

Historical Tales

The Romance of Reality

By

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*Author of "Half-Hours with the Best American Authors," "Tales from the Dramatists,"
etc.*

IN FIFTEEN VOLUMES

Volume XIV

King Arthur

2

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CONWAY CASTLE.

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KING ARTHUR

AND THE

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE.

BOOK VIII.

TRISTRAM AND ISOLDE AT JOYOUS GARD

CHAPTER I.

THE TREACHERY OF KING MARK.

The story of Tristram's valorous deeds, and of the high honor in which he was held at Camelot, in good time came to Cornwall, where it filled King Mark's soul with revengeful fury, and stirred the heart of La Belle Isolde to the warmest love. The coward king, indeed, in his jealous hatred of his nephew, set out in disguise for England, with murderous designs against Tristram should an opportunity occur.

Many things happened to him there, and he was brought into deep disgrace, but the story of his adventures may be passed over in brief review, lest the reader should find it wearisome.

Not far had he ridden on English soil before he met with Dinadan, who, in his jesting humor, soon[Pg 10] played him a merry trick. For he arrayed Dagonet, the king's fool, in a suit of armor, which he made Mark believe was Lancelot's. Thus prepared, Dagonet rode to meet him and challenged him to a joust. But King Mark, on seeing what he fancied was Lancelot's shield, turned and fled at headlong speed, followed by the fool and his comrades with hunting cries and laughter till the forest rang with the noise.

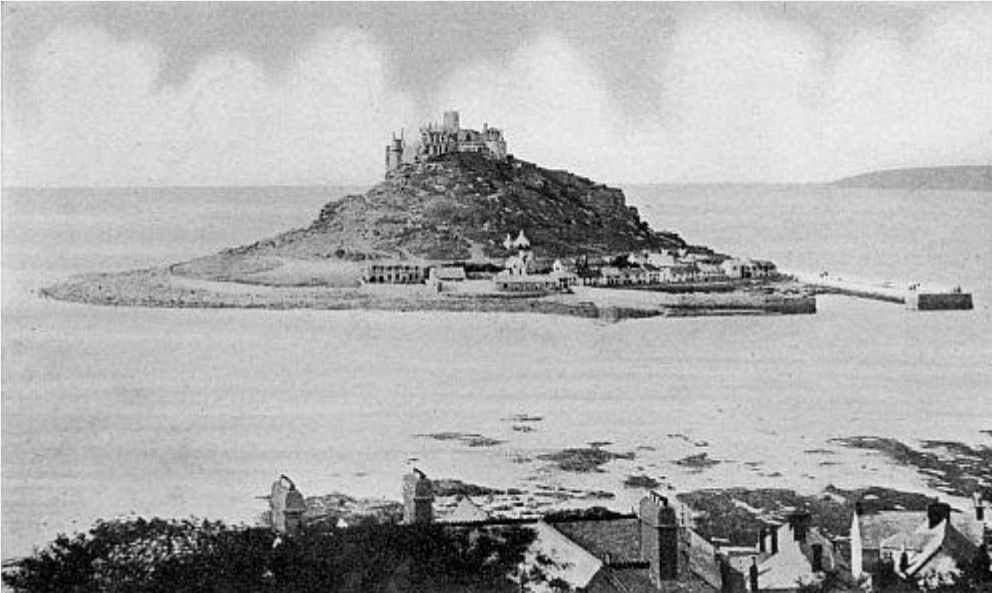
Escaping at length from this merry chase, the trembling dastard made his way to Camelot, where he hoped some chance would arise to aid him in his murderous designs on Tristram. But a knight of his own train, named Sir Amant, had arrived there before him, and accused him of treason to the king, without telling who he was.

"This is a charge that must be settled by wager of battle," said King Arthur. "The quarrel is between you; you must decide it with sword and spear."

In the battle that followed, Sir Amant, by unlucky fortune, was run through, and fell from his horse with a mortal wound.

"Heaven has decided in my favor," cried King Mark. "But here I shall no longer stay, for it does not seem a safe harbor for honest knights."

He thereupon rode away, fearing that Dinadan would reveal his name. Yet not far had he gone before Lancelot came in furious haste after him.



ST. MICHAEL'S

MOUNT, CORNWALL.

"Turn again, thou recreant king and knight," he loudly called. "To Arthur's court you must return, whether it is your will or not. We know you, villain. Sir Amant has told your name and[Pg 11] purpose; and, by my faith, I am strongly moved to kill you on the spot."

"Fair sir," asked King Mark, "what is your name?"

"My name is Lancelot du Lake. Defend yourself, dog and dastard."

On hearing this dreaded name, and seeing Lancelot riding upon him with spear in rest, King Mark tumbled like a sack of grain from his saddle to the earth, crying in terror, "I yield me, Sir Lancelot! I yield me!" and begging piteously for mercy.

"Thou villain!" thundered Lancelot, "I would give much to deal thee one buffet for the love of Tristram and Isolde. Mount, dog, and follow me."

Mark hastened to obey, and was thus brought like a slave back to Arthur's court, where he made such prayers and promises that in the end the king forgave him, but only on condition that he would enter into accord with Tristram, and remove from him the sentence of banishment. All this King Mark volubly promised and swore to abide by, though a false heart underlay his fair words. But Tristram gladly accepted the proffered truce with his old enemy, for his heart burned with desire to see his lady love again.

Soon afterwards Dinadan, with Dagonet and his companions, came to court, and great was the laughter and jesting at King Mark when they told the story of his flight from Arthur's fool.

"This is all very well for you stay-at-homes," cried Mark; "but even a fool in Lancelot's armor is not to be played with. As it was, Dagonet paid[Pg 12] for his masquerade, for he met a knight who brought him like a log to the ground, and all these laughing fellows with him."

"Who was that?" asked King Arthur.

"I can tell you," said Dinadan. "It was Sir Palamides. I followed him through the forest, and a lively time we had in company."

"Aha! then you have had adventures."

"Rare ones. We met a knight before Morgan le Fay's castle. You know the custom there, to let no knight pass without a hard fight for it. This stranger made havoc with the custom, for he overthrew ten of your sister's knights, and killed some of them. He afterwards tilted with Palamides for offering to help him, and gave that doughty fellow a sore wound."

"Who was this mighty champion? Not Lancelot or Tristram?" asked the king, looking around.

"On our faith we had no hand in it," they both answered.

"It was the knight next to them in renown," answered Dinadan.

"Lamorak of Wales?"

"No less. And, my faith, a sturdy fellow he is. I left him and Palamides the best of friends."

"I hope, then, to see the pair of them at next week's tournament," said the king.

Alas for Lamorak! Better for him far had he kept away from that tournament. His gallant career was near its end, for treachery and hatred were soon to seal his fate. This sorrowful story it is now our sad duty to tell.

Lamorak had long loved Margause, the queen[Pg 13] of Orkney, Arthur's sister and the mother of Gawaine and his brethren. For this they hated him, and with treacherous intent invited their mother to a castle near Camelot, as a lure to her lover. Soon after the tournament, at which Lamorak won the prize of valor, and redoubled the hatred of Gawaine and his brothers by overcoming them in the fray, word was brought to the victorious knight that Margause was near at hand and wished to see him.

With a lover's ardor, he hastened to the castle where she was, but, as they sat in the queen's apartment in conversation, the door was suddenly flung open, and Gaheris, one of the murderous brethren, burst in, full armed and with a naked sword in his hand. Rushing in fury on the unsuspecting lovers, with one dreadful blow he struck off his mother's head, crimsoning Lamorak with her blood. He next assailed Lamorak, who, being unarmed, was forced to fly for his life, and barely escaped.

The tidings of this dread affair filled the land with dismay, and many of the good knights of Arthur's court threatened reprisal. Arthur himself was full of wrath at the death of his sister. Yet those were days when law ruled not, but force was master, and retribution only came from the strong hand and the ready sword. This was Lamorak's quarrel, and the king, though he vowed to protect him from his foes, declared that the good knight of Wales must seek retribution with his own hand.

He gained death, alas! instead of revenge, for his foes proved too vigilant for him, and overcame him by vile treachery. Watching his movements,[Pg 14] they lay in ambush for him at a difficult place, and as he was passing, unsuspecting of danger, they set suddenly upon him, slew his horse, and assailed him on foot.

Gawaine, Mordred, and Gaheris formed this ambush, for the noble-minded Gareth had refused to take part in their murderous plot; and with desperate fury they assaulted the noble Welsh knight, who, for three hours, defended himself against their utmost strength. But at the last Mordred dealt him a death-blow from behind, and when he fell in death the three murders hewed him with their swords till scarce a trace of the human form was left.

Thus perished one of the noblest of Arthur's knights, and thus was done one of the most villanous deeds of blood ever known in those days of chivalrous war.

Before the death of Lamorak another event happened at Arthur's court which must here be told, for it was marvellous in itself, and had in it the promise of wondrous future deeds.

One day there came to the court at Camelot a knight attended by a young squire. When he had disarmed he went to the king and asked him to give the honor of knighthood to his squire.

"What claim has he to it?" asked the king. "Of what lineage is he?"

"He is the youngest son of King Pellinore, and brother to Sir Lamorak. He is my brother also; for my name is Aglavale, and I am of the same descent."

"What is his name?"

"Percivale." [Pg 15]

"Then for my love of Lamorak, and the love I bore your father, he shall be made a knight to-morrow."

So when the morrow dawned, the king ordered that the youth should be brought into the great hall, and there he knighted him, dealing him the accolade with his good sword Excalibur.

And so the day passed on till the dinner-hour, when the king seated himself at the head of the table, while down its sides were many knights of prowess and renown. Percivale, the new-made knight, was given a seat among the squires and the untried knights, who sat at the lower end of the great dining-table.

But in the midst of their dinner an event of great strangeness occurred. For there came into the hall one of the queen's maidens, who was of high birth, but who had been born dumb, and in all her life had spoken no word. Straight across the hall she walked, while all gazed at her in mute surprise, till she came to where Percivale sat. Then she took him by the hand, and spoke in a voice that rang through the hall with the clearness of a trumpet,—

"Arise, Sir Percivale, thou noble knight and warrior of God's own choosing. Arise and come with me."

He rose in deep surprise, while all the others sat in dumb wonder at this miracle. To the Round Table she led him, and to the right side of the seat perilous, in which no knight had hitherto dared to sit.

[Pg 16]"Fair knight, take here your seat;" she said. "This seat belongs to you, and to none other, and shall be yours until a greater than you shall come."

This said, she departed and asked for a priest. Then was she confessed and given the sacrament, and forthwith died. But the king and all his court gazed with wonder on Sir Percivale, and asked themselves what all this meant, and for what great career God had picked out this youthful knight, for such a miracle no man there had ever seen before.

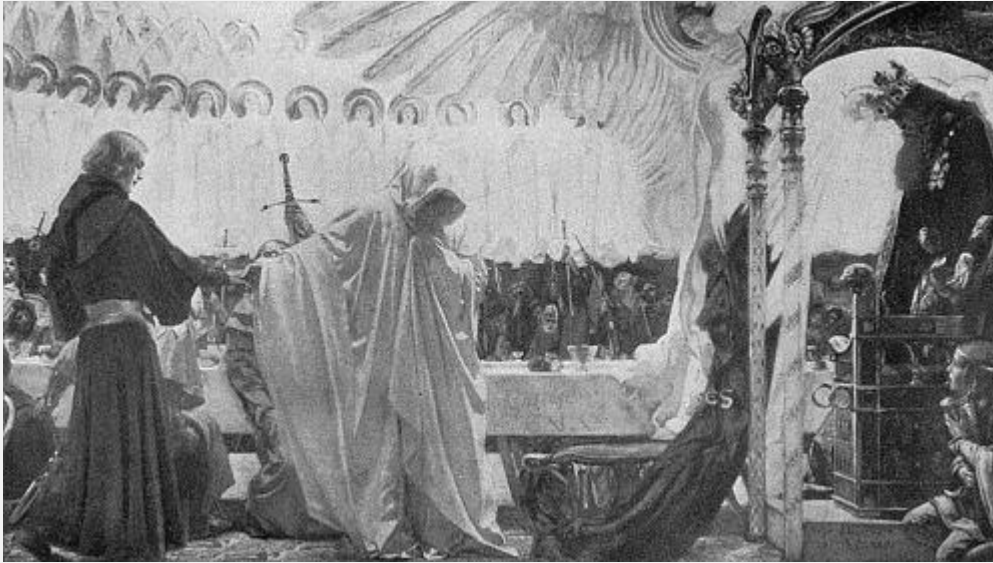
Meanwhile, King Mark had gone back to Cornwall, and with him went Sir Tristram, at King Arthur's request, though not till Arthur had made the Cornish king swear on Holy Scripture to do his guest no harm, but hold him in honor and esteem.

