

**HARRY STIRLING EVERARD,
MRS. LANG**

THE BOOK OF ROMANCE

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The Book of Romance

PREFACE

It is to be supposed that children do not read Prefaces; these are Bluebeard's rooms, which they are not curious to unlock. A few words may therefore be said about the Romances contained in this book. In the editor's opinion, romances are only fairy tales grown up. The whole mass of the plot and incident of romance was invented by nobody knows who, nobody knows when, nobody knows where. Almost every people has the Cinderella story, with all sorts of variations: a boy hero in place of a girl heroine, a beast in place of a fairy godmother, and so on. The Zuñis, an agricultural tribe of New Mexico, have a version in which the moral turns out to be against poor Cinderella, who comes to an ill end. The Red Indians have the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, told in a very touching shape, but without the music. On the other hand, the negroes in the States have the Orpheus tale, adapted to plantation life, in a form which is certainly borrowed from Europeans. This version was sent to me some years ago, by Mr. Barnet Phillips, Brooklyn, New York, and I give it here for its curiosity. If the proper names, Jim Orpus and Dicey, had not been given, we might not feel absolutely certain that the story was borrowed. It is a good example of adaptation from the heroic age of Greece to the servile age of Africans.

Dicey and Orpus

Dat war eber so long ago, 'cause me granmammy tell me so. It h'aint no white-folks yarn – no Sah. Gall she war call Dicey, an' she war borned on de plantation. Whar Jim Orpus kum from, granmammy she disremember. He war a boss-fiddler, he war, an' jus' that powerful, dat when de mules in de cotton field listen to um, dey no budge in de furrer. Orpus he neber want no mess of fish, ketched wid a angle. He just take him fiddle an' fool along de branch, an' play a tune, an' up dey comes, an' he cotch 'em in he hans. He war mighty sot on Dicey, an' dey war married all proper an' reg'lar. Hit war so long ago, dat de railroad war a bran-new spick an' span ting in dose days. Dicey once she lounge 'round de track, 'cause she tink she hear Orpus a fiddlin' in de fur-fur-away. Onyways de hengine smash her. Den Jim Orpus he took on turrible, an' when she war buried, he sot him down on de grave, an' he fiddle an' he fiddle till most yo' heart was bruk.

An' he play so long dat de groun' crummle (crumble) an' sink, an' nex' day, when de peoples look for Jim Orpus, dey no find um; oney big-hole in de lot, an' nobody never see Jim Orpus no mo'. An' dey do say, dat ef yo' go inter a darky's burial-groun', providin' no white man been planted thar, an' yo' clap yo' ear to de groun', yo' can hear Jim's fiddle way down deep belo', a folloin' Dicey fru' de lan' of de Golden Slippah.¹

The original touch, the sound of Orpus's fiddle heard only in the graveyards of the negroes (like the fairy music under the fairy hill at Ballachulish), is very remarkable. Now the Red Indian story has no harper, and no visit by the hero to the land of the dead. His grief brings his wife back to him, and he loses her again by breaking a taboo, as Orpheus did by looking back, a thing always forbidden. Thus we do not know whether or not the Red Indian version is borrowed from the European myth, probably enough it is not. But in no case – not even when the same plot and incidents occur among Egyptians and the Central Australian tribes, or among the frosty Samoyeds and Eskimo, the Samoans, the Andamanese, the Zulus, and the Japanese, as well as among Celts and ancient Greeks – can we be absolutely certain that the story has not been diffused and borrowed, in the backward of time. Thus the date and place of origin of these eternal stories, the groundwork of ballads and popular tales, can never be ascertained. The oldest known version may be found in the literature of Egypt or Chaldaea, but it is an obvious fallacy to argue that the place of origin must be the place where the tale was first written down in hieroglyph or cuneiform characters.

There the stories are: they are as common among the remotest savages as among the peasants of Hungary, France, or Assynt. They bear all the birth-marks of an early society, with the usual customs and superstitions of man in such a stage of existence. Their oldest and least corrupted forms exist among savages, and people who do not read and write. But when reading and writing and a class of professional minstrels and tellers of tales arose, these men invented no new plots, but borrowed the plots and incidents of the world-old popular stories. They adapted these to their own condition of society, just as the plantation negroes adapted Orpheus and Eurydice. They elevated the nameless heroes and heroines into Kings, Queens, and Knights, Odysseus, Arthur, Charlemagne, Diarmid, and the rest. They took an ancient popular tale, known all over the earth, and attributed the adventures of the characters to historical persons, like Charlemagne and his family, or to Saints, for the legends of early Celtic Saints are full of fairy-tale materials. Characters half historic, half fabulous, like Arthur, were endowed with fairy gifts, and inherited the feats of nameless imaginary heroes.

The results of this uncritical literary handling of elements really popular were the national romances of Arthur, of Charlemagne, of Sigurd, or of Etzel. The pagan legends were Christianised, like that of Beowulf; they were expanded into measureless length, whole cycles were invented about

¹ Mr. Phillips, writing in 1896, says that the tale was told him by a plantation hand, thirty years ago, 'long before the Uncle Remus period.'

the heroic families; poets altered the materials each in his own way and to serve his own purpose, and often to glorify his own country. If the Saracens told their story of Roland at Roncevalles, it would be very different from that of the old Frankish *chansons de geste*. Thus the romances are a mixture of popular tales, of literary invention, and of history as transmitted in legend. To the charm of fairy tale they add the fascination of the age of chivalry, yet I am not sure but that children will prefer the fairy tale pure and simple, nor am I sure that their taste would be wrong, if they did.

In the versions here offered, the story of Arthur is taken mainly from Malory's compilation, from sources chiefly French, but the opening of the Graal story is adapted from Mr. Sebastian Evans's 'High History of the Holy Graal,' a masterpiece of the translator's art. For permission to adapt this chapter I have to thank the kindness of Mr. Evans.

The story of Roland is from the French Epic, probably of the eleventh century, but resting on earlier materials, legend and ballad. William Short Nose is also from the *chanson de geste* of that hero.

The story of Diarmid, ancient Irish and also current among the Dalriadic invaders of Argyle, is taken from the translations in the Transactions of the Ossianic Society.

The story of Robin Hood is from the old English ballads of the courteous outlaw, whose feast, in Scotland, fell in the early days of May. His alleged date varies between the ages of Richard I. and Edward II., but all the labours of the learned have thrown no light on this popular hero.

A child can see how *English* Robin is, how human, and possible and good-humoured are his character and feats, while Arthur is half Celtic, half French and chivalrous, and while the deeds of the French Roland, and of the Celtic Diarmid, are exaggerated beyond the possible. There is nothing of the fairylike in Robin, and he has no thirst for the Ideal. Had we given the adventures of Sir William Wallace, from Blind Harry, it would have appeared that the Lowland Scots could exaggerate like other people.

The story of Wayland the Smith is very ancient. An ivory in the British Museum, apparently of the eighth century, represents Wayland making the cups out of the skulls. As told here the legend is adapted from the amplified version by Oehlenschläger. Scott's use of the story in 'Kenilworth' will be remembered.

All the romances are written by Mrs. Lang, except the story of Grettir the Strong, done by Mr. H. S. C. Everard from the saga translated by Mr. William Morris.

A. Lang.

THE DRAWING OF THE SWORD

Long, long ago, after Uther Pendragon died, there was no King in Britain, and every Knight hoped to seize the crown for himself. The country was like to fare ill when laws were broken on every side, and the corn which was to give the poor bread was trodden underfoot, and there was none to bring the evildoer to justice. Then, when things were at their worst, came forth Merlin the magician, and fast he rode to the place where the Archbishop of Canterbury had his dwelling. And they took counsel together, and agreed that all the lords and gentlemen of Britain should ride to London and meet on Christmas Day, now at hand, in the Great Church. So this was done. And on Christmas morning, as they left the church, they saw in the churchyard a large stone, and on it a bar of steel, and in the steel a naked sword was held, and about it was written in letters of gold, 'Whoso pulleth out this sword is by right of birth King of England.' They marvelled at these words, and called for the Archbishop, and brought him into the place where the stone stood. Then those Knights who fain would be King could not hold themselves back, and they tugged at the sword with all their might; but it never stirred. The Archbishop watched them in silence, but when they were faint from pulling he spoke: 'The man is not here who shall lift out that sword, nor do I know where to find him. But this is my counsel – that two Knights be chosen, good and true men, to keep guard over the sword.'

Thus it was done. But the lords and gentlemen-at-arms cried out that every man had a right to try to win the sword, and they decided that on New Year's Day a tournament should be held, and any Knight who would, might enter the lists.

So on New Year's Day, the Knights, as their custom was, went to hear service in the Great Church, and after it was over they met in the field to make ready for the tourney. Among them was a brave Knight called Sir Ector, who brought with him Sir Kay, his son, and Arthur, Kay's foster-brother. Now Kay had unbuckled his sword the evening before, and in his haste to be at the tourney had forgotten to put it on again, and he begged Arthur to ride back and fetch it for him. But when Arthur reached the house the door was locked, for the women had gone out to see the tourney, and though Arthur tried his best to get in he could not. Then he rode away in great anger, and said to himself, 'Kay shall not be without a sword this day. I will take that sword in the churchyard, and give it to him'; and he galloped fast till he reached the gate of the churchyard. Here he jumped down and tied his horse tightly to a tree, then, running up to the stone, he seized the handle of the sword, and drew it easily out; afterwards he mounted his horse again, and delivered the sword to Sir Kay. The moment Sir Kay saw the sword he knew it was not his own, but the sword of the stone, and he sought out his father Sir Ector, and said to him, 'Sir, this is the sword of the stone, therefore I am the rightful King.' Sir Ector made no answer, but signed to Kay and Arthur to follow him, and they all three went back to the church. Leaving their horses outside, they entered the choir, and here Sir Ector took a holy book and bade Sir Kay swear how he came by that sword. 'My brother Arthur gave it to me,' replied Sir Kay. 'How did you come by it?' asked Sir Ector, turning to Arthur. 'Sir,' said Arthur, 'when I rode home for my brother's sword I found no one to deliver it to me, and as I resolved he should not be swordless I thought of the sword in this stone, and I pulled it out.' 'Were any Knights present when you did this?' asked Sir Ector. 'No, none,' said Arthur. 'Then it is you,' said Sir Ector, 'who are the rightful King of this land.' 'But why am I the King?' inquired Arthur. 'Because,' answered Sir Ector, 'this is an enchanted sword, and no man could draw it but he who was born a King. Therefore put the sword back into the stone, and let me see you take it out.' 'That is soon done,' said Arthur replacing the sword, and Sir Ector himself tried to draw it, but he could not. 'Now it is your turn,' he said to Sir Kay, but Sir Kay fared no better than his father, though he tugged with all his might and main. 'Now you, Arthur,' and Arthur pulled it out as easily as if it had been lying in its sheath, and as he did so Sir Ector and Sir Kay sank on their knees before him. 'Why do you, my father and brother, kneel to me?' asked Arthur in surprise. 'Nay, nay, my lord,' answered Sir Ector, 'I was never your father,

though till to-day I did not know who your father really was. You are the son of Uther Pendragon, and you were brought to me when you were born by Merlin himself, who promised that when the time came I should know from whom you sprang. And now it has been revealed to me.' But when Arthur heard that Sir Ector was not his father, he wept bitterly. 'If I am King,' he said at last, 'ask what you will, and I shall not fail you. For to you, and to my lady and mother, I owe more than to anyone in the world, for she loved me and treated me as her son.' 'Sir,' replied Sir Ector, 'I only ask that you will make your foster-brother, Sir Kay, Seneschal² of all your lands.' 'That I will readily,' answered Arthur, 'and while he and I live no other shall fill that office.'

Sir Ector then bade them seek out the Archbishop with him, and they told him all that had happened concerning the sword, which Arthur had left standing in the stone. And on the Twelfth Day the Knights and Barons came again, but none could draw it out but Arthur. When they saw this, many of the Barons became angry and cried out that they would never own a boy for King whose blood was no better than their own. So it was agreed to wait till Candlemas, when more Knights might be there, and meanwhile the same two men who had been chosen before watched the sword night and day; but at Candlemas it was the same thing, and at Easter. And when Pentecost came, the common people who were present, and saw Arthur pull out the sword, cried with one voice that he was their King, and they would kill any man who said differently. Then rich and poor fell on their knees before him, and Arthur took the sword and offered it upon the altar where the Archbishop stood, and the best man that was there made him Knight. After that the crown was put on his head, and he swore to his lords and commons that he would be a true King, and would do them justice all the days of his life.

² 'Seneschal' means steward.

THE QUESTING BEAST

But Arthur had many battles to fight and many Kings to conquer before he was acknowledged lord of them all, and often he would have failed had he not listened to the wisdom of Merlin, and been helped by his sword Excalibur, which in obedience to Merlin's orders he never drew till things were going ill with him. Later it shall be told how the King got the sword Excalibur, which shone so bright in his enemies' eyes that they fell back, dazzled by the brightness. Many Knights came to his standard, and among them Sir Ban, King of Gaul beyond the sea, who was ever his faithful friend. And it was in one of these wars, when King Arthur and King Ban and King Bors went to the rescue of the King of Cameliard, that Arthur saw Guenevere, the King's daughter, whom he afterwards wedded. By and by King Ban and King Bors returned to their own country across the sea, and the King went to Carlion, a town on the river Usk, where a strange dream came to him.

