinadan; “for this unhappy Sir Tristram brought us to the tournament, and many great buffets hath he since earned us.”

At that all laughed mightily. Then said King Arthur to Tristram, “What knight was it that fought so sturdily with you—he with the silver shield?”

“Sir,” answered Tristram, “he is sitting at this table.”

“What?” cried the king. “Was it Sir Palomides?—Ah, sir, that was unknighly of you.”

“Sir,” answered Palomides, “I knew not Sir Tristram, because he was so disguised.”

“That might well be,” said Lancelot, “for I knew him not.”

“It matters not,” said Tristram, “for I have pardoned him, and I should be sorry to lose his fellowship, for I love his company.”

After that they had much pleasant converse together, and not until night did King Arthur and Sir Lancelot take their leave. On the following day, in the tournament, Sir Tristram and Palomides at first went together against King

Arthur's knights, as before, and did passing well. Sir Lancelot came in on King Arthur's side, and great deeds he wrought; but he and his fellows were too few against the other party. When Tristram saw how nobly Arthur's knights bore them, he called Palomides, Gareth, and Dinadan to him, and proposed that they should turn to King Arthur's side. Gareth and Dinadan assented, but Sir Palomides said he would not depart from the side on which he came in.

"That is for my sake," quoth Tristram; and so Sir Palomides left them. And Tristram and the other two went to King Arthur's side, and then they smote down all they met, so that none could withstand them; and King Arthur himself gave Sir Palomides a fall. So the kings who held against King Arthur's were fain to withdraw their knights.

"Alas!" cried Palomides, "now have I lost all the worship I had won;" and he rode to a well, and there put off his armour, and wept and wailed like a woman.

So the tournament was ended, and Sir Tristram would have given the chief prize to Sir Lancelot, and Sir Lancelot to Sir Tristram; but by the award of King Arthur it was divided between them.

Sir Tristram returned with his companions to his pavilions; but as Sir Palomides sat by the well, the kings of Scotland and Northgalis came by, and they got him to put on his armour again, and to ride with them. It chanced that they passed by Sir Tristram's tents, and Sir Palomides rode to the entrance, and cried out, "Sir Tristram de Lyons, where art thou?"

"What, Sir Palomides!" answered Tristram; "will you not come in among us?"

"Fie on thee, traitor!" said Palomides. "If it were daylight, now would I slay thee with mine own hands; and if ever I meet thee, thou shalt die for this day's deed."

"Sir Palomides," replied Tristram, "you blame me wrongly. Had you done as I did, you would have had worship: but since you give me warning, henceforth will I beware of you."

"Fie on thee, traitor," again said Palomides, and then he departed. So he went with the two kings, and Sir Tristram took his way with La Beale Isoude to Joyous Gard.



CHAPTER XIV. THE END OF THE HISTORY OF THE ROUND TABLE, AND THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THE Tournament of Lonazep was the last great gathering of the chivalry of Britain. In no long time after, the good knight Sir Tristram was slain by the crafts of his uncle and old enemy, King Marke of Cornwall. As for the Knights of the Round Table, they were dispersed in the quest of the Holy Grail; which was a vessel that had been brought to Britain a long time before by Joseph of Arimathea with some of the blood of our Lord therein, and had been left in charge of King Pellam, Joseph's descendant. Whoever could partake thereof was made whole of all wounds; but it might not be seen except by a knight that was absolutely pure and clean. Most of the Knights of the Round Table took part in the quest, and some of them, especially Sir Lancelot, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival de Galis, met with marvellous adventures in it; but it was achieved at last by Sir Galahad, the son of Sir Lancelot by Elaine the daughter of King Pellam. As soon as he had achieved the Grail he died, and thereupon the sacred vessel disappeared from this world for ever. Of the other knights that went in the quest, many perished; but afterwards the remnant gathered again about King Arthur, and maintained the Round Table with might, for Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawaine, and other good knights were still left. And Sir Lancelot loved Queen Guenever more than before, and she him; but it chanced that there came some disagreement between them, and she bade him withdraw from the court. So he departed, and went to a hermitage near Windsor, and none save his cousin Sir Bors knew whither he had gone.