Lancelot, however, was full of dread and anger when he heard what had occurred, and he told King Mark plainly that if he did mischief to Sir Tristram he would slay him with his own hands.

"Bear this well in mind, sir king," he said, "for I have a way of keeping my word."

"I have sworn before King Arthur to treat him honorably," answered Mark. "I, too, have a way of keeping my word."

"A way, I doubt not," said Lancelot, scornfully; "but not my way. Your reputation for truth needs mending. And all men know for what you came into this country. Therefore, take heed what you do."



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THE ROUND TABLE OF KING ARTHUR.

Then Mark and Tristram departed, and soon after they reached Cornwall a damsel was sent[Pg 17] to Camelot with news of their safe arrival, and bearing letters from Tristram to Arthur and Lancelot. These they answered and sent the damsel back, the burden of Lancelot's letter being, "Beware of King Fox, for his ways are ways of wiles."

They also sent letters to King Mark, threatening him if he should do aught to Tristram's injury. These letters worked harm only, for they roused the evil spirit in the Cornish king's soul, stirring him up to anger and thirst for revenge. He thereupon wrote to Arthur, bidding him to meddle with his own concerns, and to take heed to his wife and his knights, which would give him work enough to do. As for Sir Tristram, he said that he held him to be his mortal enemy.

He wrote also to Queen Guenever, his letter being full of shameful charges of illicit relations with Sir Lancelot, and dishonor to her lord, the king. Full of wrath at these vile charges, Guenever took the letter to Lancelot, who was half beside himself with anger on reading it.

"You cannot get at him to make him eat his words," said Dinadan, whom Lancelot took into his confidence. "And if you seek to bring him to terms with pen and ink, you will find that his villany will get the better of your honesty. Yet there are other ways of dealing with cowardly curs. Leave him to me; I will make him wince. I will write a mocking lay of King Mark and his doings, and will send a harper to sing it before him

at his court. When this noble king has heard my song I fancy he will admit that there are other ways of gaining revenge besides writing scurrilous letters."

[Pg 18]A stinging lay, indeed, was that which Dinadan composed. When done he taught it to a harper named Eliot, who in his turn taught it to other harpers, and these, by the orders of Arthur and Lancelot, went into Wales and Cornwall to sing it everywhere.

Meanwhile King Mark's crown had been in great danger. For his country had been invaded by an army from Session, led by a noted warrior named Elias, who drove the forces of Cornwall from the field and besieged the king in his castle of Tintagil. And now Tristram came nobly to the rescue. At the head of the Cornish forces he drove back the besiegers with heavy loss, and challenged Elias to a single combat to end the war. The challenge was accepted, and a long and furious combat followed, but in the end Elias was slain, and the remnant of his army forced to surrender.

This great service added to the seeming accord between Tristram and the king, but in his heart Mark nursed all his old bitterness, and hated him the more that he had helped him. His secret fury soon found occasion to flame to the surface. For at the feast which was given in honor of the victory, Eliot, the harper, appeared, and sang before the king and his lords the lay that Dinadan had made.

This was so full of ridicule and scorn of King Mark that he leaped from his seat in a fury of wrath before the harper had half finished.

"Thou villanous twanger of strings!" he cried. "What hound sent you into this land to insult me with your scurrilous songs?"

"I am a minstrel," said Eliot, "and must obey[Pg 19] the orders of my lord. Sir Dinadan made this song, if you would know, and bade me sing it here."

"That jesting fool!" cried Mark, in wrath. "As for you, fellow, you shall go free through minstrels' license. But if you lose any time in getting out of this country you may find that Cornish air is not good for you."

The harper took this advice and hastened away, bearing letters from Tristram to Lancelot and Dinadan. But King Mark turned the weight of his anger against Tristram, whom he believed had instigated this insult, with the design to set all the nobles of his own court laughing at him. And well he knew that the villanous lay would be sung throughout the land, and that he would be made the jest of all the kingdom.

"They have their sport now," he said. "Mine will come. Tristram of Lyonesse shall pay dearly for this insult. And all that hold with him shall learn that King Mark of Cornwall is no child's bauble to be played with."

The evil-minded king was not long in putting his project in execution. At a tournament which was held soon afterwards Tristram was badly wounded, and King Mark, with great show of sorrow, had him borne to a castle near by, where he took him under his own care as nurse and leech.

Here he gave him a sleeping draught, and had him borne while slumbering to another castle, where he was placed in a strong prison cell, under the charge of stern keepers.

The disappearance of Tristram made a great stir in the kingdom. La Belle Isolde, fearing treachery,[Pg 20] went to a faithful knight named Sir Sadok, and begged him to try and discover what had become of the missing knight. Sadok set himself diligently to work; and soon learned that Tristram was held captive in the castle of Lyonesse. Then he went to Dinas, the seneschal, and others, and told them what had been done, at which they broke into open rebellion against King Mark, and took possession of all the towns and castles in the country of Lyonesse, filling them with their followers.

But while the rebellious army was preparing to march on Tintagil, and force King Mark to set free his prisoner, Tristram was delivered by the young knight Sir Percivale, who had come thither in search of adventures, and had heard of King Mark's base deed. Great was the joy between these noble knights, and Tristram said,—

"Will you abide in these marches, Sir Percivale? If so, I will keep you company."

"Nay, dear friend, I cannot tarry here. Duty calls me into Wales."

But before leaving Cornwall he went to King Mark, told him what he had done, and threatened him with the revenge of all honorable knights if he sought again to injure his noble nephew.

"What would you have me do?" asked the king. "Shall I harbor a man who openly makes love to my wife and queen?"

"Is there any shame in a nephew showing an open affection for his uncle's wife?" asked Percivale. "No man will dare say that so noble a warrior as Sir Tristram would go beyond the borders of sinless love, or will dare accuse the virtuous[Pg 21] lady La Belle Isolde of lack of chastity. You have let jealousy run away with your wisdom, King Mark."

So saying, he departed; but his words had little effect on King Mark's mind. No sooner had Percivale gone than he began new devices to gratify his hatred of his nephew. He sent word to Dinas, the seneschal, under oath, that he intended to go to the Pope and join the war against the infidel Saracens, which he looked upon as a nobler service than that of raising the people against their lawful king.

So earnest were his professions that Dinas believed him and dismissed his forces, but no sooner was this done than King Mark set aside his oath and had Tristram again privately seized and imprisoned.

This new outrage filled the whole realm with tumult and rebellious feeling. La Belle Isolde was at first thrown into the deepest grief, and then her heart swelled high with resolution to live no longer with the dastard who called her wife. Tristram at the same time privately sent her a letter, advising her to leave the court of her villanous lord, and offering to go with her to Arthur's realm, if she would have a vessel privately made ready.

The queen thereupon had an interview with Dinas and Sadok, and begged them to seize and imprison the king, since she was resolved to escape from his power.

Furious at the fox-like treachery of the king, these knights did as requested, for they formed a plot by which Mark was privately seized, and they imprisoned him secretly in a strong dungeon. At [Pg 22] the same time Tristram was delivered, and soon sailed openly away from Cornwall with La Belle Isolde, gladly shaking the dust of that realm of treachery from his feet.

In due time the vessel touched shore in King Arthur's dominions, and gladly throbbed the heart of the long-unhappy queen as her feet touched that free and friendly soil. As for Tristram, never was lover fuller of joy, and life seemed to him to have just begun.

Not long had they landed when a knightly chance brought Lancelot into their company. Warm indeed was the greeting of those two noble companions, and glad the welcome which Lancelot gave Isolde to English soil.

"You have done well," he said, "to fly from that wolf's den. There is no noble knight in the world but hates King Mark and will honor you for leaving his palace of vile devices. Come with me, you shall be housed at my expense."

Then he rode with them to his own castle of Joyous Gard, a noble stronghold which he had won with his own hands. A royal castle it was, garnished and provided with a richness which no king or queen could surpass. Here Lancelot bade them use everything as their own, and charged all his people to love and honor them as they would himself.

"Joyous Gard is yours as long as you will honor it by making it your home," he said. "As for me, I can have no greater joy than to know that my castle is so nobly tenanted, and that Tristram of Lyonesse and Queen Isolde are my honored guests."

Leaving them, Lancelot rode to Camelot, where he told Arthur and Guenever of what had happened, much to their joy and delight.

"By my crown," cried Arthur, joyfully, "the coming of Tristram and Isolde to my realm is no everyday event, and is worthy of the highest honor. We must signalize it with a noble tournament."

Then he gave orders that a stately passage-at-arms should be held on May-day at the castle of Lonazep, which was near Joyous Gard. And word was sent far and near that the knights of his own realm of Logris, with those of Cornwall and North Wales, would be pitted against those of the rest of England, of Ireland and Scotland, and of lands beyond the seas.

[Pg 23]

CHAPTER II.

HOW TRISTRAM BEFOOLED DINADAN.

Never were two happier lovers than Tristram and Isolde at Joyous Gard. Their days were spent in feasting and merriment, Isolde's heart overflowing with joy to be free from the jealousy of her ill-tempered spouse, and Tristram's to have his lady love to himself, far from treacherous plots and murderous devices.

Every day Tristram went hunting, for at that time men say he was the best courser at the chase in the world, and the rarest blower of the horn among all lovers of sport. From him, it is said,[Pg 24] came all the terms of hunting and hawking, the distinction between beasts of the chase and vermin, all methods of dealing with hounds and with game, and all the blasts of the chase and the recall, so that they who delight in huntsmen's sport will have cause to the world's end to love Sir Tristram and pray for his soul's repose.

Yet Isolde at length grew anxious for his welfare, and said,—

"I marvel that you ride so much to the chase unarmed. This is a country not well known to you, and one that contains many false knights, while King Mark may lay some plot for your destruction. I pray you, my dear love, to take more heed to your safety."

This advice seemed timely, and thereafter Tristram rode in armor to the chase, and followed by men who bore his shield and spear. One day, a little before the month of May, he followed a hart eagerly, but as the animal led him by a cool woodland spring, he alighted to quench his thirst in the gurgling waters.

Here, by chance, he met with Dinadan, who had come into that country in search of him. Some words of greeting passed between them, after which Dinadan asked him his

name, telling his own. This confidence Tristram declined to return, whereupon Dinadan burst out in anger.



MARRIAGE OF

SIR TRISTRAM.

"You value your name highly, sir knight," he said. "Do you design to ride everywhere under a mask? Such a foolish knight as you I saw but lately lying by a well. He seemed like one asleep, and no word could be got from him, yet all the time[Pg 25] he grinned like a fool. The fellow was either an idiot or a lover, I know not which."

"And are not you a lover?" asked Tristram.

"Marry, my wit has saved me from that craft."

"That is not well said," answered Tristram. "A knight who disdains love is but half a man, and not half a warrior."

"I am ready to stand by my creed," retorted Dinadan. "As for you, sirrah, you shall tell me your name, or do battle with me."