He thought that the land was over-run with gryphons and serpents which burnt and slew his people, and he made war on the monsters, and was sorely wounded, though at last he killed them all. When he awoke the remembrance of his dream was heavy upon him, and to shake it off he summoned his Knights to hunt with him, and they rode fast till they reached a forest. Soon they spied a hart before them, which the King claimed as his game, and he spurred his horse and rode after him. But the hart ran fast and the King could not get near it, and the chase lasted so long that the King himself grew heavy and his horse fell dead under him. Then he sat under a tree and rested, till he heard the baying of hounds, and fancied he counted as many as thirty of them. He raised his head to look, and, coming towards him, saw a beast so strange that its like was not to be found throughout his kingdom. It went straight to the well and drank, making as it did so the noise of many hounds baying, and when it had drunk its fill the beast went its way.

While the King was wondering what sort of a beast this could be, a Knight rode by, who, seeing a man lying under a tree, stopped and said to him: 'Knight full of thought and sleepy, tell me if a strange beast has passed this way?'

'Yes, truly,' answered Arthur, 'and by now it must be two miles distant. What do you want with it?'

'Oh sir, I have followed that beast from far,' replied he, 'and have ridden my horse to death. If only I could find another I would still go after it.' As he spoke a squire came up leading a fresh horse for the King, and when the Knight saw it he prayed that it might be given to him, 'for,' said he, 'I have followed this quest this twelvemonth, and either I shall slay him or he will slay me.'

'Sir Knight,' answered the King, 'you have done your part; leave now your quest, and let me follow the beast for the same time that you have done.' 'Ah, fool!' replied the Knight, whose name was Pellinore, 'it would be all in vain, for none may slay that beast but I or my next of kin'; and without more words he sprang into the saddle. 'You may take my horse by force,' said the King, 'but I should like to prove first which of us two is the better horseman.'

'Well,' answered the Knight, 'when you want me, come to this spring. Here you will always find me,' and, spurring his horse, he galloped away. The King watched him till he was out of sight, then turned to his squire and bade him bring another horse as quickly as he could. While he was waiting for it the wizard Merlin came along in the likeness of a boy, and asked the King why he was so thoughtful.

'I may well be thoughtful,' replied the King, 'for I have seen the most wonderful sight in all the world.'

'That I know well,' said Merlin, 'for I know all your thoughts. But it is folly to let your mind dwell on it, for thinking will mend nothing. I know, too, that Uther Pendragon was your father, and your mother was the Lady Igraine.'

'How can a boy like you know that?' cried Arthur, growing angry; but Merlin only answered, 'I know it better than any man living,' and passed, returning soon after in the likeness of an old man of fourscore, and sitting down by the well to rest.

'What makes you so sad?' asked he.

'I may well be sad,' replied Arthur, 'there is plenty to make me so. And besides, there was a boy here who told me things that he had no business to know, and among them the names of my father and mother.'

'He told you the truth,' said the old man, 'and if you would have listened he could have told you still more; how that your sister shall have a child who shall destroy you and all your Knights.'

'Who are you?' asked Arthur, wondering.

'I am Merlin, and it was I who came to you in the likeness of a boy. I know all things; how that you shall die a noble death, being slain in battle, while my end will be shameful, for I shall be put alive into the earth.'

There was no time to say more, for the man brought up the King's horse, and he mounted, and rode fast till he came to Carlion.

THE SWORD EXCALIBUR

King Arthur had fought a hard battle with the tallest Knight in all the land, and though he struck hard and well, he would have been slain had not Merlin enchanted the Knight and cast him into a deep sleep, and brought the King to a hermit who had studied the art of healing, and cured all his wounds in three days. Then Arthur and Merlin waited no longer, but gave the hermit thanks and departed.

As they rode together Arthur said, 'I have no sword,' but Merlin bade him be patient and he would soon give him one. In a little while they came to a large lake, and in the midst of the lake Arthur beheld an arm rising out of the water, holding up a sword. 'Look!' said Merlin, 'that is the sword I spoke of.' And the King looked again, and a maiden stood upon the water. 'That is the Lady of the Lake,' said Merlin, 'and she is coming to you, and if you ask her courteously she will give you the sword.' So when the maiden drew near Arthur saluted her and said, 'Maiden, I pray you tell me whose sword is that which an arm is holding out of the water? I wish it were mine, for I have lost my sword.'

'That sword is mine, King Arthur,' answered she, 'and I will give it to you, if you in return will give me a gift when I ask you.'

'By my faith,' said the King, 'I will give you whatever gift you ask.' 'Well,' said the maiden, 'get into the barge yonder, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you.' For this was the sword Excalibur. 'As for *my* gift, I will ask it in my own time.' Then King Arthur and Merlin dismounted from their horses and tied them up safely, and went into the barge, and when they came to the place where the arm was holding the sword Arthur took it by the handle, and the arm disappeared. And they brought the sword back to land. As they rode the King looked lovingly on his sword, which Merlin saw, and, smiling, said, 'Which do you like best, the sword or the scabbard?' 'I like the sword,' answered Arthur. 'You are not wise to say that,' replied Merlin, 'for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword, and as long as it is buckled on you you will lose no blood, however sorely you may be wounded.' So they rode into the town of Carlion, and Arthur's Knights gave them a glad welcome, and said it was a joy to serve under a King who risked his life as much as any common man.

THE STORY OF SIR BALIN

In those days many Kings reigned in the Islands of the Sea, and they constantly waged war upon each other, and on their liege lord, and news came to Arthur that Ryons, King of North Wales, had collected a large host and had ravaged his lands and slain some of his people. When he heard this, Arthur rose in anger, and commanded that all lords, Knights, and gentlemen of arms should meet him at Camelot, where he would call a council, and hold a tourney.

From every part the Knights flocked to Camelot, and the town was full to overflowing of armed men and their horses. And when they were all assembled, there rode in a damsel, who said she had come with a message from the great Lady Lile of Avelion, and begged that they would bring her before King Arthur. When she was led into his presence she let her mantle of fur slip off her shoulders, and they saw that by her side a richly wrought sword was buckled. The King was silent with wonder at the strange sight, but at last he said, 'Damsel, why do you wear this sword? for swords are not the ornaments of women.' 'Oh, my lord,' answered she, 'I would I could find some Knight to rid me of this sword, which weighs me down and causes me much sorrow. But the man who will deliver me of it must be one who is mighty of his hands, and pure in his deeds, without villainy, or treason. If I find a Knight such as this, he will draw this sword out of its sheath, and he only. For I have been at the Court of King Ryons, and he and his Knights tried with all their strength to draw the sword and they could not.'

'Let me see if I can draw it,' said Arthur, 'not because I think myself the best Knight, for well I know how far I am outdone by others, but to set them an example that they may follow me.' With that the King took the sword by the sheath and by the girdle, and pulled at it with all his force, but the sword stuck fast. 'Sir,' said the damsel, 'you need not pull half so hard, for he that shall pull it out shall do it with little strength.' 'It is not for me,' answered Arthur, 'and now, my Barons, let each man try his fortune.' So most of the Knights of the Round Table there present pulled, one after another, at the sword, but none could stir it from its sheath. 'Alas! alas!' cried the damsel in great grief, 'I thought to find in this Court Knights that were blameless and true of heart, and now I know not where to look for them.' 'By my faith,' said Arthur, 'there are no better Knights in the world than these of mine, but I am sore displeased that they cannot help me in this matter.'

Now at that time there was a poor Knight at Arthur's Court who had been kept prisoner for a year and a half because he had slain the King's cousin. He was of high birth and his name was Balin, and after he had suffered eighteen months the punishment of his misdeed the Barons prayed the King to set him free, which Arthur did willingly. When Balin, standing apart beheld the Knights one by one try the sword, and fail to draw it, his heart beat fast, yet he shrank from taking his turn, for he was meanly dressed, and could not compare with the other Barons. But after the damsel had bid farewell to Arthur and his Court, and was setting out on her journey homewards, he called to her and said, 'Damsel, I pray you to suffer me to try your sword, as well as these lords, for though I am so poorly clothed, my heart is as high as theirs.' The damsel stopped and looked at him, and answered, 'Sir, it is not needful to put you to such trouble, for where so many have failed it is hardly likely that you will succeed.' 'Ah! fair damsel,' said Balin, 'it is not fine clothes that make good deeds.' 'You speak truly,' replied the damsel, 'therefore do what you can.' Then Balin took the sword by the girdle and sheath, and pulled it out easily, and when he looked at the sword he was greatly pleased with it. The King and the Knights were dumb with surprise that it was Balin who had triumphed over them, and many of them envied him and felt anger towards him. 'In truth,' said the damsel, 'this is the best Knight that I ever found, but, Sir, I pray you give me the sword again.'

'No,' answered Balin, 'I will keep it till it is taken from me by force.' 'It is for your sake, not mine, that I ask for it,' said the damsel, 'for with that sword you shall slay the man you love best, and it shall bring about your own ruin.' 'I will take what befalls me,' replied Balin, 'but the sword I will not

give up, by the faith of my body.' So the damsel departed in great sorrow. The next day Sir Balin left the Court, and, armed with his sword, set forth in search of adventures, which he found in many places where he had not thought to meet with them. In all the fights that he fought, Sir Balin was the victor, and Arthur, and Merlin his friend, knew that there was no Knight living of greater deeds, or more worthy of worship. And he was known to all as Sir Balin le Savage, the Knight of the two swords.

One day he was riding forth when at the turning of a road he saw a cross, and on it was written in letters of gold, 'Let no Knight ride towards this castle.' Sir Balin was still reading the writing when there came towards him an old man with white hair, who said, 'Sir Balin le Savage, this is not the way for you, so turn again and choose some other path.' And so he vanished, and a horn blew loudly, as a horn is blown at the death of a beast. 'That blast,' said Balin, 'is for me, but I am still alive,' and he rode to the castle, where a great company of knights and ladies met him and welcomed him, and made him a feast. Then the lady of the castle said to him, 'Knight with the two swords, you must now fight a Knight that guards an island, for it is our law that no man may leave us without he first fight a tourney.'

'That is a bad custom,' said Balin, 'but if I must I am ready; for though my horse is weary my heart is strong.'

'Sir,' said a Knight to him, 'your shield does not look whole to me; I will lend you another'; so Balin listened to him and took the shield that was offered, and left his own with his own coat of arms behind him. He rode down to the shore, and led his horse into a boat, which took them across. When he reached the other side, a damsel came to him crying, 'O Knight Balin, why have you left your own shield behind you? Alas! you have put yourself in great danger, for by your shield you should have been known. I grieve over your doom, for there is no man living that can rival you for courage and bold deeds.'

'I repent,' answered Balin, 'ever having come into this country, but for very shame I must go on. Whatever befalls me, either for life or death, I am ready to take it.' Then he examined his armour, and saw that it was whole, and mounted his horse.

As he went along the path he beheld a Knight come out of a castle in front, clothed in red, riding a horse with red trappings. When this red Knight looked on the two swords, he thought for a moment it was Balin, but the shield did not bear Balin's device. So they rode at each other with their spears, and smote each other's shields so hard that both horses and men fell to the ground with the shock, and the Knights lay unconscious on the ground for some minutes. But soon they rose up again and began the fight afresh, and they fought till the place was red with their blood, and they had each seven great wounds. 'What Knight are you?' asked Balin le Savage, pausing for breath, 'for never before have I found any Knight to match me.' 'My name,' said he, 'is Balan, brother to the good Knight Balin.'

'Alas!' cried Balin, 'that I should ever live to see this day,' and he fell back fainting to the ground. At this sight Balan crept on his feet and hands, and pulled off Balin's helmet, so that he might see his face. The fresh air revived Balin, and he awoke and said: 'O Balan, my brother, you have slain me, and I you, and the whole world shall speak ill of us both.'

'Alas,' sighed Balan, 'if I had only known you! I saw your two swords, but from your shield I thought you had been another knight.'

'Woe is me!' said Balin, 'all this was wrought by an unhappy knight in the castle, who caused me to change my shield for his. If I lived, I would destroy that castle that he should not deceive other men.'

'You would have done well,' answered Balan, 'for they have kept me prisoner ever since I slew a Knight that guarded this island, and they would have kept you captive too.' Then came the lady of the castle and her companions, and listened as they made their moan. And Balan prayed that she would grant them the grace to lie together, there where they died, and their wish was given them, and she and those that were with her wept for pity.