Soon afterward Queen Guenever gave a banquet to certain of the Knights of the Round Table, and especially to Sir Gawaine. Now Sir Gawaine was exceedingly fond of all kinds of fruit, and especially of apples and pears, so of these the queen had made large provision. But a knight of the court, named Sir Pinell, hated Sir Gawaine; for he was cousin to Sir Lamoracke de Galis, whom Gawaine and his brethren had slain. With intent to avenge him on Sir Gawaine, he put poison into some of the fairest of the fruit; but it fell out that no one ate the apples he had poisoned save a knight named Sir Patrice, cousin to Sir Mador de la Port; and as soon as he had eaten, the poison was so strong that he died

forthwith. Then was there a great stir among all the knights at the table, for as Queen Guenever had provided the banquet every one had suspicion of her; and she herself was sore abashed, for she did not understand the matter. But Sir Mador de la Port, who was one of the guests, rose up and accused the queen of the death of Sir Patrice; and forasmuch as all the other knights believed her to be guilty, none of them would take up the quarrel on her behalf. Then Guenever burst into weeping, and at last she fell down in a swoon.

News of the matter was soon brought to King Arthur, and he was sore troubled; but being bound by the oaths of knighthood, he appointed a day, fifteen days after that, on which Sir Mador was to be ready, armed, in the meadow beside Winchester, to make good his accusation against the queen; and if no knight appeared on her behalf, or if a knight did appear and was vanquished, then should she be burned in that place. With this Sir Mador was content, and departed. When King Arthur and the queen were alone together, he asked her how the matter had come about.

“Sir,” said she, “as God me help, I know nothing of it.”

“Where is Sir Lancelot?” asked Arthur. “If he were here, he would undertake the battle for you.”

“Sir,” said the queen sorrowfully, for well she knew that she had sent him away from the court, “I cannot tell you where he is, but his kinsmen believe that he is not within this realm.”

“Of that am I sorry,” said the king. “But I counsel you to go to Sir Bors, and pray him to undertake the battle for you for Sir Lancelot’s sake, and I dare affirm that he will not refuse you.” So the queen went to Sir Bors, and entreated him as King Arthur had bidden her. “Ah, madam,” said he, “I may not with any worship have to do in this matter; for I was at the banquet, and if I undertake the battle on your behalf, all the other knights my fellows will suspect me of guilt. Now stand you in need of Sir Lancelot, who would not have failed you, whether in right or wrong. I wonder how you can for very shame require anything of me, after you have so discourteously treated that good knight my cousin.”

“Alas!” cried the queen, and she fell on her knees to Sir Bors, and implored him to have mercy on her; “for,” said she, “if you will not, I must die a shameful death, and I have not deserved it.” Just then came King Arthur, and he also required Sir Bors to undertake the battle for Sir Lancelot’s sake. So then Sir Bors consented to be the queen’s champion, if on the appointed day a better knight than himself did not undertake the battle. The king and queen were greatly comforted; but Sir Bors straightway rode in secret to Sir Lancelot, and told him

what had happened. Said Lancelot: "This has happily come as I would have it. Do you make you ready on the day fixed to do the battle, but delay as long as you can till I come."

This Sir Bors undertook; and on the day set, the king and all the court were gathered in the meadow beside Winchester, where the battle was appointed to be fought. The queen was brought into the place as a prisoner, and there was an iron stake set up, so that if Sir Mador had the better she should be burned forthwith, according to the king's judgment. Then came Sir Mador de la Port, and made oath before the King that Queen Guenever had treasonably slain his cousin Sir Patrice; and that he would maintain with his body against any one that should say the contrary. Forthwith there entered Sir Bors, and he said that Queen Guenever was innocent, and he would prove with his body that she was not guilty of the treason charged against her.