"You will not get my name by a threat, I promise you that," said Tristram. "I shall not fight till I am in the mood; and when I do, you may get more than you bargain for."

"I fear you not, coward," said Dinadan.

"If you are so full of valor, here is your man," said Tristram, pointing to a knight who rode along the forest aisle towards them. "He looks ready for a joust."

"On my life, it is the same dull-plate knave I saw lying by the well, neither sleeping nor waking," said Dinadan.

"This is not the first time I have seen that covered shield of azure," said Tristram. "This knight is Sir Epinegris, the son of the king of Northumberland, than whom the land holds no more ardent lover, for his heart is gone utterly out to the fair daughter of the king of Wales. Now, if you care to find whether a lover or a non-lover is the better knight, here is your opportunity."

"I shall teach him to grin to more purpose," said Dinadan. "Stand by and you shall see." Then, as the lover approached, he cried,—

[Pg 26]"Halt, sir knight, and make ready to joust, as is the custom with errant knights."

"Let it be so, if you will," answered Epinegris. "Since it is the custom of you knight-errant to make a man joust whether he will or no, I am your man."

"Make ready, then, for here is for you."

Then they spurred their horses and rode together at full speed, Dinadan breaking his spear, while Epinegris struck him so shrewd a blow that he rolled upon the earth.

"How now?" cried Tristram. "It seems to me that the lover has best sped."

"Will you play the coward?" queried Dinadan. "Or will you, like a good knight, revenge me?"

"I am not in the mood," answered Tristram. "Take your horse, Sir Dinadan, and let us get away from here, where hard blows are more plentiful than soft beds."

"Defend me from such fellowship as yours!" roared Dinadan. "Take your way and I will take mine. We fit not well together."

"I might give you news of Sir Tristram."

"Sir Tristram, if he be wise, will seek better company. I can do without your news, as I have had to do without your help," and he rode on in high dudgeon.

"Farewell, then," cried Tristram, laughing. "It may happen we shall soon meet again."

Tristram rode back in much amusement to Joyous Gard, but on coming near he heard in the neighboring town a great outcry.

"What means this noise?" he asked.

[Pg 27]"Sir," he was told, "a knight of the castle has just been slain by two strangers, and for no other cause than saying that Sir Lancelot was a better knight than Sir Gawaine."

"Who would dispute that?" said Tristram. "It is a small cause for the death of a good man, that he stands for his lord's fame."

"But what remedy have we?" said the towns-men. "If Lancelot had been here, these fellows would soon have been called to a reckoning. But, alas, he is away."

"I may do something in his service," answered Tristram. "If I take his place, I must defend his followers."

Thereupon he sent for his shield and spear, and rode in pursuit of the two knights, whom he overtook before they had gone far.

"Turn, sir dastards," he cried, "and amend your misdeeds."

"What amends wish you?" asked one of the knights. "We are ready with spear and sword to make good whatever we have done."

He rode against Tristram, but was met so sturdily in mid career that he was thrust over his horse's tail. Then the other rode against him, and was served in the same rough manner.

They rose as quickly as they could, drew their swords, and challenged him to battle on foot.

"You shall tell me your names," he said, sternly. "I warn you that if it comes to sword-play you will find more than your match. Yet you may have that in your lineage which will keep you from my hands, however much you deserve punishment for your evil deeds."

[Pg 28]"As for our names, we dread not to tell them. We are Agravaine and Gaheris, brothers to the good knight Gawaine, and nephews of King Arthur."

"For Arthur's sake, then, I must let you pass unscathed. Yet it is a crying shame that men of such good blood as you should play the part of murderers. You slew among you a better knight than the best of your kin, Lamorak de Galis, and I would to God I had been by at that time."

"You would have gone the same road," said Gaheris.

"Not without more knights to do it than you had in your murderous crew."

With these words he turned from them and rode back towards Joyous Gard. When he had gone they regained their horses, and feeling themselves safe in the saddle their courage returned.

"Let us pursue this boaster," they said, "and see if he fares so much better than Lamorak."

They did so, and when they came near Tristram, who was jogging slowly along, Agravaine cried,—

"Turn, traitor knight!"

"Traitor in your teeth!" cried Tristram, in a rage. "I let you off too cheaply, it seems." And drawing his sword, he turned upon Agravaine and smote him so fiercely on the helm that he fell swooning from his horse, with a dangerous wound.

Then he turned to Gaheris and dealt him a blow that in like manner tumbled him from his saddle to the earth. This done, Tristram turned and rode into the castle, leaving them like dead men in the road.

Here he told La Belle Isolde of his several adventures.[Pg 29] When he spoke of Dinadan, she asked,—

"Was it not he that made the song about King Mark?"

"The same," answered Tristram. "He is the greatest jester at Arthur's court, but a good knight withal, and I know no man whom I like better as a comrade."

"Why did you not bring him with you?"

"No need of that. He is seeking me through this country, and there is no fear that he will give up the search lightly."

As they spoke, a servant came and told Tristram that a knight-errant had entered the town, and described the device on his shield.

"That is our man now," said Tristram. "That is Dinadan. Send for him, Isolde, and you shall hear the merriest knight and the maddest talker that you ever spoke with. I pray you to make him heartily welcome, for he is a cherished friend of mine."

Then Isolde sent into the town with a message to Dinadan, begging that he would come to the castle and rest a while there, at a lady's wish.

"That will I, with a good will," answered Dinadan. "I were but a churl else."

He hastened to mount and ride to the castle, and here he was shown to a chamber where he laid aside his armor. Then he was brought into the presence of La Belle Isolde, who courteously bade him welcome.

"Whence, come you, and what name do you bear?" she asked.

"Madam," he answered, "I am from King[Pg 30] Arthur's court, and am one of the small fry of Round Table Knights. My name is Dinadan."

"And why came you hither?"

"I am seeking my old friend and comrade, Sir Tristram, who I am told has made his way to this country."

"That I cannot answer for," said Isolde. "He may and he may not be here. Sir Tristram will be found where love leads him."

"I warrant me that. Your true lover has no will of his own, but is led like an ox, with a ring in his nose. I marvel what juice of folly gets into the pates of these lovers to make them so mad about the women."

"Why, sir," said Isolde, "can it be that you are a knight and no lover? I fancy that there can be no true man-of-arms who seeks not by his deeds to win the smiles of the fair."

"They who care to be fed on smiles are welcome to them, but I am not made of that fashion," answered Dinadan. "The joy of love is too short, and the sorrow thereof too long, to please my fancy."

"Say you so? Yet near here but to-day was the good knight Sir Bleoberis, he who fought with three knights at once for a maiden's sake, and won her before the king of Northumberland."

"I know him for a worthy fellow," said Dinadan, "as are all of Lancelot's kindred. Yet he has crotchets in his head, like all that crew."

"Now, I pray you," said Isolde, "will you not do me the grace to fight for my love with three knights that have done me great wrong? As you[Pg 31] are a knight of King Arthur's, you can never say me nay in such a duty."

"Can I not?" cried Dinadan. "This much I will say, madam, that you are as fair a sample of womankind as ever I saw, and much more beautiful than is my lady Queen Guenever. And yet, heaven defend me, I will not fight for you against three knights; and would not, were you Helen of Troy herself."

At these words, and the odd grimace which he made, La Belle Isolde burst into a merry peal of laughter, and broke out with,—

"I know you better than you fancy, Sir Dinadan. And well you keep up your credit of being a merry fellow. You are very welcome to my castle, good sir."

They had much more of gameful conversation together, and Dinadan was treated with all honor, and slept serenely at the castle that night. But Tristram took good care to keep out of his sight.

Early the next day Tristram armed himself and prepared to ride away, saying to the Lady Isolde that he would contrive to meet with Dinadan, and would ride with him to Lonazep, where the tournament was to be held. He promised also to make arrangements

to provide her with a good place from which to see the passage-at-arms. Then he departed, accompanied by two squires, who bore his shield and a brace of great and long spears.

Shortly afterwards Dinadan left the castle, bidding a merry adieu to the lady, and rode so briskly forward that he soon overtook Tristram. He knew him at sight for his yesterday's comrade, and made a sour grimace at beholding him.

[Pg 32]"So," he said, "here again is my easy-going friend, who wears his armor for a holiday parade. You shall not get off so lightly to-day, fellow. You shall joust with me, despite your head."

"Faith, I am not eager," said Tristram, "but a wilful man will have his way; so let us have it over, if fight we must."

Then they rode at each other, and Dinadan broke a spear on Tristram's shield, but Tristram purposely missed him.

Dinadan now bade him draw his sword.

"Not I," he answered. "What makes you so warlike? I am not in the humor to fight."

"You shame all knights by your cowardice."

"So far as that goes, it troubles me little," said Tristram. "Suppose, my good sir, you take me under your protection. Though I bear arms I shall gladly accept the patronage of so worthy a knight as you."

"The devil deliver me of you!" cried Dinadan. "You are a fellow of goodly build, and sit your horse like a warrior; but heaven knows if you have blood or water in your veins. What do you propose to do with those great spears that your squire carries?"

"I shall give them to some good knight at the tournament. If you prove the best there, you are welcome to them."

As they thus conversed they saw a knight-errant in the road before them, who sat with spear in rest as if eager to joust.

"Come," said Tristram, "since you are so anxious for a fight, yonder is your man."

[Pg 33]"Shame betide you for a dastard," cried Dinadan. "Fight him yourself. You can't get more than a fall."

"Not so. That knight seems a shrewish fellow. It will need a stronger hand than mine to manage him."

"Good faith, then, here's to teach you a lesson," said Dinadan, and he rode fiercely against the other knight, with the unlucky result that he was thrust from his horse, and fell headlong to the earth.

"What did I tell you?" said Tristram. "You had better have taken a lesson from my prudence, and let that good fellow alone."

"The fiends take you, coward!" cried Dinadan, as he started to his feet and drew his sword. "Come, sir knight, you are my better on horseback, let us have it out on foot."

"Shall it be in love or in anger?" said the other.

"Let it be in love. I am saving all my anger for this do-nothing who came with me."

"Then I pray you to tell me your name."

"Folks call me Dinadan."

"Ah, and I am your comrade Gareth. I will not fight with an old friend like Dinadan."

"Nor I with you, by my faith!" cried Dinadan, seizing Gareth's hand and giving it a warm pressure. "Beaumains is safe from my spear. Here is a chap now, if you want to try your skill; but if you can get him to fight you must first learn the art of converting a coward into a man of valor."

Tristram laughed quietly at this, and bided his time. Nor was there long to wait, for just then a[Pg 34] well-armed knight rode up, on a sturdy horse, and put his spear in rest as he approached.

"Now, my good sirs," said Tristram, "choose between yourselves which will joust with yonder knight; for I warn you that I will keep clear of him."

"Faith, you had better," said Gareth. "Leave him to me."

And he rode against the knight but with such ill-fortune that he was thrust over his horse's croup.

"It is your turn now," said Tristram to Dinadan. "Honor requires that you should avenge your comrade Gareth."

"Honor does, eh? Then reason does not, and I always weigh reason against honor. He has overturned a much bigger fellow than I, and with your kind permission I will not stir up that hornet."

"Aha, friend Dinadan, your heart fails you after all your boasting. Very well, you shall see what the coward can do. Make ready, sir knight."

Then Tristram rode against the victorious knight, and dealt him so shrewd a buffet that he was thrust from his horse.

Dinadan looked at this in amazement. Was this the fellow that professed cowardice and begged protection? "The cunning rogue," he said to himself, "has been making game of me. The rascal! where has he learned the art of turning my weapons on myself?"

The dismounted knight rose to his feet in anger, and drawing his sword, challenged Tristram to a fight on foot.

"First, tell me your name?" asked Tristram.

[Pg 35]"My name is Palamides."

"And what knight hate you most?"

"I hate Sir Tristram to the death. If we meet, one of us must die."