So they died; and the lady made a tomb for them, and put Balan's name alone on it, for Balin's name she knew not. But Merlin knew, and next morning he came and wrote it in letters of gold, and he ungirded Balin's sword, and unscrewed the pommel, and put another pommel on it, and bade a

Knight that stood by handle it, but the Knight could not. At that Merlin laughed. 'Why do you laugh?' asked the Knight. 'Because,' said Merlin, 'no man shall handle this sword but the best Knight in the world, and that is either Sir Lancelot or his son Sir Galahad. With this sword Sir Lancelot shall slay the man he loves best, and Sir Gawaine is his name.' And this was later done, in a fight across the seas.

All this Merlin wrote on the pommel of the sword. Next he made a bridge of steel to the island, six inches broad, and no man could pass over it that was guilty of any evil deeds. The scabbard of the sword he left on this side of the island, so that Galahad should find it. The sword itself he put in a magic stone, which floated down the stream to Camelot, that is now called Winchester. And the same day Galahad came to the river, having in his hand the scabbard, and he saw the sword and pulled it out of the stone, as is told in another place.

HOW THE ROUND TABLE BEGAN

It was told in the story of the Questing Beast that King Arthur married the daughter of Leodegrance, King of Cameliard, but there was not space there to say how it came about. And as the tales of the Round Table are full of this lady, Queen Guenevere, it is well that anybody who reads this book should learn how she became Queen.

After King Arthur had fought and conquered many enemies, he said one day to Merlin, whose counsel he took all the days of his life, 'My Barons will let me have no rest, but bid me take a wife, and I have answered them that I shall take none, except you advise me.'

'It is well,' replied Merlin, 'that you should take a wife, but is there any woman that you love better than another?' 'Yes,' said Arthur, 'I love Guenevere, daughter of Leodegrance, King of Cameliard, in whose house is the Round Table that my father gave him. This maiden is the fairest that I have ever seen, or ever shall see.' 'Sir,' answered Merlin, 'what you say as to her beauty is true, but, if your heart was not set on her, I could find you another as fair, and of more goodness, than she. But if a man's heart is once set it is idle to try to turn him.' Then Merlin asked the King to give him a company of knights and esquires, that he might go to the Court of King Leodegrance and tell him that King Arthur desired to wed his daughter, which Arthur did gladly. Therefore Merlin rode forth and made all the haste he could till he came to the Castle of Cameliard, and told King Leodegrance who had sent him and why.

'That is the best news I have ever had,' replied Leodegrance, 'for little did I think that so great and noble a King should seek to marry my daughter. As for lands to endow her with, I would give whatever he chose; but he has lands enough of his own, so I will give him instead something that will please him much more, the Round Table which Uther Pendragon gave me, where a hundred and fifty Knights can sit at one time. I myself can call to my side a hundred good Knights, but I lack fifty, for the wars have slain many, and some are absent.' And without more words King Leodegrance gave his consent that his daughter should wed King Arthur. And Merlin returned with his Knights and esquires, journeying partly by water and partly by land, till they drew near to London.

When King Arthur heard of the coming of Merlin and of the Knights with the Round Table he was filled with joy, and said to those that stood about him, 'This news that Merlin has brought me is welcome indeed, for I have long loved this fair lady, and the Round Table is dearer to me than great riches.' Then he ordered that Sir Lancelot should ride to fetch the Queen, and that preparations for the marriage and her coronation should be made, which was done. 'Now, Merlin,' said the King, 'go and look about my kingdom and bring fifty of the bravest and most famous Knights that can be found throughout the land.' But no more than eight and twenty Knights could Merlin find. With these Arthur had to be content, and the Bishop of Canterbury was fetched, and he blessed the seats that were placed by the Round Table, and the Knights sat in them. 'Fair Sirs,' said Merlin, when the Bishop had ended his blessing, 'arise all of you, and pay your homage to the King.' So the Knights arose to do his bidding, and in every seat was the name of the Knight who had sat on it, written in letters of gold, but two seats were empty. After that young Gawaine came to the King, and prayed him to make him a Knight on the day that he should wed Guenevere. 'That I will gladly,' replied the King, 'for you are my sister's son.'

As the King was speaking, a poor man entered the Court, bringing with him a youth about eighteen years old, riding on a lean mare, though it was not the custom for gentlemen to ride on mares. 'Where is King Arthur?' asked the man. 'Yonder,' answered the Knights. 'Have you business with him?' 'Yes,' said the man, and he went and bowed low before the King: 'I have heard, O King Arthur, flower of Knights and Kings, that at the time of your marriage you would give any man the gift he should ask for.'

'That is truth,' answered the King, 'as long as I do no wrong to other men or to my kingdom.'

'I thank you for your gracious words,' said the poor man; 'the boon I would ask is that you would make my son a Knight.' 'It is a great boon to ask,' answered the King. 'What is your name?'

'Sir, my name is Aries the cowherd.'

'Is it you or your son that has thought of this honour?'

'It is my son who desires it, and not I,' replied the man. 'I have thirteen sons who tend cattle, and work in the fields if I bid them; but this boy will do nothing but shoot and cast darts, or go to watch battles and look on Knights, and all day long he beseeches me to bring him to you, that he may be knighted also.'

'What is your name?' said Arthur, turning to the young man.

'Sir, my name is Tor.'

'Where is your sword that I may knight you?' said the King.

'It is here, my lord.'

'Take it out of its sheath,' said the King, 'and require me to make you a Knight.' Then Tor jumped off his mare and pulled out his sword, and knelt before the King, praying that he might be made a Knight and a Knight of the Round Table.

'As for a Knight, that I will make you,' said Arthur, smiting him in the neck with the sword, 'and if you are worthy of it you shall be a Knight of the Round Table.' And the next day he made Gawaine Knight also.

THE PASSING OF MERLIN

Sir Tor proved before long by his gallant deeds that he was worthy to sit in one of the two empty seats of the Round Table. Many of the other Knights went out also in search of adventures, and one of them, Sir Pellinore, brought a damsel of the lake to Arthur's Court, and when Merlin saw her he fell in love with her, so that he desired to be always in her company. The damsel laughed in secret at Merlin, but made use of him to tell her all she would know, and the wizard had no strength to say her nay, though he knew what would come of it. For he told King Arthur that before long he should be put into the earth alive, for all his cunning. He likewise told the King many things that should befall him, and warned him always to keep the scabbard as well as the sword Excalibur, and foretold that both sword and scabbard should be stolen from him by a woman whom he most trusted. 'You will miss my counsel sorely,' added Merlin, 'and would give all your lands to have me back again.' 'But since you know what will happen,' said the King, 'you may surely guard against it.' 'No,' answered Merlin, 'that will not be.' So he departed from the King, and the maiden followed him whom some call Nimue and others Vivien, and wherever she went Merlin went also.

They journeyed together to many places, both at home and across the seas, and the damsel was wearied of him, and sought by every means to be rid of him, but he would not be shaken off. At last these two wandered back to Cornwall, and one day Merlin showed Vivien a rock under which he said great marvels were hidden. Then Vivien put forth all her powers, and told Merlin how she longed to see the wonders beneath the stone, and, in spite of all his wisdom, Merlin listened to her and crept under the rock to bring forth the strange things that lay there. And when he was under the stone she used the magic he had taught her, and the rock rolled over him, and buried him alive, as he had told King Arthur. But the damsel departed with joy, and thought no more of him: now that she knew all the magic he could teach her.

HOW MORGAN LE FAY TRIED TO KILL KING ARTHUR

King Arthur had a sister called Morgan le Fay, who was skilled in magic of all sorts, and hated her brother because he had slain in battle a Knight whom she loved. But to gain her own ends, and to revenge herself upon the King, she kept a smiling face, and let none guess the passion in her heart.

One day Morgan le Fay went to Queen Guenevere, and asked her leave to go into the country. The Queen wished her to wait till Arthur returned, but Morgan le Fay said she had had bad news and could not wait. Then the Queen let her depart without delay.

Early next morning at break of day Morgan le Fay mounted her horse and rode all day and all night, and at noon next day reached the Abbey of nuns where King Arthur had gone to rest, for he had fought a hard battle, and for three nights had slept but little. 'Do not wake him,' said Morgan le Fay, who had come there knowing she would find him, 'I will rouse him myself when I think he has had enough sleep,' for she thought to steal his sword Excalibur from him. The nuns dared not disobey her, so Morgan le Fay went straight into the room where King Arthur was lying fast asleep in his bed, and in his right hand was grasped his sword Excalibur. When she beheld that sight, her heart fell, for she dared not touch the sword, knowing well that if Arthur waked and saw her she was a dead woman. So she took the scabbard, and went away on horseback.

When the King awoke and missed his scabbard, he was angry, and asked who had been there; and the nuns told him that it was his sister Morgan le Fay, who had gone away with a scabbard under her mantle. 'Alas!' said Arthur, 'you have watched me badly!'

'Sir,' said they, 'we dared not disobey your sister.'

'Saddle the best horse that can be found,' commanded the King, 'and bid Sir Ontzlake take another and come with me.' And they buckled on their armour and rode after Morgan le Fay.

They had not gone far before they met a cowherd, and they stopped to ask if he had seen any lady riding that way. 'Yes,' said the cowherd, 'a lady passed by here, with forty horses behind her, and went into the forest yonder.' Then they galloped hard till Arthur caught sight of Morgan le Fay, who looked back, and, seeing that it was Arthur who gave chase, pushed on faster than before. And when she saw she could not escape him, she rode into a lake that lay in the plain on the edge of the forest, and, crying out, 'Whatever may befall me, my brother shall not have the scabbard,' she threw the scabbard far into the water, and it sank, for it was heavy with gold and jewels. After that she fled into a valley full of great stones, and turned herself and her men and her horses into blocks of marble. Scarcely had she done this when the King rode up, but seeing her nowhere thought some evil must have befallen her in vengeance for her misdeeds. He then sought high and low for the scabbard, but could not find it, so he returned unto the Abbey. When Arthur was gone, Morgan le Fay turned herself and her horses and her men back into their former shapes and said, 'Now, Sirs, we may go where we will.' And she departed into the country of Gore, and made her towns and castles stronger than before, for she feared King Arthur greatly. Meanwhile King Arthur had rested himself at the Abbey, and afterwards he rode to Camelot, and was welcomed by his Queen and all his Knights. And when he told his adventures and how Morgan le Fay sought his death they longed to burn her for her treason.

The next morning there arrived a damsel at the Court with a message from Morgan le Fay, saying that she had sent the King her brother a rich mantle for a gift, covered with precious stones, and begged him to receive it and to forgive her in whatever she might have offended him. The King answered little, but the mantle pleased him, and he was about to throw it over his shoulders when the lady of the lake stepped forward, and begged that she might speak to him in private. 'What is it?' asked the King. 'Say on here, and fear nothing.' 'Sir,' said the lady, 'do not put on this mantle, or suffer your Knights to put it on, till the bringer of it has worn it in your presence.' 'Your words are

wise,' answered the King, 'I will do as you counsel me. Damsel, I desire you to put on this mantle that you have brought me, so that I may see it.' 'Sir,' said she, 'it does not become me to wear a King's garment.' 'By my head,' cried Arthur, 'you shall wear it before I put it on my back, or on the back of any of my Knights,' and he signed to them to put it on her, and she fell down dead, burnt to ashes by the enchanted mantle. Then the King was filled with anger, more than he was before, that his sister should have dealt so wickedly by him.

WHAT BEAUMAINS ASKED OF THE KING

As Pentecost drew near King Arthur commanded that all the Knights of the Round Table should keep the feast at a city called Kin-Kenadon, hard by the sands of Wales, where there was a great castle. Now it was the King's custom that he would eat no food on the day of Pentecost, which we call Whit Sunday, until he had heard or seen some great marvel. So on that morning Sir Gawaine was looking from the window a little before noon when he espied three men on horseback, and with them a dwarf on foot, who held their horses when they alighted. Then Sir Gawaine went to the King and said, 'Sir, go to your food, for strange adventures are at hand.' And Arthur called the other Kings that were in the castle, and all the Knights of the Round Table that were a hundred and fifty, and they sat down to dine. When they were seated there entered the hall two men well and richly dressed, and upon their shoulders leaned the handsomest young man that ever was seen of any of them, higher than the other two by a cubit. He was wide in the chest and large handed, but his great height seemed to be a burden and a shame to him, therefore it was he leaned on the shoulders of his friends. As soon as Arthur beheld him he made a sign, and without more words all three went up to the high daïs, where the King sat. Then the tall young man stood up straight, and said: 'King Arthur, God bless you and all your fair fellowship, and in especial the fellowship of the Table Round. I have come hither to pray you to give me three gifts, which you can grant me honourably, for they will do no hurt to you or to anyone.' 'Ask,' answered Arthur, 'and you shall have your asking.'

'Sir, this is my petition for this feast, for the other two I will ask after. Give me meat and drink for this one twelvemonth.' 'Well,' said the king, 'you shall have meat and drink enough, for that I give to every man, whether friend or foe. But tell me your name!'