"Then make thee ready," said Sir Mador, "and we shall soon prove whether thou or I be in the right."

"Sir," said Bors, "though I know you for a good knight, I have no doubt that I can withstand you; but I have only undertaken to do this battle if there come not a better knight than I and discharge me of it."

"Thou must either meet me forthwith," said Mador angrily, "or say nay and withdraw."

"Take your horse," said Bors, "and you shall not have to wait long." Then both of them went to their tents, and made them ready; but Sir Bors delayed as long as he could, till Sir Mador rode about the field crying to the queen, "Bid your champion come forth if he dare." Then was Sir Bors ashamed, and took his horse, and came into the lists; but just then he was aware of a strong knight that came fast out of a wood near by on a white horse with a shield of strange device; and this knight requested Sir Bors to retire and let him take the battle. Sir Bors knew well who it was, and so willingly withdrew. Then the king asked the stranger knight if he were willing to undertake the battle.

"Therefore," said he, "came I hither; and it seems to me a shame and dishonour to all you Knights of the Round Table that you should have suffered so noble a lady and courteous a queen as Queen Guenever to be rebuked and shamed among you."

Then all the knights marvelled who the stranger could be; but Sir Mador was impatient, and so he and the other encountered in the midst of the lists, and Sir Mador's spear broke, but Sir Lancelot's held and bore Sir Mador to the ground. Then he drew his sword and challenged the stranger to fight him on foot; and

quickly Sir Lancelot descended. So met they foot to foot, and fought a great battle for more than an hour, for Sir Mador was a passing good knight. But at the last Sir Lancelot smote him down, and then he yielded, and withdrew his accusation against the queen. So was she delivered; and then King Arthur prayed the stranger to take off his helmet. This he did, and all present knew that it was Sir Lancelot. Full joyfully was he greeted, especially by Queen Guenever, who repented her sorely of her unkindness to him. Afterwards, through the contrivance of the damsel of the lake, Nimue, it became known that Sir Pinell had done the deed of which Queen Guenever had been accused, and he fled to his own country; so then Sir Mador prayed the queen to forgive him, and peace was made between them.

On the following Lady-day, King Arthur proclaimed a tournament at Camelot; and thereto was a great gathering of knights from all parts, though many of the best of those who had been at Lonazep were now dead. Queen Guenever would not go, because she said she was sick; and at first Sir Lancelot also excused himself, but the queen told him it were better for him to go, lest there should be suspicion that he stayed behind for her sake. So then he departed, but in ill-humour, and declared that he would be against King Arthur and his fellowship. Now as Sir Lancelot rode, he rested on his way at a castle which was named Astolat, and the knight that dwelt there was called Sir Bernard. He entertained Lancelot courteously, though he knew not his name, but saw by his manner and his many scars that he was a great lord and a well-proved knight. Sir Lancelot said to his host, "Sir, can you lend me a shield with a device which is not known? I would go to the tournament disguised, and my shield is too well known."

Sir Bernard answered, "Sir, you shall have your desire, for you seem a full likely knight. I have two sons, of whom the elder was hurt on the same day he was made knight, so that never since has he been able to ride. His shield shall you bear; and his brother, Sir Lavaine, shall attend you in the field."

At this Sir Lancelot was well pleased. Now the old knight had a daughter that was exceedingly beautiful, so that she was called the Fair Maid of Astolat; and when she saw Sir Lancelot she loved him exceedingly; but his heart was ever set on Queen Guenever, and he returned not the maiden's love. Still, being courteous to all ladies, he was ever gentle with her; and she was so emboldened that she entreated him to wear her token at the tournament.