"You need not go far to seek him. I am Tristram de Lyonesse. Now do your worst."

At this Dinadan started, and struck his hand sturdily on his knee, like one who has had a shock of surprise. Nor was Palamides less astonished, and he stood before Tristram like one in a sudden revulsion of feeling.

"I pray you, Sir Tristram," he said, "to forgive my ill-will and my unkind words. You are a noble knight and worthy of the love of all honorable warriors. I repent my truculent temper towards you, and, if I live, will rather do you service than assail you."

"I know your valor well," answered Tristram, "and that it is anything but fear makes you speak so. Therefore I thank you much for your kind words. But if you have any shreds of ill-will towards me I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"My wits have been astray," answered Palamides. "There is no just reason why we should be at odds, and I am ready to do you knightly service in all things you may command."

"I take you at your word," cried Tristram, as he grasped Palamides by the hand. "I have never been your enemy, and know none whom I would rather have as a friend."

"Would you?" cried Dinadan. "And would have me as your fool, mayhap? By my knightly faith, you have made a sweet butt of me! I came into this country for your sake, and by the advice of Sir Lancelot, though he would not tell me where to find you. By Jove's ears, I never thought to find you masquerading as a milk-brained coward."

"He could have told you," said Tristram, "for I abode within his own castle. As for my little sport, friend Dinadan, I cry you mercy."

"Faith, it is but one of my own jests, turned against me," said Dinadan, with a merry laugh. "I am pinked with my own dart. I forgive you, old comrade; but I vow I did not know you had such a jolly humor."

"It comes to one in your company," said Tristram, laughing. "The disease is catching."

And so the four knights rode gayly onward, conversing much as they went, and laying their plans for the tournament.

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CHAPTER III.

ON THE ROAD TO LONAZEP.

The four knights rode onward in company until they came in sight of the castle of Lonazep, where they saw striking preparations for the tournament. For not less than four hundred tents and pavilions covered the plain outside the great circle of the lists, and war-horses and knights in armor were there in hundreds.

"Truly," said Tristram, "this is the royalest[Pg 37] show that I ever saw."

"You forget," answered Palamides. "It had its equal at the Castle of Maidens, where you won the prize."

"And in that tournament which Galahalt of the Long Isles held in Surluse there was as great a gathering," said Dinadan.

"I was not there; who won the prize?" asked Tristram.

"Lancelot du Lake, and the next after him was the noble knight Lamorak de Galis."

"A noble fellow, indeed, I never met his better, save Sir Lancelot. His murder was shameful, and were they not the nephews of my lord Arthur that slew him, by my faith they should die the death. And this without prejudice to you, Sir Gareth."

"Say what you will on that point; I am with you," answered Gareth. "Though my own brothers did that bloody work, I hold not with them. None of them love me, as you well know, and I have left their company as murderers. Had I been by when Lamorak was killed there might have been another tale to tell."

"Truly that is well said of you," rejoined Tristram. "I would rather have been there than to have all the gold between here and Rome."

"And I also," said Palamides. "It is a burning disgrace to the Round Table fellowship that such a knight should have been ambushed and slain on his way from a passage-at-arms where he had won the prize of valor."

"Out on such treason!" cried Tristram. "The tale of it makes my blood run cold."

[Pg 38]"And mine as well," said Gareth. "I can never love or respect my brothers again for that ruthless deed."

"Yet to speak of it is useless," said Palamides. "His life is gone; we cannot bring it back again."

"There lies the pity," said Dinadan. "No matter how good and noble a man may be, when he stops breathing all else stops with him. By good luck, though, the same rule holds with villains and cowards. As for Gawaine and his brothers, except you, Sir Gareth, they hate the best knights of the Round Table, and Lancelot and his kindred above all. Only that Lancelot is well aware of this, they might draw him into as deadly a trap as they drew poor Lamorak."

"Come, come, remember that Gareth is their brother," said Palamides. "Let us change the subject. Here is this tournament,—what part shall we play here? My advice is that we four hold together against all that may assail us."

"That is not my counsel," said Tristram. "By their pavilions we may count on some four hundred knights, and doubtless many of them worthy ones. If we play the game of four against all comers we are likely to find ourselves borne down by numbers. Many good knights have lost the game by taking too great odds. Manhood is of little avail if it be not tempered by wisdom. If you think it best we may try it, and see what we can do in company, but, as a rule, I prefer to fight for my own hand."

As they thus talked they rode away from Lonazep, and in due time came to the banks of the Humber,[Pg 39] where they were surprised by a loud and grievous cry that seemed full of doleful meaning. Looking over the waters they saw approaching before the wind a vessel richly draped with red silk. Not long had they waited when it came to the shore, at a point close by where they stood.

Seeing this strange thing and hearing the doleful cries which came from the vessel, the knights gave their horses in care of their squires, and approached on foot, Tristram boarding the vessel. When he reached the deck he saw there a bed with rich silken coverings, on which lay a dead knight, armed save the head, which was crimsoned with blood. And through great gaps in his armor deadly wounds could be seen.

"What means this?" said Tristram. "How came this knight by his death?"

As he spoke he saw that a letter lay in the dead knight's hand.

"Master mariners," he asked of those on board the vessel, "what does this strange thing signify?"

"Sir knight," they answered, "by the letter which the dead knight bears you may learn how and for what cause he was slain, and what name he bore. Yet first heed well this warning: No man must take and read that letter unless he be a knight of proved valor, and faithfully promises to revenge the murder of this good warrior."

"There be those among us able to revenge him," answered Tristram. "And if he shall prove to have been foully treated his death shall not go unredressed."

Therewith he took the letter from the knight's[Pg 40] hand and opened it. Thus it read,—

"I, Hermance, king and lord of the Red City, request of all knights-errant and all noble knights of Arthur's court, that they find one knight who will fight for my sake with two false brethren, whom I brought up from nothingness and who have feloniously and treacherously slain me. And it is my will and desire that the valiant knight who avenges my death shall become lord of my Red City and all my castles."

"Sir," said the mariners, "the king and knight that lies here dead was a man of great virtue and noble prowess, and one who loved all knights-errant, and, above all, those of King Arthur's court."

"It is a piteous case, truly," said Tristram. "I would fain take the enterprise in hand myself, but that I have made a solemn promise to take part in this great tournament. It was for my sake in especial that my lord Arthur made it, and I cannot in honor and courtesy fail to attend it. Therefore I am not free to undertake any adventure which may keep me from the lists."

"I pray you, dear sir," said Palamides, who had followed Tristram into the vessel, "to put this enterprise into my hands. I promise to achieve it worthily or to die in the effort."

"Be it so," said Tristram. "You may go if you will. But first I wish your promise to return so as to be with me at the tournament this day week, if possible."

"That promise I freely give. If I be alive and unhurt, and my task be not too arduous and long, I shall be with you by that day."

[Pg 41]This said, Tristram left the vessel, leaving Palamides in it, and he, with Gareth and Dinadan, stood watching it as the mariners hoisted its sails and it glided swiftly away over long Humber. Not till it was out of sight did they return to their horses, and look about them.

As they did so they beheld near them a knight, who came up unarmed save a sword, and saluted them with all courtesy.

"Fair sirs," he said, "I pray you, as knights-errant, to come and see my castle, and take such fare as you may find there. This I heartily request."

"That shall we willingly do, and thank you for your courtesy," they answered, and rode with him to his castle, which was near by.

Here they entered a richly-furnished hall, and, having laid off their armor, took their seats at a well-laden table. But when the host saw Tristram's face, he knew him, and first grew pale and then angry of countenance.

"Sir, mine host," said Tristram, on seeing this threatening aspect, "what is wrong with you, I pray?"

"I know you, Tristram de Lyonesse," answered the knight, hotly. "You slew my brother. Honor demands that I shall not seek revenge here, but I give you warning that I will kill you when I meet you outside my castle."

"I have no knowledge of you or your brother," answered Tristram. "But no man can say that I ever killed any one except in fair and open fight. If I have done as you say I stand ready to make what amends are in my power."

[Pg 42]"I desire no amends," rejoined the knight. "But I warn you to keep from me."

Tristram at this rose from the table and asked for his arms, his companions following him. Seeking their horses they rode away, but they had not gone far from the castle when Dinadan saw a knight following them, who was well armed, but bore no shield.

"Take care of yourself, Sir Tristram," he said. "Yonder comes our host to call you to account."

"Then I must abide him as I may," answered Tristram.

Soon the knight came up, and, loudly bidding Tristram to be on his guard, he rode furiously upon him with couched spear. But his valor went beyond his strength, for he was hurled over his horse's croup.

Not content with this, he rose, mounted again, and driving his horse at full speed upon Tristram, struck him two hard blows on the helm.

"Sir knight," said Tristram, "I pray you leave off this sport. I do not care to harm you after having just eaten at your table, but beg you not to try my patience too far."

The furious assailant would not cease, however, and continued his assaults until Tristram was provoked to anger. In the end he returned the knight a blow with the full strength of his mighty arm, so fierce a buffet, indeed, that the blood burst out from the breathing holes of his helm, and he fell to the earth and lay there like one dead.



THE ASSAULT OF SIR TRISTRAM.

"I hope I have not killed him," said Tristram. "I did not think to strike the man so hard a blow,[Pg 43] but I am not a log to stand at rest and let him whet his sword on."

Leaving the fallen knight to the care of his squire, they rode on; but not far had they gone when they saw coming towards them two well-armed and well-horsed knights, each with a good following of servants. One of these was Berrant le Apres, he who was called the king with the hundred knights, and the other Sir Segwarides, both men of might and renown.

When they came up the king looked at Dinadan, who, through sport, had put on Tristram's helmet. This he recognized as one he had seen before with the queen of Northgalis, whom he loved. She had given it to La Belle Isolde, and she to Tristram.

"Sir knight," asked Berrant, "whence had you that helm?"

"Not from you, I fancy. What have you to say to it?"

"That I will have a tilt with you, for the love of her who once owned it. Therefore, defend yourself."

So they drew asunder, and rode at each other with all the speed of their horses. But Dinadan, good knight as he was, was no match for the tough and hardy warrior before him, and was sent, horse and all, to the ground.

"I fancy I have something to say about the helmet now," said Berrant, grimly. "Go take it off him, and keep it," he ordered his servant.

"What will you do?" cried Tristram. "Hands off, fellow. Touch not that helm."

"To what intent do you meddle, sir knight?" demanded Berrant.

[Pg 44]"To this intent, that the helm is mine. Nor will you get it from me till you buy it at a dearer price."

"Do you mean that as a challenge?" asked Berrant. "Be it so, then; make ready."

Together they rode with all speed, but with a change of fortune, for Berrant found himself thrust over the tail of his horse. In a moment he was on his feet, sprang briskly to his saddle, and, riding in anger upon Tristram, struck at him fiercely with his sword.

Tristram was not taken unawares, but in an instant had his sword in hand. A fierce combat followed, for the king with the hundred knights was a warrior of tough sinews and tried valor, but at the last he received such a buffet on the helm that he fell forward on his horse's neck, stunned and helpless.

"By my faith, that helmet has proved unlucky for two of us," said Dinadan. "It brought me a tumble, and now, sir king, you owe it a buzzing head-piece."

"Who will joust with me?" asked Segwarides.

"It is your right," said Gareth to Dinadan, "but I pray you let me have it."

"You are heartily welcome to it. One tumble a day is enough for my weak appetite," answered Dinadan. "I make you a free present of the opportunity."

"That is no fair exchange," said Tristram. "The joust is yours by right."

"But not by choice," rejoined Dinadan. "Good faith, sir bruiser, I have lived long enough to know[Pg 45] when I have had my share, and that is a lesson it would pay many of you battle-hungry knights to learn."

Then Gareth and Segwarides rode together, the result being that Gareth and his horse went in a heap to the earth.

"Now," said Tristram, "the joust is yours."