'I cannot tell you that,' answered he. 'That is strange,' replied the King, 'but you are the goodliest young man I ever saw,' and, turning to Sir Kay, the steward, charged him to give the young man to eat and drink of the best, and to treat him in all ways as if he were a lord's son. 'There is little need to do that,' answered Sir Kay, 'for if he had come of gentlemen and not of peasants he would have asked of you a horse and armour. But as the birth of a man is so are his requests. And seeing he has no name I will give him one, and it shall be Beaumains, or Fair-hands, and he shall sit in the kitchen and eat broth, and at the end of a year he shall be as fat as any pig that feeds on acorns.' So the young man was left in charge of Sir Kay, that scorned and mocked him.

Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawaine were wroth when they heard what Sir Kay said, and bade him leave off his mocking, for they believed the youth would turn out to be a man of great deeds; but Sir Kay paid no heed to them, and took him down to the great hall, and set him among the boys and lads, where he ate sadly. After he had finished eating both Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawaine bade him come to their room, and would have had him eat and drink there, but he refused, saying he was bound to obey Sir Kay, into whose charge the King had given him. So he was put into the kitchen by Sir Kay, and slept nightly with the kitchen boys. This he bore for a whole year, and was always mild and gentle, and gave hard words to no one. Only, whenever the Knights played at tourney he would steal out and watch them. And Sir Lancelot gave him gold to spend, and clothes to wear, and so did Gawaine. Also, if there were any games held whereat he might be, none could throw a bar nor cast a stone as far as he by two good yards.

Thus the year passed by till the feast of Whitsuntide came again, and this time the king held it at Carlion. But King Arthur would eat no meat at Whitsuntide till some adventures were told him, and glad was he when a squire came and said to him, 'Sir you may go to your food, for here is a damsel with some strange tales.' At this the damsel was led into the hall, and bowed low before the King, and begged he would give her help. 'For whom?' asked the King, 'and what is the adventure?' 'Sir,' answered she, 'my sister is a noble lady of great fame, who is besieged by a tyrant, and may not get out of her castle. And it is because your Knights are said to be the noblest in all the world that

I came to you for aid.' 'What is your sister's name, and where does she dwell? And who is the man that besieges her, and where does he come from?' 'Sir King,' answered she, 'as for my sister's name, I cannot tell it you now, but she is a lady of great beauty and goodness, and of many lands. As for the tyrant who besieges her, he is called the Red Knight of the Red Lawns.' 'I know nothing of him,' said the King. 'But I know him,' cried Sir Gawaine, 'and he is one of the most dangerous Knights in the world. Men say he has the strength of seven, and once when we had crossed swords I hardly escaped from him with my life.' 'Fair damsel,' then said the King, 'there are many Knights here who would go gladly to the rescue of your lady, but none of them shall do so with my consent unless you will tell us her name, and the place of her castle.' 'Then I must speak further,' said the damsel. But before she had made answer to the King up came Beaumains, and spoke to Arthur, saying, 'Sir King, I thank you that for this whole year I have lived in your kitchen, and had meat and drink, and now I will ask you for the two gifts that you promised me on this day.' 'Ask them,' answered the King. 'Sir, this shall be my two gifts. First grant me the adventure of this damsel, for it is mine by right.' 'You shall have it,' said the King. 'Then, Sir, you shall bid Sir Lancelot du Lake to make me Knight, for I will receive Knighthood at the hands of no other.' 'All this shall be done,' said the King. 'Fie on you,' cried the damsel, 'will you give me none but a kitchen boy to rescue my lady?' and she went away in a rage, and mounted her horse.

No sooner had she left the hall than a page came to Beaumains and told him that a horse and fair armour had been brought for him, also there had arrived a dwarf carrying all things that a Knight needed. And when he was armed there were few men that were handsomer than he, and the Court wondered greatly whence these splendid trappings had come. Then Beaumains came into the hall, and took farewell of the King, and Sir Gawaine and Sir Lancelot, and prayed Sir Lancelot that he would follow after him. So he departed, and rode after the damsel. Many looked upon him and marvelled at the strength of his horse, and its golden trappings, and envied Beaumains his shining coat of mail; but they noted that he had neither shield nor spear. 'I will ride after him,' laughed Sir Kay, 'and see if my kitchen boy will own me for his better.' 'Leave him and stay at home,' said Sir Gawaine and Sir Lancelot, but Sir Kay would not listen and sprang upon his horse. Just as Beaumains came up with the damsel, Sir Kay reached Beaumains, and said, 'Beaumains, do you not know me?'

Beaumains turned and looked at him, and answered, 'Yes, I know you for an ill-mannered Knight, therefore beware of me.' At this Sir Kay put his spear in rest and charged him, and Beaumains drew his sword and charged Sir Kay, and dashed aside the spear, and thrust him through the side, till Sir Kay fell down as if he had been dead, and Beaumains took his shield and spear for himself. Then he sprang on his own horse, bidding first his dwarf take Sir Kay's horse, and rode away. All this was seen by Sir Lancelot, who had followed him, and also by the damsel. In a little while Beaumains stopped, and asked Sir Lancelot if he would tilt with him, and they came together with such a shock that both the horses and their riders fell to the earth and were bruised sorely. Sir Lancelot was the first to rise, and he helped Beaumains from his horse, and Beaumains threw his shield from him, and offered to fight on foot. And they rushed together like wild boars, turning and thrusting and parrying for the space of an hour, and Sir Lancelot marvelled at the young man's strength, and thought he was more like a giant than a Knight, and dreading lest he himself should be put to shame, he said: 'Beaumains, do not fight so hard, we have no quarrel that forbids us to leave off.' 'That is true,' answered Beaumains, laying down his arms, 'but it does me good, my lord, to feel your might.' 'Well,' said Sir Lancelot, 'I promise you I had much ado to save myself from you unshamed, therefore have no fear of any other Knight.' 'Do you think I could really stand against a proved Knight?' asked Beaumains. 'Yes,' said Lancelot, 'if you fight as you have fought to-day I will be your warrant against anyone.' 'Then I pray you,' cried Beaumains, 'give me the order of knighthood.' 'You must first tell me your name,' replied Lancelot, 'and who are your kindred.' 'You will not betray me if I do?' asked Beaumains. 'No, that I will never do, till it is openly known,' said Lancelot. 'Then, Sir, my name is Gareth, and Sir Gawaine is my brother.' 'Ah, Sir,' cried Lancelot, 'I am gladder of you than ever I

was, for I was sure you came of good blood, and that you did not come to the Court for meat and drink only.' And he bade him kneel, and gave him the order of knighthood.

After that Sir Gareth wished to go his own ways, and departed. When he was gone, Sir Lancelot went back to Sir Kay and ordered some men that were by to bear him home on a shield, and in time his wounds were healed; but he was scorned of all men, and especially of Sir Gawaine and Sir Lancelot, who told him it was no good deed to treat any young man so, and no one could tell what his birth might be, or what had brought him to the Court.

Then Beaumains rode after the damsel, who stopped when she saw him coming. 'What are you doing here?' said she. 'Your clothes smell of the grease and tallow of the kitchen! Do you think to change my heart towards you because of yonder Knight whom you slew? No, truly! I know well who you are, you turner of spits! Go back to King Arthur's kitchen, which is your proper place.' 'Damsel,' replied Beaumains, 'you may say to me what you will, but I shall not quit you whatever you may do, for I have vowed to King Arthur to relieve the lady in the castle, and I shall set her free or die fighting for her.' 'Fie on you, Scullion,' answered she. 'You will meet with one who will make you such a welcome that you would give all the broth you ever cooked never to have seen his face.' 'I shall do my best to fight him,' said Beaumains, and held his peace.

Soon they entered the wood, and there came a man flying towards them, galloping with all his might. 'Oh, help! help! lord,' cried he, 'for my master lies in a thicket, bound by six thieves, and I greatly fear they will slay him.' 'Show me the way,' said Sir Beaumains, and they rode together till they reached the place where the Knight lay bound. Then Sir Beaumains charged the six thieves, and struck one dead, and another, and another still, and the other three fled, not liking the battle. Sir Beaumains pursued them till they turned at bay, and fought hard for their lives; but in the end Sir Beaumains slew them, and returned to the Knight and unbound him. The Knight thanked Beaumains heartily for his deliverance, and prayed him to come to his castle, where he would reward him. 'Sir,' said Beaumains, 'I was this day made Knight by noble Sir Lancelot, and that is reward enough for anything I may do. Besides, I must follow this damsel.' But when he came near her she reviled him as before, and bade him ride far from her. 'Do you think I set store by what you have done? You will soon see a sight that will make you tell a very different tale.' At this the Knight whom Beaumains had rescued rode up to the damsel, and begged that she would rest in his castle that night, as the sun was now setting. The damsel agreed, and the Knight ordered a great supper, and gave Sir Beaumains a seat above the seat of the damsel, who rose up in anger. 'Fie! fie! Sir Knight,' cried she, 'you are uncourteous to set a mere kitchen page before me; he is not fit to be in the company of high-born people.' Her words struck shame into the Knight, and he took Beaumains and set him at a side table, and seated himself before him.

In the early morning Sir Beaumains and the damsel bade farewell to the Knight, and rode through the forest till they came to a great river, where stood two Knights on the further side, guarding the passage. 'Well, what do you say now?' asked the damsel. 'Will you fight them or turn back?' 'I would not turn if there were six more of them,' answered Sir Beaumains, and he rushed into the water and so did one of the Knights. They came together in the middle of the stream, and their spears broke in two with the force of the charge, and they drew their swords, hitting hard at each other. At length Sir Beaumains dealt the other Knight such a blow that he fell from his horse, and was drowned in the river. Then Beaumains put his horse at the bank, where the second Knight was waiting for him, and they fought long together, till Sir Beaumains clave his helmet in two. So he left him dead, and rode after the damsel. 'Alas!' she cried, 'that even a kitchen page should have power to destroy two such Knights! You think you have done mighty things, but you are wrong! As to the first Knight, his horse stumbled, and he was drowned before you ever touched him. And the other you took from behind, and struck him when he was defenceless.' 'Damsel!' answered Beaumains, 'you may say what you will, I care not what it is, so I may deliver this lady.' 'Fie, foul kitchen knave, you shall see Knights that will make you lower your crest.' 'I pray you be more civil in your language,' answered Beaumains, 'for it

matters not to me what Knights they be, I will do battle with them.' 'I am trying to turn you back for your own good,' answered she, 'for if you follow me you are certainly a dead man, as well I know all you have won before has been by luck.' 'Say what you will, damsel,' said he, 'but where you go I will follow you,' and they rode together till eventide, and all the way she chid him and gave him no rest.

At length they reached an open space where there was a black lawn, and on the lawn a black hawthorn, whereon hung a black banner on one side, and a black shield and spear, big and long, on the other. Close by stood a black horse covered with silk, fastened to a black stone. A Knight, covered with black armour, sat on the horse, and when she saw him the damsel bade him ride away, as his horse was not saddled. But the Knight drew near and said to her, 'Damsel, have you brought this Knight from King Arthur's Court to be your champion?' 'No, truly,' answered she, 'this is but a kitchen boy, fed by King Arthur for charity.' 'Then why is he clad in armour?' asked the Knight; 'it is a shame that he should even bear you company.' 'I cannot be rid of him,' said she, 'he rides with me against my will. I would that you were able to deliver me from him! Either slay him or frighten him off, for by ill fortune he has this day slain the two Knights of the passage.' 'I wonder much,' said the Black Knight, 'that any man who is well born should consent to fight with him.' 'They do not know him,' replied the damsel, 'and they think he must be a famous Knight because he rides with me.' 'That may be,' said the Black Knight, 'but he is well made, and looks likely to be a strong man; still I promise you I will just throw him to the ground, and take away his horse and armour, for it would be a shame to me to do more.' When Sir Beaumains heard him talk thus he looked up and said, 'Sir Knight, you are lightly disposing of my horse and armour, but I would have you know that I will pass this lawn, against your will or not, and you will only get my horse and armour if you win them in fair fight. Therefore let me see what you can do.' 'Say you so?' answered the Knight, 'now give up the lady at once, for it ill becomes a kitchen page to ride with a lady of high degree.' 'It is a lie,' said Beaumains, 'I am a gentleman born, and my birth is better than yours, as I will prove upon your body.'

With that they drew back their horses so as to charge each other hotly, and for the space of an hour and a half they fought fiercely and well, but in the end a blow from Beaumains threw the Knight from his horse, and he swooned and died. Then Beaumains jumped down, and seeing that the Knight's horse and armour were better than his own, he took them for himself, and rode after the damsel. While they were thus riding together, and the damsel was chiding him as ever she did, they saw a Knight coming towards them dressed all in green. 'Is that my brother the Black Knight who is with you?' asked he of the damsel. 'No, indeed,' she replied, 'this unhappy kitchen knave has slain your brother, to my great sorrow.' 'Alas!' sighed the Green Knight, 'that my brother should die so meanly at the hand of a kitchen knave. Traitor!' he added, turning to Beaumains, 'thou shalt die for slaying my brother, for he was a noble Knight, and his name was Sir Percard.' 'I defy you,' said Beaumains, 'for I slew him as a good Knight should.'