"Fair damsel," said he, "if I grant you that, I shall have done more for you than I did ever for any lady before." Then he bethought him that he did not wish to be known at the tournament, and that if he bore the damsel's token none

would think it was he; so he granted her request. And she brought him a sleeve of red cloth embroidered with pearls; and he put it on his helm, and gave her his shield to keep for him till he came again for it.

So Lancelot departed to the tournament, and there he did great deeds against King Arthur's knights, and he put back all the fellowship of the Round Table; and Sir Lavaine supported him mightily. But by mischance Sir Bors hurt Sir Lancelot sore with a spear, which went into his side and broke, and the spearhead remained in the wound. Then the tournament ended for the day; and because Sir Lancelot's name was not known, the prize was adjudicated to the knight who wore the red sleeve. But Sir Lancelot suffered so sorely from his wound that he withdrew secretly from the crowd with Sir Lavaine; and when they were come to a quiet place he bade Sir Lavaine draw out the spear-head. When that was done, he bled so much that he swooned away; but at last he recovered so far as to be able to ride to a hermitage near by, where the hermit tended him carefully, and having in old days been himself a knight, he knew him for Sir Lancelot. In the meantime, there was great grief with King Arthur and the knights at Camelot that they could not find the knight with the red sleeve, and all of them dispersed to seek for him. Now it chanced that in the search Sir Gawaine lodged with Sir Bernard at Astolat, and the damsel Elaine asked him how the tournament had gone. Then he told her of the great exploits that had been achieved by the knight with the red sleeve.

"Right thankful am I," quoth Elaine, "that the good knight sped so well; for he is the man that I first loved, and the only man that ever I shall love."

"Fair lady," said Gawaine, "is that knight your love?"

"Certainly," she answered, "he is my love."

"Do you know his name?" asked Gawaine.

"I know not his name," said Elaine, "for he would never tell it; but he left here his shield in my keeping, and took my brother's in its stead, so that he might not be known."

Then Gawaine asked to look at the shield; and when he saw it, he knew it for Sir Lancelot's. Then he marvelled, because before that time he had never known Lancelot bear any lady's token; and he told Elaine who the knight was, and that he had been sore wounded. Thereupon she asked leave of her father to go forth and seek him and her brother Sir Lavaine. But Sir Gawaine went to London, and there openly he declared all that he had learned concerning Lancelot and the maid of Astolat. Thereat was Queen Guenever greatly angered, and she declared to Sir Bors that Lancelot was a false traitor. But Sir Bors set forth to seek him.

In the meanwhile the damsel Elaine rode to Camelot, and there she saw her brother Sir Lavaine that had come out to exercise his horse. So she caused him to bring her to the hermitage where Sir Lancelot lay; and when she saw him lying all pale and wasted on his bed, she swooned for sorrow. When she came to herself, he comforted her, and asked her how she came to know his name. And she told him how Sir Gawaine had seen his shield. "Alas!" said Lancelot, "I repent sorely that my name is known, for that will lead to trouble." Then Elaine never left Lancelot, but nursed him night and day. After a long while he was whole of his wound, and made ready to depart. So Elaine said to him, "My lord Sir Lancelot, as you are a fair and courteous knight, have mercy on me, and suffer me not to die for your love."

"What would you that I did?" asked Lancelot.

"I would have you for my husband," she answered.

"Fair damsel," said he, "I am purposed never to be married."

"Then must I die for your love," she said. He spoke to her full tenderly, and promised, if she could give her love to another, to be his good friend. But all was to no purpose; for after he had departed, she never slept nor ate, and after ten days she felt that her days were done, but still she spoke and thought only of Lancelot. The priest that was with her bade her leave such thoughts. Then said she, "Why should I leave such thoughts? Is it any sin to love a noble knight? I take God to witness that I was never greater offender against his laws than that I loved the noble knight Sir Lancelot out of all measure, whereof I have my death." And she had a letter written to Sir Lancelot, and requested that when she was dead the letter might be put in her hand, and she be laid in a fair bed with all the richest clothing she had about her; and then that the bed should be laid in a barge covered with black, and sent into the river Thames. All this was done, and the barge with the maid's body floated down the Thames to Westminster, where the court was at that time. The king saw it floating on the river, and sent three knights to find out what it might be. When they saw so fair a corpse lying in the richest bed they had ever beheld, they caused the barge to be drawn to the shore, and told the king; who came to it, and took the letter from the dead maid's hand. It set forth that she who writ it had died for love of Sir Lancelot du Lake, and entreated the knight to pray for her soul. At this Sir Lancelot was sorry, and the queen repented of all the hard words she had said against him.