"But the appetite is lacking," said Dinadan. "I have even less stomach for it than before."

"Then will I try him."

With these words Tristram challenged Segwarides, who received a sore fall in the joust that followed. Then the three knights rode on, leaving their late antagonists the worse in heart and limb for the encounter.

They continued their ride till they reached Joyous Gard. Here Gareth courteously declined to enter the castle, but Tristram would not hear of his departure, and made him alight and enter as his guest. So they disarmed and had good cheer, with La Belle Isolde as their hostess.

But Dinadan, when he came into the presence of Isolde, roundly cursed the hour that he had been persuaded to wear Tristram's helm, and told her of how he had been mocked by his comrade knight.

Much laughing and jesting at Dinadan followed, but this was a game in which he was quite able to hold his own, however he might lack with sword and spear. For Arthur's court held no other so witty of tongue and merry of heart. And thus in jest and feast they passed the hours happily away.

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CHAPTER IV.

HOW PALAMIDES FARED AT THE RED CITY.

Leaving Tristram and his companions to their merry talk in Joyous Gard, we must now return to Palamides. The ship into which he had entered sailed far along the Humber, until in time it reached the open sea. It continued its course through the sea-waves till it came to a part of the coast where stood a stately castle.

All day and night they had sailed, and it was now early in the morning, before day-dawn. Palamides was sound asleep in the vessel's cabin when the mariners came to call him.

"Sir knight," they said, "you must arise. We have reached a castle, which you must enter."

"I am at your command," he replied.

Rising, he armed himself quickly, and then blew a loud call upon a horn which the mariners gave him.

At the ringing music of that bugle-blast the sleeping castle seemed to stir into life. Soon many eyes could be seen looking from the windows, and ere long the walls were crowded with knights, who called to Palamides as with one voice, "Welcome, fair sir, to this castle."

The day had now fully dawned, and Palamides entered the castle, where a crowd of knights came to greet him, and led him to a stately dining-hall, where an abundant breakfast awaited him. But as he ate he heard much lamentation, and saw many[Pg 47] whose eyes were wet with tears.

"What means this?" he asked. "I love not such sorrow, and would fain know what gives rise to it."

"We mourn here daily," answered a knight named Sir Ebel, "and for this cause. We had a king named Hermance, who was lord of the Red City, and in every way a noble and generous monarch. And he loved nothing in the world so much as the knights-errant of King Arthur's court, together with the sports of jousting, hunting, and all knightly diversions. A king so kind of heart as he was never before known in this country, and we shall ever be filled with sorrow for his loss. Yet he acted unwisely, and is himself at fault for his death."

"Tell me how he was slain and by whom," asked Palamides.

"In this wise it came to pass," answered Ebel. "He brought up, in pure charity, two children, who are now strong knights. And to them he gave all his trust and confidence, in default of those of his own blood. These two men governed him completely, and, through him, his lands and people, for they took the best of care that none of his kindred should come into power. He was so free and trustful, and they so politic and deceitful, that they ruled him as though they were the kings and he the subject. When the lords of our king's blood saw that he had fallen into this dotage they left the court in disgust, and sought their livelihood elsewhere. This it proved not wise to do, for when these villains found that all the king's kindred had left the realm they schemed to have more power still; for,[Pg 48] as the old saw says, 'Give a churl rule in part, and he will not be content till he has it all.' It is the instinct of the base-born to destroy gentlemen-born, if the power be put in their hands, and all rulers should take warning by the fate of King Hermance. In the end our king, by the advice of these traitors, rode into the forest here by, to chase the red deer. When he had become warm from the hunt he alighted to drink at a woodland spring, and, while he was bent over the water, one of these villains thrust him through the body with a spear. They then fled from the spot, thinking he was dead. Shortly after they had gone, fortune brought me to the spot, where I found my lord still alive, but mortally hurt, and learned from him his story. Knowing that we had no knights

able to revenge him on his murderers, I had him brought to the water, and put into the ship alive, and the letter which he bore in his hand I wrote from his own words. Then he died, and, as he had ordered, the ship set sail up the Humber, bound for the realm of Logris, where it was hoped that some valiant Knight of the Round Table would take this adventure on himself."

"Truly your doleful tale grieves me sorely," said Palamides. "I saw the letter you speak of. It was read to me by one of the best knights upon the earth, and it is by his command I am here. I came to revenge your king, and I shall never be at ease till I meet with and punish his murderers."

"You have my hearty thanks and best wishes," said Ebel. "Since you accept this adventure, you must enter the ship again, and sail forward till[Pg 49] you reach the Delectable Isle, which is near by the Red City. We shall await here your return. If you speed well this castle is yours. King Hermance built it for the two traitors, but we hold it against them, and they threaten us sorely unless we yield it."

"Look that you keep it, whatsoever may come to me," said Palamides. "For if fortune decides that I am to be slain in this quest, I trust that one of the best knights in the world will come to revenge me; either Tristram de Lyonesse or Lancelot du Lake."

Then Palamides entered the ship and sailed away towards the Red City. But as he came near it, and landed on the coast, another ship touched shore near by, from which came a goodly knight, with his shield on his shoulder and his hand on his sword.

"Sir knight, what seek you here?" he asked Palamides. "If you have come to revenge King Hermance you must yield this quest to me, for it was mine before it was yours, and I shall yield it to no man."

"You speak like a true knight," said Palamides. "But when the letter was taken from the dead king's hand there was nothing known of any champion for him, and so I promised to revenge him. And this I must and shall do, lest I win shame instead of honor."

"You have right on your side," said the knight. "What I propose is this. I will fight with you; and he who proves the better knight shall have the quest."

"That fits with my fancy," said Palamides; "for[Pg 50] from what I hear no second-rate champion can watch this pair of villains."

With this they advanced their shields and drew their swords, and began a stern and well-contested combat. For more than an hour the fight between them continued, but at the end of this time Palamides seemed stronger and better-winded than at the beginning, and he finally dealt his opponent a blow that brought him to his knees. Then the discomfited combatant cried out,—

"Knight, hold your hand."

Palamides let fall his sword at this request.

"You are the better of us two, and more worthy of this battle," said the knight. "But fain would I know your name."

"My name is Palamides. I am a Knight of the Round Table, and one well known in Arthur's realm."

"In good faith it is, and much beyond that realm," answered the knight. "I know only three living men besides yourself who are fitted for this task, and they are Lancelot, Tristram, and my cousin Lamorak. As for me, my name is Hermind, and I am brother to the murdered King Hermance."

"I shall do my best to revenge your brother," said Palamides. "If I am slain, I commend you to Lancelot or Tristram. As for Lamorak, he will never strike blow again."

"Alas, what mean you?"

"That he has been murdered—waylaid and slain treacherously by Gawaine and his brothers, except Sir Gareth, the best of them all." And he told the [Pg 51] story of the death of Lamorak, much to the grief and indignation of his hearer.

Then Palamides took ship again, and sailed on till he came to the Delectable Isle. Meanwhile Hermind made all haste to the Red City, where he told of the arrival of the famous knight Palamides and of his combat with him. The people were filled with joy at these tidings, and quickly sent a messenger to the two brethren, bidding them to make ready, as a knight had come who would fight them both. The messenger found them at a castle near by, and delivered his message.

"Who is this champion?" they asked. "Is it Lancelot or any of his blood?"

"No."

"If it were, we would not fight. But we care for no one else."

"It is a good knight though, Sir Palamides, a Saracen by birth, and still unchristened."

"He had best have been christened before he came here, for it will be too late when we have done with him. Let him know that we will be at the Red City in two days, and will give him all the fighting he is likely to want for the rest of his life."

When Palamides came to the city he was received with the greatest joy, and the more so when the people saw what a handsome and well-built man he was, neither too young nor too old, with clean and powerful limbs, and no defect of body.

At the time appointed there came to the city the two brethren, Helius and Helake by name, both of them strong and valiant men, of great prowess in [Pg 52] war, false as they were at heart. And with them they brought forty knights, to guard them against any treachery from the Red City, for they knew well that it was filled with their enemies.

The lists had already been prepared, and at the appointed hour Palamides entered full armed, and confronted his antagonists boldly.

"Are you the two brethren Helius and Helake, who slew your king by treason?" he asked.

"We are the men who slew King Hermance," they replied. "And bear in mind, Sir Saracen, we are able to stand by our deeds, and will handle you so before you depart that you will wish you had been christened before you came so far."

"I trust to God I shall die a better Christian than either of you," Palamides replied. "And you had best kill me if you get the chance, for I vow not to spare you."

As he spoke the trumpet sounded, and, reining back their horses, they rode against each other with terrific speed. Palamides directed his spear against Helake, and struck him so mighty a blow that the spear pierced through his shield and hauberk, and for a fathom's length through his breast, hurling him dead to the earth. As for Helius, he held up his spear in pride and presumption, and rode by Palamides without touching him.

But when he saw his brother stretched in death on the earth his assurance changed to doubt, and rage drove the pride from his heart. "Help thyself, villain!" he cried, and rushed upon Palamides before he could prepare to encounter him, striking him a blow with his spear that bore him from his [Pg 53] saddle to the earth. Then he forced his horse over him backward and forward before the dismounted champion could regain his feet.

As he came again, the fallen knight reached up and caught the horse by the bridle, dragging himself by its aid to his feet. Then, as the animal reared, he pressed so strongly upon it that it toppled backward to the ground, the rider barely saving himself from being crushed beneath his fallen horse. But he was on his feet in an instant, and, sword in hand, struck Palamides a blow on the helm that brought him down to one knee.

Before he could repeat the blow the gallant Saracen was on his feet and had drawn his trenchant blade, with which he attacked his antagonist in turn. A fierce and deadly combat succeeded, the two knights hurtling together like two wild boars, now both hurled grovelling to the earth, now on foot again and hewing at each other with the strength of giants.

Thus for two hours they fought, without time for rest or a moment's space to recover breath. At the end of that time Palamides grew faint and weary from the violence of his efforts, but Helius seemed as strong as ever, and redoubling his strokes he drove back

the Saracen knight step by step, over all the field. At this the people of the city were filled with fear, while the party of Helius shouted with triumph.

"Alas!" cried the citizens, "that this noble knight should be slain for our king's sake."

While they thus bewailed his threatened fate and the seeming victory of their tyrant, Helius showered[Pg 54] so many vigorous blows on his weakened foe that it was a wonder he kept his feet. But when he saw how the common people wept for him his heart was filled with a sense of shame, while a glow of fury burned like fire in his veins.

"Fie on you for a dastard, Palamides!" he said to himself. "Why hang you your head so like a whipped hound?"

Then, with a new spirit burning hotly within him, and fresh strength animating his limbs, he lifted his drooping shield and turned on Helius with lion-like fury, smiting him a vigorous blow on the helm, which he followed quickly by others. This violent onset was too much for the strained strength of the false knight, and he retreated in dismay, while the sword of Palamides fell with ever more and more might. At length came so mighty a blow that he was hurled like a log to the earth. The victorious Saracen gave him no time to recover, but sprang upon him like a fury, tore the helm from his head, and with a final stroke smote the head from his body.

Then he rose and stood leaning upon his sword, hardly able to bear himself on his feet, while from all the people of the city went up loud shouts of joy and congratulation.

"Palamides, the conqueror! Palamides, our deliverer! Palamides, our king!" they shouted, while one adorned his brows with a wreath of laurel, and others tore off his armor and applied ointments to his bleeding limbs.

"Fair friends, your crown is not for me," he said. "I have delivered you from your tyrants, but you must choose some other king, as I am under promise to return with all speed to my lord King Arthur at the castle of Lonazep."

This decision filled them with grief, but they brought him to the city and treated him with all the honor which they could bestow upon him. And as he persisted in his refusal of the crown, they proffered him a third part of their goods if he would remain with them. All this he declined, and in a short time departed, bearing with him a thousand good wishes and prayers for success and fortune.