Then the Green Knight seized a horn which hung from a horn tree, and blew three notes upon it, and two damsels came and armed him, and fastened on him a green shield and a green spear. So the fight began and raged long, first on horseback and then on foot, till both were sore wounded. At last the damsel came and stood beside them, and said, 'My lord the Green Knight, why for very shame do you stand so long fighting a kitchen knave? You ought never to have been made a Knight at all!' These scornful words stung the heart of the Green Knight, and he dealt a mighty stroke which cleft asunder the shield of Beaumains. And when Beaumains saw this, he struck a blow upon the Knight's helmet which brought him to his knees, and Beaumains leapt on him, and dragged him to the ground. Then the Green Knight cried for mercy, and offered to yield himself prisoner unto Beaumains. 'It is all in vain,' answered Beaumains, 'unless the damsel prays me for your life,' and therewith he unlaced his helmet as though he would slay him. 'Fie upon thee, false kitchen page!' said the damsel, 'I will never pray to save his life, for I am sure he is in no danger.' 'Suffer me not to die,' entreated the Knight, 'when a word may save me!' 'Fair Knight,' he went on, turning to Beaumains, 'save my life, and I will forgive you the death of my brother, and will do you service for ever, and will bring thirty of

my Knights to serve you likewise.' 'It is a shame,' cried the damsel, 'that such a kitchen knave should have you and thirty Knights besides.' 'Sir Knight,' said Beaumains, 'I care nothing for all this, but if I am to spare your life the damsel must ask for it,' and he stepped forward as if to slay him. 'Let be, foul knave,' then said the damsel, 'do not slay him. If you do, you will repent it.' 'Damsel,' answered Beaumains, 'it is a pleasure to me to obey you, and at your wish I will save his life. Sir Knight with the green arms, I release you at the request of this damsel, and I will fulfil all she charges me.'

Then the Green Knight kneeled down, and did him homage with his sword. 'I am sorry,' said the damsel, 'for the wounds you have received, and for your brother's death, for I had great need of you both, and have much dread of passing the forest.' 'Fear nothing,' answered the Green Knight, 'for this evening you shall lodge in my house, and to-morrow I will show you the way through the forest.' And they went with the Green Knight. But the damsel did not mend her ways with Beaumains, and ever more reviled him, till the Green Knight rebuked her, saying Beaumains was the noblest Knight that held a spear, and that in the end she would find he had sprung from some great King. And the Green Knight summoned the thirty Knights who did him service, and bade them henceforth do service to Beaumains, and keep him from treachery, and when he had need of them they would be ready to obey his orders. So they bade each other farewell, and Beaumains and the damsel rode forth anew. In like manner did Sir Beaumains overcome the Red Knight, who was the third brother, and the Red Knight cried for mercy, and offered to bring sixty Knights to do him service, and Beaumains spared his life at the request of the damsel, and likewise it so happened to Sir Persant of Inde.

And this time the damsel prayed Beaumains to give up the fight, saying, 'Sir, I wonder who you are and of what kindred you have come. Boldly you speak, and boldly you have done; therefore I pray you to depart and save yourself while you may, for both you and your horse have suffered great fatigues, and I fear we delay too long, for the besieged castle is but seven miles from this place, and all the perils are past save this one only. I dread sorely lest you should get some hurt; yet this Sir Persant of Inde is nothing in might to the Knight who has laid siege to my lady.' But Sir Beaumains would not listen to her words, and vowed that by two hours after noon he would have overthrown him, and that it would still be daylight when they reached the castle. 'What sort of a man can you be?' answered the damsel, looking at him in wonder, 'for never did a woman treat a Knight as ill and shamefully as I have done you, while you have always been gentle and courteous to me, and no one bears himself like that save he who is of noble blood.' 'Damsel,' replied Beaumains, 'your hard words only drove me to strike the harder, and though I ate in King Arthur's kitchen, perhaps I might have had as much food as I wanted elsewhere. But all I have done was to make proof of my friends, and whether I am a gentleman or not, fair damsel, I have done you gentleman's service, and may perchance, do you greater service before we part from each other.' 'Alas, fair Beaumains, forgive me all that I have said and done against you.' 'With all my heart,' he answered, 'and since you are pleased now to speak good words to me, know that I hear them gladly, and there is no Knight living but I feel strong enough to meet him.'

So Beaumains conquered Sir Persant of Inde, who brought a hundred Knights to be sworn into his service, and the next morning the damsel led him to the castle, where the Red Knight of the Red Lawn held fast the lady. 'Heaven defend you,' cried Sir Persant, when they told him where they were going; 'that is the most perilous Knight now living, for he has the strength of seven men. He has done great wrong to that lady, who is one of the fairest in all the world, and it seems to me as if this damsel must be her sister. Is not her name Linet?' 'Yes, Sir,' answered she, 'and my lady my sister's name is dame Lyonesse.' 'The Red Knight has drawn out the siege for two years,' said Sir Persant, 'though he might have forced an entrance many a time, but he hoped that Sir Lancelot du Lake or Sir Tristram or Sir Gawaine should come to do battle with him.' 'My Lord Sir Persant of Inde,' said the damsel, 'I bid you knight this gentleman before he fight with the Red Knight.' 'That I will gladly,' replied Sir Persant, 'if it please him to take the order of knighthood from so simple a man as I am.' 'Sir,' answered Beaumains, 'I thank you for your goodwill, but at the beginning of this quest I was made

a Knight by Sir Lancelot. My name is Sir Gareth of Orkney and Sir Gawaine is my brother, though neither he nor King Arthur, whose sister is my mother, knows of it. I pray you to keep it close also.'

Now word was brought unto the besieged lady by the dwarf that her sister was coming to her with a Knight sent by King Arthur. And when the lady heard all that Beaumains had done, and how he had overthrown all who stood in his way, she bade her dwarf take baked venison, and fat capons, and two silver flagons of wine and a gold cup, and put them into the hands of a hermit that dwelt in a hermitage close by. The dwarf did so, and the lady then sent him to greet her sister and Sir Beaumains, and to beg them to eat and drink in the hermit's cell, and rest themselves, which they did. When they drew near the besieged castle Sir Beaumains saw full forty Knights, with spurs on their heels and swords in their hands, hanging from the tall trees that stood upon the lawn. 'Fair Sir,' said the damsel, 'these Knights came hither to rescue my sister, dame Lyonesse; and if you cannot overthrow the Knight of the Red Lawn, you will hang there too.'

'Truly,' answered Beaumains, 'it is a marvel that none of King Arthur's Knights has dealt with the Knight of the Red Lawn ere this'; and they rode up to the castle, which had round it high walls and deep ditches, till they came to a great sycamore tree, where hung a horn. And whoso desired to do battle with the Red Knight must blow that horn loudly.

'Sir, I pray you,' said Linet, as Beaumains bent forward to seize it, 'do not blow it till it is full noontide, for during three hours before that the Red Knight's strength so increases that it is as the strength of seven men; but when noon is come, he has the might of one man only.'

'Ah! for shame, damsel, to say such words. I will fight him as he is, or not at all,' and Beaumains blew such a blast that it rang through the castle. And the Red Knight buckled on his armour, and came to where Beaumains stood. So the battle began, and a fierce one it was, and much ado had Beaumains to last out till noon, when the Red Knight's strength began to wane; they rested, and came on again, and in the end the Red Knight yielded to Sir Beaumains, and the lords and barons in the castle did homage to the victor, and begged that the Red Knight's life might be spared on condition they all took service with Beaumains. This was granted to them, and Linet bound up his wounds and put ointment on them, and so she did likewise to Sir Beaumains. But the Red Knight was sent to the Court of King Arthur, and told him all that Sir Beaumains had done. And King Arthur and his Knights marvelled.

Now Sir Beaumains had looked up at the windows of Castle Perilous before the fight, and had seen the face of the Lady Lyonesse, and had thought it the fairest in all the world. After he had subdued the Red Knight, he hasted into the castle, and the Lady Lyonesse welcomed him, and he told her he had bought her love with the best blood in his body. And she did not say him nay, but put him off for a time. Then the King sent letters to her to bid her, and likewise Sir Gareth, come to his Court, and by the counsel of Sir Gareth she prayed the King to let her call a tournament, and to proclaim that the Knight who bore himself best should, if he was unwedded, take her and all her lands. But if he had a wife already he should be given a white ger-falcon, and for his wife a crown of gold, set about with precious stones.

So the Lady Lyonesse did as Sir Gareth had counselled her, and answered King Arthur that where Sir Gareth was she could not tell, but that if the King would call a tourney he might be sure that Sir Gareth would come to it. 'It is well thought of,' said Arthur, and the Lady Lyonesse departed unto Castle Perilous, and summoned all her Knights around her, and told them what she had done, and how they were to make ready to fight in the tournament. She began at once to set her castle in order, and to think what she should do with the great array of Knights that would ride hither from the furthest parts – from Scotland and Wales and Cornwall – and to lodge fitly the Kings, Dukes, Earls, and Barons that should come with Arthur. Queen Guenevere also she awaited, and the Queen of Orkney, Sir Gareth's mother. But Sir Gareth entreated the Lady Lyonesse and those Knights that were in the castle with him not to let his name be known, and this they agreed to.

'Sir Gareth,' said dame Lyonesse, 'I will lend you a ring, which I beseech you for the love you bear me to give me back when the tournament is done, for without it I have but little beauty. This

ring is like no other ring, it will turn green red, and blue white, and the bearer shall lose no blood, however sore he may be wounded.'

'Truly, my own lady,' answered Sir Gareth, 'this ring will serve me well, and by its help I shall not fear that any man shall know me.' And Sir Gringamore, brother to the Lady Lyonesse, gave him a bay horse, and strong armour, and a sharp sword that had once belonged to his father. On the morning of the fifteenth of August, when the Feast of the Assumption was kept, the King commanded his heralds to blow loudly their trumpets, so that every Knight might know that he must enter the lists. It was a noble sight to see them flocking clad in shining armour, each man with his device upon his shield. And the heralds marked who bare them best, and who were overthrown. All marvelled as to who the Knight could be whose armour sometimes seemed green, and sometimes white, but no man knew it was Sir Gareth. And whosoever Sir Gareth tilted with was straightway overthrown. 'Of a truth,' cried King Arthur, 'that Knight with the many colours is a good Knight,' and he called Sir Lancelot and bade him to challenge that Knight to combat. But Sir Lancelot said that though the Knight had come off victor in every fight, yet his limbs must be weary, for he had fought as a man fights under the eyes of his lady, 'and for this day,' said Sir Lancelot, 'he shall have the honour. Though it lay in my power to put it from him, I would not.'

Then they paused for a while to rest, and afterwards the tournament began again more fiercely than before, and Sir Lancelot was set upon by two Knights at once. When Sir Gareth saw that, he rode in between them, but no stroke would he deal Sir Lancelot, which Sir Lancelot noted, and guessed that it was the good Knight Sir Gareth. Sir Gareth went hither and thither, smiting anyone that came in his way, and by fortune he met with his brother Sir Gawaine, and knocked off his helmet. Now it happened that while he was fighting a Knight dealt Sir Gareth a fierce blow on his helm, and he rode off the field to mend it. Then his dwarf, who had been watching eagerly, cried out to Sir Gareth to leave the ring with him, lest he should lose it while he was drinking, which Sir Gareth did; and when he had drunk and mended his helm he forgot the ring, at which the dwarf was glad, for he knew his name could no longer be hid. And when Sir Gareth returned to the field, his armour shone yellow like gold, and King Arthur marvelled what Knight he was, for he saw by his hair that he was the same Knight who had worn the many colours. 'Go,' he said to his heralds, 'ride near him and see what manner of Knight he is, for none can tell me his name.' So a herald drew close to him, and saw that on his helm was written in golden letters 'This helm belongs to Sir Gareth of Orkney'; and the herald cried out and made proclamation, and the Kings and Knights pressed to behold him. And when Sir Gareth saw he was discovered, he struck more fiercely than before, and smote down Sir Sagramore, and his brother Sir Gawaine. 'O brother,' said Sir Gawaine, 'I did not think you would have smitten me!' When Sir Gareth heard him say that he rode out of the press, and cried to his dwarf, 'Boy, you have played me foul, for you have kept my ring. Give it to me now, that I may hide myself,' and he galloped swiftly into the forest, and no one knew where he had gone. 'What shall I do next?' asked he of the dwarf. 'Sir,' answered the dwarf, 'send the Lady Lyonesse back her ring.' 'Your counsel is good,' said Gareth; 'take it to her, and commend me to her grace, and say I will come when I may, and bid her to be faithful to me, as I am to her.' After that Sir Gareth rode deeper into the forest.