So Sir Lancelot was at that time the knight of by far the most worship living. Whenever there was a jousting, and he might be there, he carried away the palm; and he was ever ready to uphold the honour of King Arthur and of his court against all comers. Therefore was he well cherished of the King, while Queen

Guenever loved him more and more, especially after he rescued her from Sir Meleagans, the son of King Bagdemagus, who had laid hold of her by treacherous means. But this same guilty love between Lancelot and the queen now most unhappily was the cause of the total destruction of the Round Table, and the end of Arthur's glorious reign. Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred had ever hated Sir Lancelot; and now, against the will and counsel of Sir Gawaine, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Gareth, their brethren, they revealed the love of Lancelot and the queen to King Arthur. The king was cut to the heart, for much he loved Sir Lancelot, but he refused to believe that such wrong had been done unless he had proof. This was obtained by the contrivances of Agravaine and Mordred; but Lancelot slew Agravaine, and sorely wounded Mordred. Then he gathered together all the knights of his kin, and all others that would follow him, and prepared to rescue the queen, for she was sentenced by King Arthur to be burned. Against this Sir Gawaine pleaded earnestly, but in vain; but when the king bade him be one of those to lead the queen to her execution, he openly refused; and though Gareth and Gaheris consented to be there, they would not put on their armour. Then the queen was led forth to her death, clad only in a single white garment; but Sir Lancelot had word of it, and he and his company came suddenly, and overpowered them that guarded her, and rescued her. By ill-hap, Sir Lancelot slew Gaheris and Gareth, not knowing them; for they had gone unarmed among those who were leading the queen to the stake. Then he took Queen Guenever to his castle of Joyous Gard, and made ready to defend her there.

When King Arthur heard how the queen had been rescued, and especially of the death of Gaheris and Gareth, he was full of sorrow; but when Sir Gawaine knew that his brethren had fallen by the hand of Sir Lancelot, whom they had always loved, he well-nigh went out of his mind. Then he took a great oath to be revenged against Sir Lancelot. And he and King Arthur raised a large army, and besieged Joyous Gard. But it was a very strong place, and well stored with provision, so that nothing could be done against it. Then King Arthur and Gawaine, with many reproaches and angry words, taunted Sir Lancelot to come out of the castle and meet them in the open field. He was loath to do so, for he wished not to hurt King Arthur or Gawaine; but at the last he consented, and there were great battles fought outside the castle. Many times Sir Lancelot might have slain the king, but he forbore him; but Sir Lancelot's knights, though not so many as those on the other side, were the most perilous at that time living, and they did great execution against those of the king. The rumour of this unhappy war spread all through Christendom; and the Pope sent a bishop to King Arthur,

charging him to make peace with Sir Lancelot and take his queen again. So at last it was agreed that Sir Lancelot should deliver up Queen Guenever, and no harm be done her; and that Sir Lancelot should withdraw him to his realm beyond the sea. This was done, and not only Sir Lancelot's own kin but many more of the best knights of Britain went with him to his own country of Benwick, where he gave them lands and made ready for war.