He was received with like joy and congratulation at the castle, Sir Ebel warmly pressing him to change his decision and remain as their king. To this Palamides would by no means consent, and after a day's stay he took ship again, and sailed up the Humber to the castle of Lonazep.



SIR TRISTRAM AT JOYOUS

GARD.

[Pg 55]

CHAPTER V.

THE TOURNAMENT AT LONAZEP.

When Palamides learned that Tristram was not at Lonazep, he tarried not there, but crossed the Humber, and sought him at Joyous Gard. Here he found lodgings in the town, and word was quickly brought to Tristram that a knight-errant had come.

[Pg 56]"What manner of man is he? and what sign does he bear?" he asked.

The messenger described his armor and appearance.

"That is Palamides," said Dinadan. "The brave fellow is already back, and victorious, I doubt not."

"It looks that way, indeed. Go and bid him welcome to Joyous Gard," said Tristram.

So Dinadan went to Palamides, and joyfully greeted him, listening eagerly to the story of his exploits, and congratulating him on his signal success. He remained with him that night, and in the morning they were visited by Tristram and Gareth before they had arisen.

Many were the warm congratulations which Tristram gave Palamides on his noble achievement, and after they had breakfasted he invited him to ride into the fields and woods, that they might repose under the cool shelter of the forest. Here they alighted by a refreshing spring, and as they sat conversing an armed knight came riding towards them.

"Who are those knights that are lodged in Joyous Gard?" he asked.

"That I cannot say," answered Tristram.

"At any rate you can tell me who you are. You are not knights-errant, I fancy, since you ride unarmed."

"Whether we be or no, we prefer not to tell our names."

"You are not courteous, sir knight, and this is the way I pay discourtesy," said the stranger.[Pg 57] "Guard yourself, or you shall die by my hands."

Then, spear in hand, he rode on Sir Tristram, with brutal intent to run him through. But Palamides sprang up hastily, and smote the knight's horse so fierce a blow with his clinched fist that horse and man fell together to the earth. He then drew his sword to slay him.

"Let the dog go," said Tristram. "He is but a fool, and it were a shame to slay him for his folly. Take the fellow's spear from him, though. It is a weapon he has not learned the use of."

The knight rose groaning, and when he had regained his saddle he again requested their names.

"My name is Tristram de Lyonesse, and this knight's name is Palamides. Would you know more?"

"No, by my faith!" cried the other, and, hastily putting spurs to his horse, he rode away as fast as the animal would carry him.

Hardly had he gone when a knight, who bore a bended shield of azure, came riding up at a furious gallop.

"My fair sirs," he asked, "has a knight passed here bearing a shield with a case of red over it?"

"Yes. We but now had some trouble with such a fellow. Who is he?"

"And you let him escape? That was ill-advised, fair sirs. He is the falsest rogue and the greatest foe to knights-errant living. His name is Breuse Sans Pité."

"And I had him under my sword!" cried Palamides. "Fool I was to let him go."

"If I overtake him there will be another story[Pg 58] to tell," answered the knight, as he spurred onward on the track of the fugitive.

Then the four friends mounted and rode leisurely back towards Joyous Gard, much conversing as they went. When they reached the castle Palamides wished not to enter, but Tristram insisted on it, and, taking him by the hand, led him in.

When Palamides saw La Belle Isolde, whom he had not met for years, but for whom his love burned as warmly as ever, he was so ravished with joy that he could scarcely speak. And when they were at dinner he could not eat a morsel, but sat like a dumb man, scarcely venturing to raise his eyes to Isolde's lovely countenance.

Poorly he slept that night, and with many dreams of her he loved. When morning broke they all prepared to ride to Lonazep. Tristram took with him three squires, and Queen Isolde had three gentlewomen, all attired with great richness. These, with the other knights and their squires, and valets to bear their shields and spears, formed their train.

Not far had they gone before they saw on the road before them a group of knights. Chief of these was the knight Galihodin, who was attended by twenty companions.

"Fair fellows," said Galihodin, "yonder come four knights escorting a richly-attired lady. What say you? shall we take her from them?"

"That is not the best counsel," said one.

"At any rate, it is my counsel," answered Galihodin. "We shall show them that we have the right of the road." And he sent a squire to them,[Pg 59] asking them if they would joust, or else lose their lady.

"We are but four," said Tristram. "Tell your lord to come with three of his comrades, and win her if he can."

"Let me have this joust," said Palamides. "I will undertake them all four."

"As you will," said Tristram. "Go tell your lord that this one knight will encounter him and any three of his fellows."

The squire departed with his challenge, and in a trice Galihodin came riding forward spear in rest. Palamides encountered him in mid career, and smote him so hard a blow that he had a terrible fall to the earth, and his horse with him. His three comrades were served in the same summary manner, while Palamides still bore an unbroken spear. At this unlooked-for result six knights rode out from the opposite party with purpose of revenge on the victor.

"Hold your hands," cried Galihodin. "Let not one of you touch this noble knight, who has proved himself a man of worth. And I doubt if the whole of you could handle him."

When Palamides saw that the field was yielded to him he rode back to Sir Tristram.

"Well and worshipfully have you done," said Tristram. "No man could have surpassed you."

Onward they rode again, and in a little while after met four knights in the highway, with spears in rest. These were Gawaine and three companions. This joust also Tristram gave to Palamides, and he served these four as he had served the others,[Pg 60] leaving them all unhorsed in the road. For the presence of La Belle Isolde gave the strength of ten men to the arm of her lover, the Saracen.

They now continued their route without molestation, and in good time reached the spot where Tristram had ordered his pavilions to be set up. Here were now many more pavilions than they had seen on their previous visit, and a great array of knights, who had been gathering for many days, for far and wide had spread the news of the great tournament.

Leaving Palamides and Gareth at the pavilions with Queen Isolde, Tristram and Dinadan rode to Lonazep to learn what was afoot, Tristram riding on the Saracen knight's white horse. As they came into the castle the sound of a great bugle-blast met their ears, and many knights crowded forward.

"What means the blast?" asked Tristram.

"Sir," answered a knight, "it comes from the party who hold against King Arthur at this tournament. These are the kings of Ireland, of Surluse, of Listinoise, of Northumberland, of North Wales, and of other countries. They are calling a council to decide how they shall be governed in the lists."

Tristram thereupon followed them to their council, and listened to the debate. He then sought his horse again, and rode by where King Arthur stood surrounded by a press of knights. Among those were Galihodin and Gawaine, who said to the king: "That knight

in the green harness, with the white horse, is a man of might, whoever he be. To-day he overthrew us both, with six of our fellows."

[Pg 61]"Who can he be?" said the king, and he called Tristram to him, and requested to know his name.

"I beg pardon, my liege lord," answered Tristram, "and pray that you will hold me excused from revealing my name at this time," and he turned his horse and rode away.

"Go after him, Sir Griflet," said the king. "Tell him that I wish to speak with him apart."

Griflet rode to Tristram and told him the king's wish, and the two returned in company.

"Fair sir," said the king, "what is the cause that you withhold your name?"

"I have an excellent reason, but beg that you will not press me for it."

"With which party do you hold?"

"Truly, my lord, that I cannot say. Where my heart draws or my fancy bids I will go. To-morrow you shall see which side I take. To-day I know not myself."

Leaving the king, he rode back to where his pavilions were set. When the morning dawned he and his three companions armed themselves all in green and rode to the lists. Here young knights had begun to joust, and, seeing this, Gareth asked leave of Tristram to break a spear.

"Go in and do your best if you care to play with beginners," said Tristram, laughing.

But Gareth found himself encountered by a nephew of the king with the hundred knights, who had some of his uncle's tough fibre, and both got ugly falls, and lay on the ground till they were helped up by their friends. Then Tristram and Palamides rode with Gareth back to the pavilions,[Pg 62] where they removed their helmets. When Isolde saw Gareth all bruised in the face, she asked him what ailed him.

"Madam, I had a hard buffet, and gave another, but none of my fellows would rescue me."

"Only unproved knights are yet in the field," said Palamides. "The man that met you, though, was a strong and well-trained knight, Sir Selises by name, so you have no dishonor. Rest here and get yourself in condition for to-morrow's work."

"I shall not fail you if I can bestride my horse," said Gareth.

"What party is it best for us to join to-morrow?" asked Tristram.

"Against King Arthur, is my advice," said Palamides. "Lancelot and many other good men will be on his side, and the more men of prowess we meet the more honor we will win."

"Well and knightly spoken," said Tristram. "Hard blows is what we court. Your counsel is well given."

"So think we all," said the others.

On the morrow, when day had broken, they arrayed themselves in green trappings, with shields and spears of green, while Isolde and her three damsels wore dresses of the same color. For the ladies Tristram found seats in a bay window of a priory which overlooked the field, and from which they could see all that took place. This done, they rode straight to the party of the king of Scots.

When Arthur saw this he asked Lancelot who were these knights and the queenly lady who came with them.

[Pg 63]"That I cannot say for certain. Yet if Tristram and Palamides be in this country then it is they and La Belle Isolde."

Then Arthur turned to Kay and said,—

"Go to the hall and see how many Knights of the Round Table are missing, and bring me word."

Kay did so, and found by the roll of knights that ten were wanting,—Tristram, Dinadan, and eight others.

"Then I dare say," remarked Arthur, "that some of these are here to-day against us."

The tournament began with a combat in which two knights, cousins to Gawaine, named Sir Edward and Sir Sadok, rode against the king of Scots and the king of North Wales and overthrew them both. This Palamides saw, and in return he spurred upon these victorious knights and hurled both of them from their saddles.

"What knight is that in green?" asked Arthur. "He is a mighty jousting knight."

"You will see him do better yet," said Gawaine. "It was he that unhorsed me and seven others two days ago."

As they stood talking Tristram rode into the lists on a black horse, and within a few minutes he smote down four knights of Orkney, while Gareth and Dinadan each unhorsed a good knight.

"Yonder is another fellow of marvellous arm," said Arthur; "that green knight on the black horse."

"He has not begun his work yet," said Gawaine. "It is plain that he is no common man."

And so it proved, for Sir Tristram pushed fiercely[Pg 64] into the press, rescued the two kings who had been unhorsed, and did such mighty work among the opposing party that all who saw him marvelled to behold one man do so many valiant deeds. Nor was the career of Palamides less marvellous to the spectators.

King Arthur, who watched them both with admiring eyes, likened Tristram to a furious lion, and Palamides to a maddened leopard, and Gareth and Dinadan, who seconded them strongly, to eager wolves. So fiercely did Tristram rage, indeed, among the knights of Orkney that at length they withdrew from the field, as no longer able to face him.

Then loud went up the cry of the heralds and the common people,—

"The green knight has beaten all Orkney!" And the heralds took account that not less than fifty knights had been smitten down by the four champions in green.

"This will not do," said Arthur. "Our party will be overmatched if these fellows rage on at such a rate. Come, Lancelot, you and Hector and Bleoberis must try your hands, and I will make a fourth."

"Let it be so," answered Lancelot. "Let me take him on the black horse, and Bleoberis him on the white. Hector shall match him on the gray horse" (Sir Gareth).

"And I," said Arthur, "will face the knight on the grizzled steed" (Sir Dinadan).

With this conversation they armed and rode to the lists. Here Lancelot rode against Tristram and[Pg 65] smote him so hard a blow that horse and man went to the earth, while his three companions met with the same ill fortune from their new antagonists.

This disaster raised a cry throughout the lists: "The green knights are down! Rescue the green knights! Let them not be held prisoners!" For the understanding was that any unhorsed knight not rescued by his own strength or by his fellows should be held as prisoner.

Then the king of North Wales rode straight to Tristram, and sprang from his horse, crying,—

"Noble knight, I know not of what country you are, but beg you to take my horse, for you have proved yourself worthier to bestride it than I am."