Though Sir Gareth had left the tournament he found that there were as many fights awaiting him as if he had remained there. He overcame all his foes, and sent them and their followers to do homage to King Arthur, but he himself stayed behind. He was standing alone after they had gone, when he beheld an armed Knight coming towards him. Sir Gareth sprang on his horse, and without a word the two crashed together like thunder, and strove hard for two hours, till the ground was wet with blood. At that time the damsel Linet came riding by, and saw what was doing, and knew who were the fighters. And she cried 'Sir Gawaine, Sir Gawaine, leave fighting with your brother Sir Gareth.' Then he threw down his shield and sword, and ran to Sir Gareth, and first took him in his arms and next kneeled down and asked mercy of him. 'Why do you, who were but now so strong and mighty, so suddenly yield to me?' asked Sir Gareth, who had not perceived the damsel. 'O Gareth,

I am your brother, and have had much sorrow for your sake.' At this Sir Gareth unlaced his helm and knelt before Sir Gawaine, and they rose and embraced each other. 'Ah, my fair brother,' said Sir Gawaine, 'I ought rightly to do you homage, even if you were not my brother, for in this twelvemonth you have sent King Arthur more Knights than any six of the best men of the Round Table.' While he was speaking there came the Lady Linet, and healed the wounds of Sir Gareth and of Sir Gawaine. 'What are you going to do now?' asked she. 'It is time that King Arthur had tidings of you both, and your horses are not fit to bear you.'

'Ride, I pray you,' said Sir Gawaine, 'to my uncle King Arthur, who is but two miles away, and tell him what adventure has befallen me.' So she mounted her mule, and when she had told her tale to King Arthur, he bade them saddle him a palfrey and invited all the Knights and ladies of his Court to ride with him. When they reached the place they saw Sir Gareth and Sir Gawaine sitting on the hill-side. The King jumped off his horse, and would have greeted them, but he swooned away for gladness, and they ran and comforted him, and also their mother.

The two Knights stayed in King Arthur's Court for eight days, and rested themselves and grew strong. Then said the King to Linet, 'I wonder that your sister, dame Lyonesse, does not come here to visit me, or more truly to visit my nephew, Sir Gareth, who has worked so hard to win her love.'

'My lord,' answered Linet, 'you must, by your grace, hold her excused, for she does not know that Sir Gareth is here.'

'Go and fetch her, then,' said Arthur.

'That I will do quickly,' replied Linet, and by the next morning she had brought dame Lyonesse, and her brother Sir Gringamore, and forty Knights, but among the ladies dame Lyonesse was the fairest, save only Queen Guenevere. They were all welcomed of King Arthur, who turned to his nephew Sir Gareth and asked him whether he would have that lady to his wife.

'My lord,' replied Sir Gareth, 'you know well that I love her above all the ladies in the world.'

'And what say you, fair lady?' asked the King.

'Most noble King,' said dame Lyonesse, 'I would sooner have Sir Gareth as my husband than any King or Prince that may be christened, and if I may not have him I promise you I will have none. For he is my first love, and shall be my last. And if you will suffer him to have his will and choice, I dare say he will have me.'

'That is truth,' said Sir Gareth.

'What, nephew,' cried the King, 'sits the wind in that door? Then you shall have all the help that is in my power,' and so said Gareth's mother. And it was fixed that the marriage should be at Michaelmas, at Kin-Kenadon by the sea-shore, and thus it was proclaimed in all places of the realm. Then Sir Gareth sent his summons to all the Knights and ladies that he had won in battle that they should be present, and he gave a rich ring to the Lady Lyonesse, and she gave him one likewise. And before she departed she had from King Arthur a shining golden bee, as a token. After that Sir Gareth set her on her way towards her castle, and returned unto the King. But he would ever be in Sir Lancelot's company, for there was no Knight that Sir Gareth loved so well as Sir Lancelot. The days drew fast to Michaelmas, and there came the Lady Lyonesse with her sister Linet and her brother Sir Gringamore to Kin-Kenadon by the sea, and there were they lodged by order of King Arthur. And upon Michaelmas Day the Bishop of Canterbury wedded Sir Gareth and the Lady Lyonesse with great ceremonies, and King Arthur commanded that Sir Gawaine should be joined to the damsel Linet, and Sir Agrawaine to the niece of dame Lyonesse, whose name was Laurel. Then the Knights whom Sir Gareth had won in battle came with their followings and did homage to him, and the Green Knight besought him that he might act as chamberlain at the feast, and the Red Knight that he might be his steward. As soon as the feast was ended, they had all manner of minstrelsy and games and a great tournament that lasted three days, but at the prayer of dame Lyonesse the King would not suffer that any man who was wedded should fight at that feast.

THE QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAAL

This is a mysterious part of the adventures of King Arthur's Knights. We must remember that parts of these stories are very old; they were invented by the heathen Welsh, or by the ancient Britons, from whom the Welsh are descended, and by the old pagan Irish, who spoke Gaelic, a language not very unlike Welsh. Then these ancient stories were translated by French and other foreign writers, and Christian beliefs and chivalrous customs were added in the French romances, and, finally, the French was translated into English about the time of Edward IV. by Sir Thomas Malory, who altered as he pleased. The Story of the Holy Graal, in this book, is mostly taken from Malory, but partly from 'The High History of the Holy Graal,' translated by Dr. Sebastian Evans from an old French book.

What *was* the Holy Graal? In the stories it is the holy vessel used by our Lord, and brought to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea. But in the older heathen Irish stories there is a mysterious vessel of a magical sort, full of miraculous food, and probably the French writers of the romances confused this with the sacred vessel brought from the Holy Land. On account of the sins of men this relic was made invisible, but now and then it appeared, borne by angels or floating in a heavenly light. The Knights, against King Arthur's wish, made a vow to find it, and gave up their duties of redressing wrongs and keeping order, to pursue the beautiful vision. But most of them, for their sins, were unsuccessful, like Sir Lancelot, and the Round Table was scattered and the kingdom was weakened by the neglect of ordinary duties in the search for what could never be gained by mortal men. This appears to be the moral of the story, if it has any moral. But the stories are confused almost like a dream, though it is a beautiful dream.

I

HOW THE KING WENT ON PILGRIMAGE, AND HIS SQUIRE WAS SLAIN IN A DREAM

Now the King was minded to go on a pilgrimage, and he agreed with the Queen that he would set forth to seek the holy chapel of St. Augustine, which is in the White Forest, and may only be found by adventure. Much he wished to undertake the quest alone, but this the Queen would not suffer, and to do her pleasure he consented that a youth, tall and strong of limb, should ride with him as his squire. Chaus was the youth's name, and he was son to Gwain li Aoutres. 'Lie within to-night,' commanded the King, 'and take heed that my horse be saddled at break of day, and my arms ready.' 'At your pleasure, Sir,' answered the youth, whose heart rejoiced because he was going alone with the King.

As night came on, all the Knights quitted the hall, but Chaus the squire stayed where he was, and would not take off his clothes or his shoes, lest sleep should fall on him and he might not be ready when the King called him. So he sat himself down by the great fire, but in spite of his will sleep fell heavily on him, and he dreamed a strange dream.

In his dream it seemed that the King had ridden away to the quest, and had left his squire behind him, which filled the young man with fear. And in his dream he set the saddle and bridle on his horse, and fastened his spurs, and girt on his sword, and galloped out of the castle after the King. He rode on a long space, till he entered a thick forest, and there before him lay traces of the King's horse, and he followed till the marks of the hoofs ceased suddenly at some open ground and he thought that the King had alighted there. On the right stood a chapel, and about it was a graveyard, and in the graveyard many coffins, and in his dream it seemed as if the King had entered the chapel, so the young man entered also. But no man did he behold save a Knight that lay dead upon a bier in the midst of the chapel, covered with a pall of rich silk, and four tapers in golden candlesticks were burning round him. The squire marvelled to see the body lying there so lonely, with no one near it, and likewise that the King was nowhere to be seen. Then he took out one of the tall tapers, and hid the candlestick under his cloak, and rode away until he should find the King.

On his journey through the forest he was stopped by a man black and ill-favoured, holding a large knife in his hand.

'Ho! you that stand there, have you seen King Arthur?' asked the squire.

'No, but I have met you, and I am glad thereof, for you have under your cloak one of the candlesticks of gold that was placed in honour of the Knight who lies dead in the chapel. Give it to me, and I will carry it back; and if you do not this of your own will, I will make you.'

'By my faith!' cried the squire, 'I will never yield it to you! Rather, will I carry it off and make a present of it to King Arthur.'

'You will pay for it dearly,' answered the man, 'if you yield it not up forthwith.'

To this the squire did not make answer, but dashed forward, thinking to pass him by; but the man thrust at him with his knife, and it entered his body up to the hilt. And when the squire dreamed this, he cried, 'Help! help! for I am a dead man!'

As soon as the King and the Queen heard that cry they awoke from their sleep, and the Chamberlain said, 'Sir, you must be moving, for it is day'; and the King rose and dressed himself, and put on his shoes. Then the cry came again: 'Fetch me a priest, for I die!' and the King ran at great speed into the hall, while the Queen and the Chamberlain followed him with torches and candles. 'What aileth you?' asked the King of his squire, and the squire told him of all that he had dreamed. 'Ha,' said the King, 'is it, then, a dream?' 'Yes, Sir,' answered the squire, 'but it is a right foul dream for me, for right foully it hath come true,' and he lifted his left arm, and said, 'Sir, look you here! Lo, here is the knife that was struck in my side up to the haft.' After that, he drew forth the candlestick,

and showed it to the King. 'Sir, for this candlestick that I present to you was I wounded to the death!' The King took the candlestick in his hands and looked at it, and none so rich had he seen before, and he bade the Queen look also. 'Sir,' said the squire again, 'draw not forth the knife out of my body till I be shriven of the priest.' So the King commanded that a priest should be sent for, and when the squire had confessed his sins, the King drew the knife out of the body and the soul departed forthwith. Then the King grieved that the young man had come to his death in such strange wise, and ordered him a fair burial, and desired that the golden candlestick should be sent to the Church of Saint Paul in London, which at that time was newly built.

After this King Arthur would have none to go with him on his quest, and many strange adventures he achieved before he reached the chapel of St. Augustine, which was in the midst of the White Forest. There he alighted from his horse, and sought to enter, but though there was neither door nor bar he might not pass the threshold. But from without he heard wondrous voices singing, and saw a light shining brighter than any that he had seen before, and visions such as he scarcely dared to look upon. And he resolved greatly to amend his sins, and to bring peace and order into his kingdom. So he set forth, strengthened and comforted, and after divers more adventures returned to his Court.

II

THE COMING OF THE HOLY GRAAL

It was on the eve of Pentecost that all the Knights of the Table Round met together at Camelot, and a great feast was made ready for them. And as they sat at supper they heard a loud noise, as of the crashing of thunder, and it seemed as if the roof would fall on them. Then, in the midst of the thunder, there entered a sunbeam, brighter by seven times than the brightest day, and its brightness was not of this world. The Knights held their peace, but every man looked at his neighbour, and his countenance shone fairer than ever it had done before. As they sat dumb, for their tongues felt as if they could speak nothing, there floated in the hall the Holy Graal, and over it a veil of white samite, so that none might see it nor who bare it. But sweet odours filled the place, and every Knight had set before him the food he loved best; and after that the Holy Vessel departed suddenly, they wist not where. When it had gone their tongues were loosened, and the King gave thanks for the wonders that they had been permitted to see. After that he had finished, Sir Gawaine stood up and vowed to depart the next morning in quest of the Holy Graal, and not to return until he had seen it. 'But if after a year and a day I may not speed in my quest,' said he, 'I shall come again, for I shall know that the sight of it is not for me.' And many of the Knights there sitting swore a like vow.

But King Arthur, when he heard this, was sore displeased. 'Alas!' cried he unto Sir Gawaine, 'you have undone me by your vow. For through you is broken up the fairest fellowship, and the truest of knighthood, that ever the world saw, and when they have once departed they shall meet no more at the Table Round, for many shall die in the quest. It grieves me sore, for I have loved them as well as my own life.' So he spoke, and paused, and tears came into his eyes. 'Ah, Gawaine, Gawaine! you have set me in great sorrow.'

'Comfort yourself,' said Sir Lancelot, 'for we shall win for ourselves great honour, and much more than if we had died in any other wise, since die we must.' But the King would not be comforted, and the Queen and all the Court were troubled also for the love which they had to these Knights. Then the Queen came to Sir Galahad, who was sitting among those Knights though younger he was than any of them, and asked him whence he came, and of what country, and if he was son to Sir Lancelot. And King Arthur did him great honour, and he rested him in his own bed. And next morning the King and Queen went into the Minster, and the Knights followed them, dressed all in armour, save only their shields and their helmets. When the service was finished the King would know how many of the fellowship had sworn to undertake the quest of the Graal, and they were counted, and found to number a hundred and fifty. They bade farewell, and mounted their horses, and rode through the streets of Camelot, and there was weeping of both rich and poor, and the King could not speak for weeping. And at sunrise they all parted company with each other, and every Knight took the way he best liked.

III

THE ADVENTURE OF SIR GALAHAD

Now Sir Galahad had as yet no shield, and he rode four days without meeting any adventure, till at last he came to a White Abbey, where he dismounted and asked if he might sleep there that night. The brethren received him with great reverence, and led him to a chamber, where he took off his armour, and then saw that he was in the presence of two Knights. 'Sirs,' said Sir Galahad, 'what adventure brought you hither?' 'Sir,' replied they, 'we heard that within this Abbey is a shield that no man may hang round his neck without being dead within three days, or some mischief befalling him. And if we fail in the adventure, you shall take it upon you.' 'Sirs,' replied Sir Galahad, 'I agree well thereto, for as yet I have no shield.'