In no long time King Arthur and Sir Gawaine followed after with a great host, leaving the realm of Britain in keeping of the king's nephew, Sir Mordred; and they besieged Sir Lancelot in his strong city of Benwick. There Sir Gawaine came every day before the walls, and defied Sir Lancelot to combat; and at the last Sir Lancelot met him in the field, and after a long fight wounded him sorely on the head. As soon as Gawaine was healed, he came forth and challenged Sir Lancelot again; and again Sir Lancelot struck him down, but would not slay him. Before he could be fully recovered from this second wound, there came news that Sir Mordred had spread a report that King Arthur was slain in battle against Sir Lancelot, and had seized the kingdom. Then Arthur and all his host returned with what speed they might, and landed at Dover. There Mordred met him with a great army; but in the battle King Arthur was victorious, and Mordred fled. On that day Sir Gawaine received a mortal wound, and then he repented that he had waged such bitter war against Sir Lancelot: so he wrote him a letter, in which he begged his forgiveness, and besought him to pray at his tomb; and he also requested that Lancelot would come over and help King Arthur against the traitor Mordred. Then Gawaine died, and King Arthur mourned over him, and caused him to be buried in the chapel of Dover Castle.

It was now reported to the king that Sir Mordred had gathered a great host at Barendown; and King Arthur went forward to meet him. There was another great battle; but again King Arthur won the field, and Mordred and his party fled toward Salisbury. The king followed him, and many people flocked to his army; and he made ready to fight another battle on Salisbury Plain. But while Arthur was in his camp, he dreamed one night that Sir Gawaine came to him, and warned him not to fight against Mordred the next day, for if he did he should have his death; but that if he would treat with Mordred and delay for a month, then would come over Sir Lancelot and his host, and put the traitor and his party altogether to the worse. When the king woke, he took measures to treat with Mordred; so it was agreed that the king and his false nephew should meet between the two armies, with fourteen attendants each, to make the treaty. So the armies were drawn out, and King Arthur warned his men that if they saw any sword drawn or other sign of battle they should come on fiercely, because he did

not trust Mordred. But Mordred gave a like warning to his men. While the two armies were standing face to face, it befell that an adder crept out of a bush of heather, and stung a knight on the foot. Forthwith he drew his sword to slay it, and thought of no other harm; but immediately the two hosts advanced fiercely against one another, and fought with all the greater fury because each party thought that the other had designed treachery. King Arthur rode at the head of his knights, and smote down on every hand, and Mordred on his part fought better than he had done in all his life before. At the last the king looked around him, and of all his host there were none left but Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere, while on the other side there was none but Mordred himself, that stood leaning grimly on his sword. When Arthur saw him, he took his spear in his hand, and ran toward him, crying, "Traitor, now is thy death-day come."

When Mordred heard that, he waited for King Arthur with his sword ready in his hand; but the king avoided his blow, and thrust his spear clean through his body. Then Mordred felt that he had his death-wound, and he thrust himself up the spear, and smote King Arthur on the helm with his sword, that it pierced to the brain-pan. Mordred fell stark dead, and the king sank down in a swoon. But Sir Bedivere and Sir Lucas, though both of them were sore wounded, contrived to bring him to a little chapel by the seaside; and there Sir Lucas, that had sustained a mortal wound, fell down and died at the king's feet. Then Sir Bedivere wept for Sir Lucas' death, for he was his brother.

"Leave this weeping and mourning," said King Arthur, "for it will not avail. Now my time is full short; therefore take thou my good sword Excalibur, and go to the water-side and throw it into the water."

Then went Sir Bedivere with the sword; and as he looked upon it, and saw how the pommel and haft were all ornamented with precious stones, he thought it would be a pity that so noble a sword should be wasted. So he hid it under a bush, and came back to the king, and told him that he had thrown the sword into the water.

"What sawest thou there?" asked the king.

"I saw nothing but the waves caused by the wind," answered Bedivere.

"Thou hast said untruly," said Arthur; "therefore as thou art true and dear to me, go and obey my command."