"Many thanks," said Tristram. "I shall try and do you as welcome a turn. Keep near us, and I may soon win you another horse."

Then he sprang to the saddle, and meeting with King Arthur struck him so fierce a sword-blow on the helm that he had no power to keep his saddle.

"Here is the horse promised you," cried Tristram to the king of North Wales, who was quickly remounted on King Arthur's horse.

Then came a hot contest around the king, one party seeking to mount him again and the other to hold him prisoner. Palamides thrust himself, on foot, into the press, striking such mighty blows to the right and left that the whole throng were borne back before him. At the same time Tristram rode into the thickest of the throng of knights[Pg 66] and cut a way through them, hurling many of them to the earth.

This done, he left the lists and rode to his pavilion, where he changed his horse and armor; he who had gone forth as a green knight coming back to the fray as a red one.

When Queen Isolde saw that Tristram was unhorsed, and lost sight of him in the press, she wept greatly, fearing that some harm had come to him. But when he rode back she knew him in an instant, despite his red disguise, and her heart swelled anew with joy as she saw him with one spear smite down five knights. Lancelot, too, now knew him, and withdrew from the lists lest he should encounter him again.

All this time Tristram's three friends had not been able to regain their saddles, but now he drove back the press and helped them again to horse, and, though they knew him not in his new array, they aided him with all their knightly prowess.

When Isolde, at her window, saw what havoc her chosen knight was making, she leaned eagerly forth and laughed and smiled in delight. This Palamides saw, and the vision of her lovely and smiling countenance filled his soul so deeply with love's rejoicing that there seemed to flow into him the strength and spirit of ten men, and, with a shout of knightly challenge, he pressed forward, smiting down with spear and sword every man he encountered. For his heart was so enamoured by the vision of that charming face that Tristram or Lancelot would then have had much ado to stand before him.

[Pg 67]"Truly Palamides is a noble warrior," said Tristram, when he beheld this. "I never saw him do such deeds as he has done this day, nor heard of his showing such prowess."

"It is his day," said Dinadan, simply. But to himself he said, "If you knew for whose love he does these valorous deeds, you would soon be in the field against him."

"It is a crying pity that so brave a knight should be a pagan," said Tristram.

"It is my fancy," said Dinadan to himself, "that you may thank Queen Isolde for what you have seen; if she had not been here to-day that shouting throng would not be giving Palamides the palm of the tourney."

At this juncture Lancelot came again into the field, and hearing the outcry in favor of Palamides he set his spear in rest and spurred upon him. Palamides, seeing this, and having no spear, coolly awaited Lancelot, and as he came up smote his spear in two

with a sword-stroke. Then he rushed upon him and struck his horse so hard a blow in the neck that the animal fell, bearing his rider to the ground.

Loud and fierce was the outcry then: "Palamides the Saracen has smitten Sir Lancelot's horse! It is an unknighly deed!"

And Hector de Maris, seeing his brother Lancelot thus unfairly dismounted, rushed upon Palamides in a rage, and bore him from his horse with a mighty spear-thrust.

"Take heed to yourself, sirrah," cried Lancelot, springing towards him sword in hand. "You have[Pg 68] done me a sorry deed, and by my knightly honor I will repay you for it."

"I humbly beg your pardon, noble sir," answered Palamides. "I have done so much this day that I have no power or strength left to withstand you. Forgive me my hasty and uncourteous deed, and I promise to be your knight while I live."

"You have done marvellously well indeed," said Lancelot. "I understand well what power moves you. Love is a mighty mistress, and if she I love were here to-day you should not bear away the honor of the field, though you have nobly won it. Beware that Tristram discovers not your love, or you may repent it. But I have no quarrel with you, and will not seek to take from you the honor of the day."

So Lancelot suffered Palamides to depart, and mounted his own horse again, despite twenty knights who sought to hinder him. Lancelot, Tristram, and Palamides did many more noble deeds before that day's end, and so great became the medley at length that the field seemed a dense mass of rearing and plunging horses and struggling knights.

At length Arthur bade the heralds to blow to lodging and the fray ended. And since Palamides had been in the field from first to last, without once withdrawing, and had done so many, noble and valiant deeds, the honor and the prize for the day were unanimously voted him, a judgment which Arthur and the kings of his counsel unanimously confirmed.

[Pg 69]But when Palamides came to understand that the red knight who had rescued him was Sir Tristram his heart was glad, for all but Dinadan fancied he had been taken prisoner. Much was the talk upon the events of the day, and great the wonder of king and knights at the remarkable valor of the Saracen knight.

"And yet I well know," said Lancelot, "that there was a better knight there than he. And take my word for it, this will be proved before the tournament ends."

This also thought Dinadan, and he rallied his friend Tristram with satirical tongue.

"What the fiend has ailed you to-day?" he asked. "Palamides grew in strength from first to last, but you have been like a man asleep, or a coward knight."

"I was never called coward before," said Tristram, hotly. "The only fall I got was from Lancelot, and him I hold as my better, and for that matter the better of any man alive."

But Dinadan kept up his railing accusations till the growing anger of Tristram warned him to desist. Yet this was all from friendship, not from spite, for he wished to stir up his friend to do his best in the lists the coming day, and not permit the Saracen again to carry off the prize.

[Pg 70]

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND DAY OF THE TOURNAMENT.

When the next morning dawned, Tristram, Palamides, and Gareth, with La Belle Isolde and her ladies, all arrayed as before in green, took horse at an early hour, and rode into the fresh forest. But Dinadan was left still asleep in bed. As they passed the castle at a little distance, it chanced that King Arthur and Lancelot saw them from an upper window.

"Yonder rideth the fairest lady of the world," said Lancelot, "always excepting your queen, Guenever."

"Who is it?" asked Arthur.

"It is La Belle Isolde, Cornwall's queen and Tristram's lady-love."

"By my troth, I should like to see her closer," said the king. "Let us arm and mount, and ride after them."

This they did, and in a short time were on the track of the gay cavalcade they had seen.

"Let us not be too hasty," warned Lancelot. "There are some knights who resent being intruded on abruptly; particularly if in the company of ladies."

"As for that, we must take our chances," said Arthur. "If they feel aggrieved I cannot help it, for I am bent on seeing Queen Isolde."

Seeing Tristram and his companions just in advance, Arthur rode briskly up and saluted Isolde[Pg 71] courteously, saying, "God save you, fair lady."

"Thanks for your courtesy, sir knight," she replied.

Then Arthur looked upon her charming countenance, freshened by the morning air, and thought in his mind that Lancelot had spoken but the truth, and that no more beautiful lady lived. But at this moment Palamides rode up.

"Sir knight, what seek you here?" he asked. "It is uncourteous to come on a lady so suddenly. Your intrusion is not to our liking, and I bid you to withdraw."

Arthur paid no heed to these words, but continued to gaze upon Isolde, as one stricken with admiration. Seeing this, Palamides flamed into anger, and spurred fiercely upon the king, with spear in rest, smiting him from his horse.

"Here is an awkward business," said Lancelot to himself. "If I ride down Palamides I shall have Tristram on me; and the pair of them would be too much for me. This comes from too head-strong a will. But whether I live or die I must stand by my lord and king." Then riding forward, he called to Palamides, "Keep thee from me!"

Fierce was the onset with which they met, but it ended in Lancelot's favor, for Palamides was flung from his saddle and had a hard fall.

When Tristram saw this he called to Lancelot, "Be on your guard, sir knight. You have unhorsed my comrade, and must joust with me."

"I have no dread of that," said Lancelot; "and yet I did but avenge my lord, who was unhorsed unwarily and unknighly. You have no cause for [Pg 72] displeasure; for no honorable knight could stand by and see his friend ill-treated."

Tristram now felt sure that it was Lancelot who spoke, and that it was King Arthur whom Palamides had unhorsed. He therefore laid aside his spear and helped Palamides again to his saddle, while Lancelot did the same for the king.

"That deed of thine was not knightly nor courteous," said Tristram, sternly to Palamides, after the others had departed. "I cannot see any harm in a knight accosting a lady gently and courteously; nor am I pleased to have you play such masteries before my lady. If I deem her insulted, I am quite able myself to protect her. And if I am not mistaken, it was King Arthur you assailed so rudely, and the other was Lancelot du Lake. You may yet have to pay for your violence."

"I cannot think," said Palamides, "that the great Arthur would ride thus secretly arrayed as a poor knight-errant."

"Then you know him not," said Tristram. "No knight living is fonder of adventure. King Arthur is always ready to take his part as an errant knight, nor does he bear malice against those who may overthrow him when in disguise. I tell you, Palamides, that our king is the true model of knightly honor, and that the best of us might learn from him."

"If it were he I am sorry," said Palamides. "I may have been over-hasty. But a thing that is done cannot be undone, and I must abide the consequences."

Then Tristram sent Isolde to her lodging in the[Pg 73] priory, from which she might behold the tournament, and made ready to enter the lists.

Fierce was the shock of the first encounter of the knights, and the three champions in green began the day with many deeds of might.

"How feel you?" asked Tristram of Palamides. "Are you able to repeat yesterday's work?"

"Hardly," was the reply. "I am weary and sore yet from my hard labors."

"I am sorry for that, as I shall miss your aid."

"Trust not to me," answered Palamides. "I have not much work left in me."

"Then I must depend on you," said Tristram to Gareth. "We two should be able to make our mark. Keep near me and rescue me if I get in trouble, and I will do the same for you."

"I shall not fail you," was the reply.

Leaving them, Palamides rode off by himself, and, pushing into the thickest press of the men of Orkney, did such deeds of arms that Tristram looked on in amazement.

"Is that his soreness and weariness?" he asked. "I fancy he is weary of my company, and wishes to win all the honor to his own hand."

"That is what Dinadan meant yesterday when he called you coward," said Gareth. "He but wished to stir you to anger so that Palamides should not rob you of credit."

"By my faith, if Palamides bears me ill will and envy I shall show him what a knight of Cornwall can do. He has gained the acclamations of the crowd already. He has left our company and we owe him no courtesy. You shall see me rob him of his honors."

[Pg 74]Then Tristram rode into the thickest of the press, and laid about him with such might that all eyes were turned upon him, and men began to say, "There is a greater than Palamides come into the field."

"Is it not as I told you?" said Lancelot to Arthur. "I said you would this day see the Saracen distanced."

"It is true enough," answered Arthur. "Palamides has not such strength of arm."

"It is Tristram himself you look upon."

"That I can well believe," said Arthur. "Such knights as he do not grow like mushrooms in every field."

The noise from the other part of the lists now drew the attention of Palamides, and when he saw what puissant deeds his late comrade was doing he wept for spite, for he saw that the honor of that day was not for him.

Seeing to what straits their party was put, Arthur and Lancelot and many other knights now armed and rode into the field, and by their aid so changed the tide of victory that the other side was driven quite back, until Tristram and Gareth stood alone, bravely abiding all who came upon them. But Lancelot and his kinsmen kept purposely away from them.

"See," said Lancelot to Arthur, "how Palamides hovers yonder like one in a dream, sick, I fancy, from envy of Tristram."

"Then he is but a fool," said the king. "He is not and never was the match of Tristram. I am glad to see the fellow repaid for the way he served me this morning."

[Pg 75]As they stood thus conversing, Tristram withdrew quietly from the lists, his going noted only by Isolde and Palamides, who kept their eyes upon him. He rode back to his pavilions, where he found Dinadan still asleep, his slumbers not broken by all the uproar of the tournament.

"As I am a living man, here is a lusty sleeper," cried Tristram. "Wake, Dinadan. The day is half spent and the field half won, and here you are still a-bed."

At this Dinadan sprang hastily up and rubbed his eyes.

"I dreamt of wars and jousts," he said. "And, i' faith, I like that way the best, for one gets all the good of the fight and is safe from sore limbs and aching bones. But what's to do?"

"Get on your harness and ride with me to the field. You will find something there to waken you up."