So on the morn they arose and heard Mass, and then a monk led them behind an altar where hung a shield white as snow, with a red cross in the middle of it. 'Sirs,' said the monk, 'this shield cannot be hung round no Knight's neck, unless he be the worthiest Knight in the world, and therefore I counsel you to be well advised.'

'Well,' answered one of the Knights, whose name was King Bagdemagus, 'I know truly that I am not the best Knight in the world, but yet shall I try to bear it,' and he bare it out of the Abbey. Then he said to Sir Galahad, 'I pray you abide here still, till you know how I shall speed,' and he rode away, taking with him a squire to send tidings back to Sir Galahad.

After King Bagdemagus had ridden two miles he entered a fair valley, and there met him a goodly Knight seated on a white horse and clad in white armour. And they came together with their spears, and Sir Bagdemagus was borne from his horse, for the shield covered him not at all. Therewith the strange Knight alighted and took the white shield from him, and gave it to the squire, saying, 'Bear this shield to the good Knight Sir Galahad that thou hast left in the Abbey, and greet him well from me.'

'Sir,' said the squire, 'what is your name?'

'Take thou no heed of my name,' answered the Knight, 'for it is not for thee to know, nor for any earthly man.'

'Now, fair Sir,' said the squire, 'tell me for what cause this shield may not be borne lest ill befalls him who bears it.'

'Since you have asked me,' answered the Knight, 'know that no man shall bear this shield, save Sir Galahad only.'

Then the squire turned to Bagdemagus, and asked him whether he were wounded or not. 'Yes, truly,' said he, 'and I shall hardly escape from death'; and scarcely could he climb on to his horse's back when the squire brought it near him. But the squire led him to a monastery that lay in the valley, and there he was treated of his wounds, and after long lying came back to life. After the squire had given the Knight into the care of the monks, he rode back to the Abbey, bearing with him the shield. 'Sir Galahad,' said he, alighting before him, 'the Knight that wounded Bagdemagus sends you greeting, and bids you bear this shield, which shall bring you many adventures.'

'Now blessed be God and fortune,' answered Sir Galahad, and called for his arms, and mounted his horse, hanging the shield about his neck. Then, followed by the squire, he set out. They rode straight to the hermitage, where they saw the White Knight who had sent the shield to Sir Galahad. The two Knights saluted each other courteously, and then the White Knight told Sir Galahad the story of the shield, and how it had been given into his charge. Afterwards they parted, and Sir Galahad and his squire returned unto the Abbey whence they came.

The monks made great joy at seeing Sir Galahad again, for they feared he was gone for ever; and as soon as he was alighted from his horse they brought him unto a tomb in the churchyard where there was night and day such a noise that any man who heard it should be driven nigh mad, or else lose

his strength. 'Sir,' they said, 'we deem it a fiend.' Sir Galahad drew near, all armed save his helmet, and stood by the tomb. 'Lift up the stone,' said a monk, and Galahad lifted it, and a voice cried, 'Come thou not nigh me, Sir Galahad, for thou shalt make me go again where I have been so long.' But Galahad took no heed of him, and lifted the stone yet higher, and there rushed from the tomb a foul smoke, and in the midst of it leaped out the foulest figure that ever was seen in the likeness of a man. 'Galahad,' said the figure, 'I see about thee so many angels that my power dare not touch thee.' Then Galahad, stooping down, looked into the tomb, and he saw a body all armed lying there, with a sword by his side. 'Fair brother,' said Galahad, 'let us remove this body, for he is not worthy to be in this churchyard, being a false Christian man.'

This being done they all departed and returned unto the monastery, where they lay that night, and the next morning Sir Galahad knighted Melias his squire, as he had promised him aforetime. So Sir Galahad and Sir Melias departed thence, in quest of the Holy Graal, but they soon went their different ways and fell upon different adventures. In his first encounter Sir Melias was sore wounded, and Sir Galahad came to his help, and left him to an old monk who said that he would heal him of his wounds in the space of seven weeks, and that he was thus wounded because he had not come clean to the quest of the Graal, as Sir Galahad had done. Sir Galahad left him there, and rode on till he came to the Castle of Maidens, which he alone might enter who was free from sin. There he chased away the Knights who had seized the castle seven years ago, and restored all to the Duke's daughter, who owned it of right. Besides this he set free the maidens who were kept in prison, and summoned all those Knights in the country round who had held their lands of the Duke, bidding them do homage to his daughter. And in the morning one came to him and told him that as the seven Knights fled from the Castle of Maidens they fell upon the path of Sir Gawaine, Sir Gareth, and Sir Lewaine, who were seeking Sir Galahad, and they gave battle; and the seven Knights were slain by the three Knights. 'It is well,' said Galahad, and he took his armour and his horse and rode away.

So when Sir Galahad left the Castle of Maidens he rode till he came to a waste forest, and there he met with Sir Lancelot and Sir Percivale; but they knew him not, for he was now disguised. And they fought together, and the two Knights were smitten down out of the saddle. 'God be with thee, thou best Knight in the world,' cried a nun who dwelt in a hermitage close by; and she said it in a loud voice, so that Lancelot and Percivale might hear. But Sir Galahad feared that she would make known who he was, so he spurred his horse and struck deep into the forest before Sir Lancelot and Sir Percivale could mount again. They knew not which path he had taken, so Sir Percivale turned back to ask advice of the nun, and Sir Lancelot pressed forward.

IV

HOW SIR LANCELOT SAW A VISION, AND REPENTED OF HIS SINS

He halted when he came to a stone cross, which had by it a block of marble, while nigh at hand stood an old chapel. He tied his horse to a tree, and hung his shield on a branch, and looked into the chapel, for the door was waste and broken. And he saw there a fair altar covered with a silken cloth, and a candlestick which had six branches, all of shining silver. A great light streamed from it, and at this sight Sir Lancelot would fain have entered in, but he could not. So he turned back sorrowful and dismayed, and took the saddle and bridle off his horse, and let him pasture where he would, while he himself unlaced his helm, and ungirded his sword, and lay down to sleep upon his shield, at the foot of the cross.

As he lay there, half waking and half sleeping, he saw two white palfreys come by, drawing a litter, wherein lay a sick Knight. When they reached the cross they paused, and Sir Lancelot heard the Knight say, 'O sweet Lord, when shall this sorrow leave me, and when shall the Holy Vessel come by me, through which I shall be blessed? For I have endured long, though my ill deeds were few.' Thus he spoke, and Sir Lancelot heard it, and of a sudden the great candlestick stood before the cross, though no man had brought it. And with it was a table of silver and the Holy Vessel of the Graal, which Lancelot had seen aforetime. Then the Knight rose up, and on his hands and knees he approached the Holy Vessel, and prayed, and was made whole of his sickness. After that the Graal went back into the chapel, and the light and the candlestick also, and Sir Lancelot would fain have followed, but could not, so heavy was the weight of his sins upon him. And the sick Knight arose and kissed the cross, and saw Sir Lancelot lying at the foot with his eyes shut. 'I marvel greatly at this sleeping Knight,' he said to his squire, 'that he had no power to wake when the Holy Vessel was brought hither.' 'I dare right well say,' answered the squire, 'that he dwelleth in some deadly sin, whereof he was never confessed.' 'By my faith,' said the Knight, 'he is unhappy, whoever he is, for he is of the fellowship of the Round Table, which have undertaken the quest of the Graal.' 'Sir,' replied the squire, 'you have all your arms here, save only your sword and your helm. Take therefore those of this strange Knight, who has just put them off.' And the Knight did as his squire said, and took Sir Lancelot's horse also, for it was better than his own.

After they had gone Sir Lancelot waked up wholly, and thought of what he had seen, wondering if he were in a dream or not. Suddenly a voice spoke to him, and it said, 'Sir Lancelot, more hard than is the stone, more bitter than is the wood, more naked and barren than is the leaf of the fig tree, art thou; therefore go from hence and withdraw thee from this holy place.' When Sir Lancelot heard this, his heart was passing heavy, and he wept, cursing the day when he had been born. But his helm and sword had gone from the spot where he had lain them at the foot of the cross, and his horse was gone also. And he smote himself and cried, 'My sin and my wickedness have done me this dishonour; for when I sought worldly adventures for worldly desires I ever achieved them and had the better in every place, and never was I discomfited in any quarrel, were it right or wrong. And now I take upon me the adventures of holy things, I see and understand that my old sin hinders me, so that I could not move nor speak when the Holy Graal passed by.' Thus he sorrowed till it was day, and he heard the birds sing, and at that he felt comforted. And as his horse was gone also, he departed on foot with a heavy heart.

V THE ADVENTURE OF SIR PERCIVALE

All this while Sir Percivale had pursued adventures of his own, and came nigh unto losing his life, but he was saved from his enemies by the good Knight, Sir Galahad, whom he did not know, although he was seeking him, for Sir Galahad now bore a red shield, and not a white one. And at last the foes fled deep into the forest, and Sir Galahad followed; but Sir Percivale had no horse and was forced to stay behind. Then his eyes were opened, and he knew it was Sir Galahad who had come to his help, and he sat down under a tree and grieved sore.

While he was sitting there a Knight passed by riding a black horse, and when he was out of sight a yeoman came pricking after as fast as he might, and, seeing Sir Percivale, asked if he had seen a Knight mounted on a black horse. 'Yes, Sir, forsooth,' answered Sir Percivale, 'why do you want to know?' 'Ah, Sir, that is my steed which he has taken from me, and wherever my lord shall find me, he is sure to slay me.' 'Well,' said Sir Percivale, 'thou seest that I am on foot, but had I a good horse I would soon come up with him.' 'Take my hackney,' said the yeoman, 'and do the best you can, and I shall follow you on foot to watch how you speed.' So Sir Percivale rode as fast as he might, and at last he saw that Knight, and he hailed him. The Knight turned and set his spear against Sir Percivale, and smote the hackney in the breast, so that he fell dead to the earth, and Sir Percivale fell with him; then the Knight rode away. But Sir Percivale was mad with wrath, and cried to the Knight to return and fight with him on foot, and the Knight answered not and went on his way. When Sir Percivale saw that he would not turn, he threw himself on the ground, and cast away his helm and sword, and bemoaned himself for the most unhappy of all Knights; and there he abode the whole day, and, being faint and weary, slept till it was midnight. And at midnight he waked and saw before him a woman, who said to him right fiercely, 'Sir Percivale, what doest thou here?' 'Neither good nor great ill,' answered he. 'If thou wilt promise to do my will when I call upon you,' said she, 'I will lend you my own horse, and he shall bear thee whither thou shalt choose.' This Sir Percivale promised gladly, and the woman went and returned with a black horse, so large and well-apparelled that Sir Percivale marvelled. But he mounted him gladly, and drove in his spurs, and within an hour and less the horse bare him four days' journey hence, and would have borne him into a rough water that roared, had not Sir Percivale pulled at his bridle. The Knight stood doubting, for the water made a great noise, and he feared lest his horse could not get through it. Still, wishing greatly to pass over, he made himself ready, and signed the sign of the cross upon his forehead.

At that the fiend which had taken the shape of a horse shook off Sir Percivale and dashed into the water, crying and making great sorrow; and it seemed to him that the water burned. Then Sir Percivale knew that it was not a horse but a fiend, which would have brought him to perdition, and he gave thanks and prayed all that night long. As soon as it was day he looked about him, and saw he was in a wild mountain, girt round with the sea and filled with wild beasts. Then he rose and went into a valley, and there he saw a young serpent bring a young lion by the neck, and after that there passed a great lion, crying and roaring after the serpent, and a fierce battle began between them. Sir Percivale thought to help the lion, as he was the more natural beast of the twain, and he drew his sword and set his shield before him, and gave the serpent a deadly buffet. When the lion saw that, he made him all the cheer that a beast might make a man, and fawned about him like a spaniel, and stroked him with his paws. And about noon the lion took his little whelp, and placed him on his back, and bare him home again, and Sir Percivale, being left alone, prayed till he was comforted. But at eventide the lion returned, and couched down at his feet, and all night long he and the lion slept together.

VI

AN ADVENTURE OF SIR LANCELOT

As Lancelot went his way through the forest he met with many hermits who dwelled therein, and had adventure with the Knight who stole his horse and his helm, and got them back again. And he learned from one of the hermits that Sir Galahad was his son, and that it was he who at the Feast of Pentecost had sat in the Siege Perilous, which it was ordained by Merlin that none should sit in save the best Knight in the world. All that night Sir Lancelot abode with the hermit and laid him to rest, a hair shirt always on his body, and it pricked him sorely, but he bore it meekly and suffered the pain. When the day dawned he bade the hermit farewell. As he rode he came to a fair plain, in which was a great castle set about with tents and pavilions of divers hues. Here were full five hundred Knights riding on horseback, and those near the castle were mounted on black horses with black trappings, and they that were without were on white horses and their trappings white. And the two sides fought together, and Sir Lancelot looked on.