Sir Bedivere returned, and took the sword in his hand, but he could not bring himself to throw it into the water. So once more he hid it, and went back to the king, telling him that he had done according to his bidding, but had seen nothing.

"Ah, traitor," cried the king, "twice now hast thou betrayed me for the rich

sword; but go yet and do my bidding, and if thou doest it not, then will I slay thee with mine own hands.”

So then Bedivere went and took the sword, and wrapped the belts about the hilt, and flung it as far as he might into the sea; and lo! there came a hand above the water, and caught the sword, and brandished it thrice, and then vanished with it beneath the water. Then Bedivere returned to the king and told him what he had seen.

“Alas!” said Arthur, “help me from hence, for I fear I have tarried over long.”

Then Bedivere took the king on his back, and carried him to the water-side; and there was a barge with many fair ladies in it, all wearing black hoods. “Now put me into the barge,” said Arthur; and Bedivere did so, and three queens received the king, with great mourning and wailing, and one of them said,—

“Ah, my dear brother, why hast thou tarried so long?” Then the barge went away, and Bedivere lost sight of it. So he departed, weeping and wailing, and wandered all night in the forest. In the morning he found himself by a hermitage and a chapel. When he went into the chapel, he saw a hermit praying by a tomb newly made. “Sir,” said Bedivere, “what man is there buried that you pray for?”

“My fair son,” answered the hermit, “I know not; but last night, about midnight, there came here a great number of ladies which brought the body of a knight, and they prayed me to bury him.”

“Alas!” cried Bedivere, “then it is my lord King Arthur that lies buried in this chapel.” And he swooned by the side of the tomb. When he came to himself, he vowed that henceforth he would abide with the hermit, and become a holy man. Of the death of King Arthur, and whether he was buried in that tomb, nothing more was certainly known; but many people believed that he was not dead at all, but remained in the Isle of Avallon, with the Lady of the Lake, and would yet come again to recover his kingdom.

In the meanwhile Sir Lancelot heard of the treason of Mordred and the death of Gawaine; and he received Gawaine’s letter, which made him very doleful. So he gathered a great host, and came over into England, but there he heard the evil news of Arthur’s death; and it was told him that Queen Guenever had gone into a nunnery at Almesbury. Thither he went and saw her; and they had a sad meeting, for she bade him an eternal farewell, and told him he must never see her again, for she had dedicated herself to the service of Heaven. And she bade him return to his own kingdom, and rule it fitly, and take to himself a wife. But this Sir Lancelot denied her; for he said that as she had become a nun, so would he also take a religious habit. And this he did, at the same place where was Sir Bedivere

and the tomb of King Arthur; and with him abode six knights of his kin, that also became hermits. Six years they dwelt there in great piety and penitence. Then it was made known to Lancelot in a vision that Guenever was dead at Almesbury; and he was bid to bring her to Glastonbury, and bury her by the side of her lord. So the next day he and his six fellows set out for Almesbury, and there they found the queen dead; and they bore her body to Glastonbury, and buried her with great solemnity in the same tomb as King Arthur. And from that time forth Lancelot scarce ever ate or slept, but was always praying by the tomb, so that in six weeks he also waxed very sick and died. He had bidden his fellows to bury him at Joyous Gard, and thither he was borne; and before he was laid in his grave, Sir Bors cried, weeping, "Ah, Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that wert never matched of any earthly knight's hands; and thou wert the courtliest knight that ever bare shield; and thou wert the truest friend that ever bestrode horse; and thou wert the truest lover that ever loved woman; and thou wert the kindest man that ever struck with sword; and thou wert the goodliest person that ever came among peers or knights; and thou wert the meekest man, and the gentlest, that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in rest."

Such is the end of the history of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. After Arthur, his kinsman Constantine, the son of Sir Cador of Cornwall, was chosen King of Britain, and full nobly and worshipfully he ruled the realm. But of the goodly company of the Knights of the Round Table there was no remnant left.

THE END.

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