At last it seemed to him that the black Knights nearest the castle fared the worst, so, as he ever took the part of the weaker, he rode to their help and smote many of the white Knights to the earth and did marvellous deeds of arms. But always the white Knights held round Sir Lancelot to tire him out. And as no man may endure for ever, in the end Sir Lancelot waxed so faint of fighting that his arms would not lift themselves to deal a stroke; then they took him, and led him away into the forest and made him alight from his horse and rest, and when he was taken the fellowship of the castle were overcome for want of him. 'Never ere now was I at tournament or jousts but I had the best,' moaned Sir Lancelot to himself, as soon as the Knights had left him and he was alone. 'But now am I shamed, and I am persuaded that I am more sinful than ever I was.' Sorrowfully he rode on till he passed a chapel, where stood a nun, who called to him and asked him his name and what he was seeking.

So he told her who he was, and what had befallen him at the tournament, and the vision that had come to him in his sleep. 'Ah, Lancelot,' said she, 'as long as you were a knight of earthly knighthood you were the most wonderful man in the world and the most adventurous. But now, since you are set among Knights of heavenly adventures, if you were worsted at that tournament it is no marvel. For the tournament was meant for a sign, and the earthly Knights were they who were clothed in black in token of the sins of which they were not yet purged. And the white Knights were they who had chosen the way of holiness, and in them the quest has already begun. Thus you beheld both the sinners and the good men, and when you saw the sinners overcome you went to their help, as they were your fellows in boasting and pride of the world, and all that must be left in that quest. And that caused your misadventure. Now that I have warned you of your vain-glory and your pride, beware of everlasting pain, for of all earthly Knights I have pity of you, for I know well that among earthly sinful Knights you are without peer.'

VII

AN ADVENTURE OF SIR GAWAINE

Sir Gawaine rode long without meeting any adventure, and from Pentecost to Michaelmas found none that pleased him. But at Michaelmas he met Sir Ector de Maris and rejoiced greatly.

As they sat talking there appeared before them a hand showing unto the elbow covered with red samite, and holding a great candle that burned right clear; and the hand passed into the chapel and vanished, they knew not where. Then they heard a voice which said, 'Knights full of evil faith and poor belief, these two things have failed you, and therefore you may not come to the adventure of the Holy Graal.' And this same told them a holy man to whom they confessed their sins, 'for,' said he, 'you have failed in three things, charity, fasting, and truth, and have been great murderers. But sinful as Sir Lancelot was, since he went into the quest he never slew man, nor shall, till he come into Camelot again. For he has taken upon him to forsake sin. And were he not so unstable, he should be the next to achieve it, after Galahad his son. Yet shall he die an holy man, and in earthly sinful men he has no fellow.'

'Sir,' said Gawaine, 'by your words it seems that our sins will not let us labour in that quest?' 'Truly,' answered the hermit, 'there be an hundred such as you to whom it will bring naught but shame.' So Gawaine departed and followed Sir Ector, who had ridden on before.

VIII

THE ADVENTURE OF SIR BORS

When Sir Bors left Camelot on his quest he met a holy man riding on an ass, and Sir Bors saluted him. Then the good man knew him to be one of the Knights who were in quest of the Holy Graal. 'What are you?' said he, and Sir Bors answered, 'I am a Knight that fain would be counselled in the quest of the Graal, for he shall have much earthly worship that brings it to an end.' 'That is true,' said the good man, 'for he will be the best Knight in the world, but know well that there shall none attain it but by holiness and by confession of sin.' So they rode together till they came to the hermitage, and the good man led Sir Bors into the chapel, where he made confession of his sins, and they ate bread and drank water together. 'Now,' said the hermit, 'I pray you that you eat none other till you sit at the table where the Holy Graal shall be.' 'Sir,' answered Sir Bors, 'I agree thereto, but how know you that I shall sit there?' 'That know I,' said the holy man, 'but there will be but few of your fellows with you. Also instead of a shirt you shall wear this garment until you have achieved your quest,' and Sir Bors took off his clothes, and put on instead a scarlet coat. Then the good man questioned him, and marvelled to find him pure in life, and he armed him and bade him go. After this Sir Bors rode through many lands, and had many adventures, and was often sore tempted, but remembered the words of the holy man and kept his life clean of wrong. And once he had by mischance almost slain his own brother, but a voice cried, 'Flee, Bors, and touch him not,' and he hearkened and stayed his hand. And there fell between them a fiery cloud, which burned up both their shields, and they two fell to the earth in a great swoon; but when they awakened out of it Bors saw that his brother had no harm. With that the voice spoke to him saying, 'Bors, go hence and bear your brother fellowship no longer; but take your way to the sea, where Sir Percivale abides till you come.' Then Sir Bors prayed his brother to forgive him all he had unknowingly done, and rode straight to the sea. On the shore he found a vessel covered with white samite, and as soon as he stepped in the vessel it set sail so fast it might have been flying, and Sir Bors lay down and slept till it was day. When he waked he saw a Knight lying in the midst of the ship, all armed save for his helm, and he knew him for Sir Percivale, and welcomed him with great joy; and they told each other of their adventures and of their temptations, and had great happiness in each other's company. 'We lack nothing but Galahad, the good Knight,' Sir Percivale said.

IX

ADVENTURE OF SIR GALAHAD

Sir Galahad rested one evening at a hermitage. And while he was resting, there came a gentlewoman and asked leave of the hermit to speak with Sir Galahad, and would not be denied, though she was told he was weary and asleep. Then the hermit waked Sir Galahad and bade him rise, as a gentlewoman had great need of him, so Sir Galahad rose and asked her what she wished. 'Galahad,' said she, 'I will that you arm yourself, and mount your horse and follow me, and I will show you the highest adventure that ever any Knight saw.' And Sir Galahad bade her go, and he would follow wherever she led. In three days they reached the sea, where they found the ship where Sir Bors and Sir Percivale were lying. And the lady bade him leave his horse behind and said she would leave hers also, but their saddles and bridles they would take on board the ship. This they did, and were received with great joy by the two Knights; then the sails were spread, and the ship was driven before the wind at a marvellous pace till they reached the land of Logris, the entrance to which lies between two great rocks with a whirlpool in the middle.

Their own ship might not get safely through; but they left it and went into another ship that lay there, which had neither man nor woman in it. At the end of the ship was written these words: 'Thou man which shalt enter this ship beware thou be in steadfast belief; if thou fail, I shall not help thee.' Then the gentlewoman turned and said, 'Percivale, do you know who I am?' 'No, truly,' answered he. 'I am your sister, and therefore you are the man in the world that I most love. If you are without faith, or have any hidden sin, beware how you enter, else you will perish.' 'Fair sister,' answered he, 'I shall enter therein, for if I am an untrue Knight then shall I perish.' So they entered the ship, and it was rich and well adorned, that they all marvelled.

In the midst of it was a fair bed, and Sir Galahad went thereto and found on it a crown of silk, and a sword drawn out of its sheath half a foot and more. The sword was of divers fashions, and the pommel of stone, wrought about with colours, and every colour with its own virtue, and the handle was of the ribs of two beasts. The one was the bone of a serpent, and no hand that handles it shall ever become weary or hurt; and the other is a bone of a fish that swims in Euphrates, and whoso handles it shall not think on joy or sorrow that he has had, but only on that which he beholds before him. And no man shall grip this sword but one that is better than other men. So first Sir Percivale stepped forward and set his hand to the sword, but he might not grasp it. Next Sir Bors tried to seize it, but he also failed. When Sir Galahad beheld the sword, he saw that there was written on it, in letters of blood, that he who tried to draw it should never fail of shame in his body or be wounded to the death. 'By my faith,' said Galahad, 'I would draw this sword out of its sheath, but the offending is so great I shall not lay my hand thereto.' 'Sir,' answered the gentlewoman, 'know that no man can draw this sword save you alone'; and she told him many tales of the Knights who had set their hands to it, and of the evil things that had befallen them. And they all begged Sir Galahad to grip the sword, as it was ordained that he should. 'I will grip it,' said Galahad, 'to give you courage, but it belongs no more to me than it does to you.' Then he gripped it tight with his fingers, and the gentlewoman girt him about the middle with the sword, and after that they left that ship and went into another, which brought them to land, where they fell upon many strange adventures. And when they had wrought many great deeds, they departed from each other. But first Sir Percivale's sister died, being bled to death, so that another lady might live, and she prayed them to lay her body in a boat and leave the boat to go as the winds and waves carried it. And so it was done, and Sir Percivale wrote a letter telling how she had helped them in all their adventures; and he put it in her right hand, and laid her in a barge, and covered it with black silk. And the wind arose and drove it from their sight.

X

SIR LANCELOT MEETS SIR GALAHAD, AND THEY PART FOR EVER

Now we must tell what happened to Sir Lancelot.

When he was come to a water called Mortoise he fell asleep, awaiting for the adventure that should be sent to him, and in his sleep a voice spoke to him, and bade him rise and take his armour, and enter the first ship he should find. So he started up and took his arms and made him ready, and on the strand he found a ship that was without sail or oar. As soon as he was within the ship, he felt himself wrapped round with a sweetness such as he had never known before, as if all that he could desire was fulfilled. And with this joy and peace about him he fell asleep. When he woke he found near him a fair bed, with a dead lady lying on it, whom he knew to be Sir Percivale's sister, and in her hand was the tale of her adventures, which Sir Lancelot took and read. For a month or more they dwelt in that ship together, and one day, when it had drifted near the shore, he heard a sound as of a horse; and when the steps came nearer he saw that a Knight was riding him. At the sight of the ship the Knight alighted and took the saddle and bridle, and entered the ship. 'You are welcome,' said Lancelot, and the Knight saluted him and said, 'What is your name? for my heart goeth out to you.'

'Truly,' answered he, 'my name is Sir Lancelot du Lake.'

'Sir,' said the new Knight, 'you are welcome, for you were the beginner of me in the world.'

'Ah,' cried Sir Lancelot, 'is it you, then, Galahad?'

'Yes, in sooth,' said he, and kneeled down and asked Lancelot's blessing, and then took off his helm and kissed him. And there was great joy between them, and they told each other all that had befallen them since they left King Arthur's Court. Then Galahad saw the gentlewoman dead on the bed, and he knew her, and said he held her in great worship, and that she was the best maid in the world, and how it was great pity that she had come to her death. But when Lancelot heard that Galahad had won the marvellous sword he prayed that he might see it, and kissed the pommel and the hilt, and the scabbard. 'In truth,' he said, 'never did I know of adventures so wonderful and strange.' So dwelled Lancelot and Galahad in that ship for half a year, and served God daily and nightly with all their power. And after six months had gone it befell that on a Monday they drifted to the edge of the forest, where they saw a Knight with white armour bestriding one horse and holding another all white, by the bridle. And he came to the ship, and saluted the two Knights and said, 'Galahad, you have been long enough with your father, therefore leave that ship and start upon this horse, and go on the quest of the Holy Graal.' So Galahad went to his father and kissed him, saying, 'Fair sweet father, I know not if I shall see you more till I have beheld the Holy Graal.' Then they heard a voice which said, 'The one shall never see the other till the day of doom.' 'Now, Galahad,' said Lancelot, 'since we are to bid farewell for ever now, I pray to the great Father to preserve me and you both.' 'Sir,' answered Galahad, 'no prayer availeth so much as yours.'

The next day Sir Lancelot made his way back to Camelot, where he found King Arthur and Guenevere; but many of the Knights of the Round Table were slain and destroyed, more than the half. All the Court was passing glad to see Sir Lancelot, and the King asked many tidings of his son Sir Galahad.

XI

HOW SIR GALAHAD FOUND THE GRAAL AND DIED OF THAT FINDING

Sir Galahad rode on till he met Sir Percivale and afterwards Sir Bors, whom they greeted most gladly, and they bare each other company. First they came to the Castle of Carbonek, where dwelled King Pelles, who welcomed them with joy, for he knew by their coming that they had fulfilled the quest of the Graal. They then departed on other adventures, and with the blood out of the Holy Lance Galahad anointed the maimed King and healed him. That same night at midnight a voice bade them arise and quit the castle, which they did, followed by three Knights of Gaul. Then Galahad prayed every one of them that if they reached King Arthur's Court they should salute Sir Lancelot his father, and those Knights of the Round Table that were present, and with that he left them, and Sir Bors and Sir Percivale with him. For three days they rode till they came to a shore, and found a ship awaiting them. And in the midst of it was the table of silver, and the Holy Graal which was covered with red samite. Then were their hearts right glad, and they made great reverence thereto, and Galahad prayed that at what time he asked, he might depart out of this world. So long he prayed that at length a voice said to him, 'Galahad, thou shalt have thy desire, and when thou askest the death of the body thou shalt have it, and shalt find the life of the soul.' Percivale likewise heard the voice, and besought Galahad to tell him why he asked such things. And Galahad answered, 'The other day when we saw a part of the adventures of the Holy Graal, I was in such a joy of heart that never did man feel before, and I knew well that when my body is dead my soul shall be in joy of which the other was but a shadow.'

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