Dinadan, as he armed, noted Tristram's battered shield, and remarked,—

"I slept both well and wisely, it seems. If I had been there I must have followed you, from shame if not from courage. And by the looks of your shield I would have been worse battered than I was yesterday. Why did you not let me sleep out the balance of it, friend Tristram?"

"A truce with your jests. Come, we must to the field again."

"How now, is there a new deal in the game? Yesterday you did but dream; to-day you seem awake."

Meanwhile Tristram had changed his armor, and[Pg 76] now was attired all in black.

"You have more fight in you than you had yesterday, that is sure," said Dinadan. "Did I stir up your sleeping spirit?"

"It may be so," said Tristram, smiling. "Keep well up to me, and I shall make you a highway through the press. If you see me overmatched, do what you can to aid me."

When ready they took their horses and rode back to the lists, where Isolde and Palamides noted their entrance. When the Saracen saw that Tristram was disguised, a new fancy came into his scheming brain. Leaving the lists, he rode to where a knight sat sorely wounded under a tree outside. Him he prayed for an exchange of armor, saying that his own was too well known in the field, and that he wished for a disguise.

"That is very true," said the knight, as he recognized the green armor. "You have made your array somewhat too well known. You are welcome to my arms, if they will be of use to you. They will gain more credit in your hands than they have won in mine."

Palamides thereupon exchanged armor with him, and, taking his shield, which shone like silver, rode into the field. He now joined the party of King Arthur, and rode spitefully against Tristram, who had just struck down three knights. They met with such force that both spears splintered to their hands, though neither lost his seat. Then they dashed eagerly together with drawn swords and fought with the courage and fury of two lions. But Tristram wondered much what knight this[Pg 77] was that faced him so valiantly, and grew angry as he felt that he was wasting in this single combat the strength he wished to treasure up for the day's work.

La Belle Isolde, who had watched Palamides from her window, had seen him change his armor with the wounded knight. And when his treacherous purpose came to her mind she wept so heartily and was so deeply disturbed that she swooned away.

At this juncture in the fray Lancelot rode again into the field, and when the knights of Arthur's party saw him the cry went up. "Return, return, here comes Sir Lancelot du Lake!"

And some said to him, "Sir Lancelot, yonder knight in the black harness is your man. He is the best of our opponents, and has nearly overcome the good knight with the silver shield."

At this Lancelot rode between the combatants, and cried to Palamides,—

"Let me have this battle; you need repose."

Palamides knew Lancelot, and readily gave way, hoping through his mighty aid to gain revenge upon his rival. Then Lancelot fell upon Tristram, and, unknowing who he was, dealt him blows that would have stunned a less hardy fighter. Tristram returned them

but feebly, for he knew well with whom he fought. And Isolde, who saw it all, was half out of her mind with grief.

Dinadan now told Gareth who the knight in black armor was, and said, "Lancelot will get the better of him, for one is weary and the other fresh, and Tristram is not fighting with his old vim. Let us to his aid."

[Pg 78]"I am with you," said Gareth. "Yonder fellow with the silver shield is waiting to fall on Tristram, if he can to advantage. It is our business to give our friend what help we can."

Then they rode in, and Gareth struck Lancelot a sword-blow that made his head swim, while Dinadan followed with a spear-thrust that bore horse and man together to the earth.

"Why do you this?" cried Tristram, angrily. "It is not a knightly act, and does not that good knight any dishonor. I was quite his match without you."

Then Palamides came to Lancelot's aid, and a close medley of fighting began, in which Dinadan was unhorsed and Tristram pulled Palamides from his saddle, and fell with him. Dinadan now sprang up and caught Tristram's horse by the bridle, calling out, with purpose to end the fight,—

"My lord Sir Tristram, take your horse."

"What is this?" cried Lancelot. "What have I done? Sir Tristram, why came you here disguised? Surely I would not have drawn sword on you, had I known you."

"Sir," said Tristram, "this is not the first honor you have done me."

Then they mounted their horses again, while the people on one side gave Lancelot the honor of the fray, and those on the other side gave it to Tristram.

"The honor is not mine," said Lancelot. "He has been longer in the field, and has smitten down many more knights; so I give my voice for Sir Tristram, and pray to all my lords and fellows to do the same."

[Pg 79]This was the verdict of the judges, and the prize of that day's tourney was by all voted to the noble Sir Tristram.

Then the trumpets blew to lodging, and the knights left the field, while Queen Isolde was conducted to her pavilion. But her heart burned hot with wrath against Palamides, all whose treachery she had seen. As Tristram rode forward with Gareth and Dinadan, Palamides joined them, still disguised.

"Sir knight," said Tristram, "you are not of our party, and your company is not welcome. So begone."

"Not I," he answered. "One of the best knights in the world bade me keep fellowship with you, and till he relieve me from that service I must obey him."

"Ha, Palamides, I know you now!" said Tristram. "But, by my faith, I did not know you before, for I deemed you a worthy knight and not a traitor. I could have handled you well enough, but you brought Lancelot to your aid against me."

"Are you my lord, Sir Tristram?" said Palamides, in a tone of surprise.

"That you know, well enough."

"How should I know it any more than you knew me? I deemed you the king of Ireland, for you bear his arms."

"I won them in battle, from his champion Sir Marhaus," said Tristram.

"Sir," answered Palamides, "I fancied you had joined Lancelot's party, and that caused me to turn to the same side."

[Pg 80]"If that be so, I forgive you," said Tristram.

But when they reached the pavilion and had disarmed and washed, and were come to table, Isolde grew red with wrath on seeing Palamides.

"You traitor and felon!" she cried, "how dare you thrust yourself into this goodly company? You know not how falsely he has treated you, my lord Tristram. I saw it all. He watched you when you rode to your tent and donned the black armor. Then he changed armor with a wounded knight and rode back and wilfully changed sides, and drew sword upon you. I saw it all, my lord, and I impeach him of treason."

"Madam," said Palamides, calmly, "you may say what you will. I cannot in courtesy deny you. Yet by my knighthood I declare I knew not Sir Tristram."

"I will take your excuse," said Tristram, "though it seems a lame one. You spared me little in the field, but all that I have pardoned."

At this, Isolde held down her head in despite and said no more.

While they were still at table two knights rode to the pavilions, and entered in full armor.

"Fair sirs," said Tristram, "is this courtesy, to come upon us thus armed at our meal?"

"We come with no ill intent," said one, "but as your friends, Sir Tristram."

"I am come," said the other, "to greet you as a friend and comrade, and my companion is eager to see and welcome La Belle Isolde."

"Then remove your helms, that I may see what guests I have."

[Pg 81]"That we do, willingly."

No sooner were their helmets off than Tristram sprang hastily to his feet.

"Madam, arise," he cried; "this is none less than my lord King Arthur; and this my very dear friend Sir Lancelot."

Then the king and queen kissed, and Lancelot and Tristram warmly embraced, while deep joy filled all hearts there. At the request of Isolde the visitors removed their armor and joined them at their meal.

"Many is the day that I have longed to see you," said Arthur to Isolde, "for much praise have I heard of you, and not without warrant. For a nobler match for beauty and valor than you and Sir Tristram the world does not hold."

"We thank you heartily," replied Tristram and Isolde. "Such praise from King Arthur is the highest honor that men's lips could give."

Then they talked of other things, but mainly of the tournament.

"Why were you against us?" asked Arthur. "You are a Knight of the Round Table, and have fought to-day against your own."

"Here is Dinadan, and your own nephew Gareth. You must blame them for that," said Tristram, smiling.

"You may lay all the blame on my shoulders, if Tristram wishes it," said Gareth.

"Not on mine, then," said Dinadan. "Mine are only broad enough to carry my own sins. It was this unhappy Tristram brought us to the tournament, and I owe to him a whole body full of[Pg 82] aches and pains as it is, without taking any of his sins in my sack, to boot."

At this the king and Lancelot laughed heartily, and the more so at the sour grimace with which Dinadan ended.

"What knight was he with the shield of silver that held you so short?" asked Arthur.

"Here he sits," said Tristram.

"What! was it Palamides?"

"None less than he," said Isolde.

"That was not a courteous action."

"Sir," said Palamides, "Tristram was so disguised that I knew him not."

"That may well be," said Lancelot, "for I knew him no better."

"However it be, we are friends again," said Tristram, "and I hope will continue so."

And so the evening passed, till the time came for Arthur and Lancelot to take their leave.

That night Palamides slept not for the pain and envy that burned in his heart. But when his friends entered his chamber in the morning they found him fast asleep, with his cheeks stained with tears.

"Say nothing," said Tristram. "The poor fellow has been deeply wounded by the rebuke that I and Isolde gave him. Lay no heavier load upon his heart."

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CHAPTER VII.

THE WOES OF TWO LOVERS.

Early on the third morning of the tournament the knights of Tristram's party were up and armed, they now being all arrayed in red, as was also Isolde and her maidens. And rare was the show they made as they rode gayly to the priory, where they left Isolde and her maidens to occupy their proper seats. As the knights turned thence towards the field they heard three loud bugle-blasts, and saw the throng of armed knights press eagerly forward, while already from the listed space came the thunder of hoofs and the cries of combatants.

Into the field they rode, Palamides in advance, and such havoc did he make in the opposing ranks that shouts of approval went up from all the seats. But Tristram now rode forward at the full speed of his great war-horse, hurled Kay the seneschal from his saddle, smote down three other knights with the same spear, and then, drawing his sword, laid about him like a roused giant.

Quickly changed the cry from Palamides. "O Tristram! O Tristram!" shouted the throng of spectators, and the deeds of this new champion threw those of the former victor into the shade.

Gareth and Dinadan also nobly aided the two champions, rousing the admiration of Arthur and Lancelot by their gallantry, and the four knightly comrades soon cleared a wide space in the ranks before them.

[Pg 84]"Come," said Arthur, "we must to the rescue, or our side will be driven from the field before the day is an hour old. See how the others crowd in on Tristram's steps, like wolves to the prey."

Then he and Lancelot hastily armed and sought the field, where they quickly fought their way into the thickest press of the tumult. Tristram, not knowing them, rode upon them and thrust King Arthur from his horse, and when Lancelot rushed to his rescue he was surrounded with such an eager host that he was pulled from his saddle to the ground.

Seeing this, the kings of Ireland and Scotland, with their knights, rushed forward to take Lancelot and Arthur prisoners. But they counted without their host, for the dismounted knights laid about them like angry lions, driving back all who came near them. Of all that passed in that hot turmoil it were too much to say. Many a knight there did deeds of great prowess, and Arthur and Lancelot being mounted again, strewed the earth with fallen knights, Lancelot that day unhorsing thirty warriors. Yet the other side held so firmly together that, with all their ardent labor, Arthur and his party were overmatched.

At this juncture, Tristram turned to his companions and said,—

"My good comrades, I begin to fancy that we are to-day on the wrong side. King Arthur's party is overborne more by numbers than valor, for I must say I never saw so few men do so well. It would be a shame for us, who are Knights of the Round[Pg 85] Table, to see our lord Arthur and our good comrade Lancelot dishonored. I am in the humor to change sides, and help our king and liege lord."

"We are with you in that," cried Gareth and Dinadan. "We have been fighting against the grain these three days."

"Do as you will," said Palamides. "I shall not change my hand in the midst of the fray."

"As you will," said Tristram. "You are your own master. Speed well in your way, and we will do our best in ours."

Then he, Gareth, and Dinadan drew out of the press and rode round to Arthur's side, where they lent such noble aid that the fortune of the field quickly changed, and the opposing party began to give ground. As for Palamides, King Arthur struck him so fierce a blow that he was hurled from his horse, while Tristram and Lancelot unhorsed all before them. Such havoc did they make, indeed, that the party of the opposing kings was soon in full flight from the field, bearing Palamides, who wept for rage and grief, with them.

Then rarely sounded the trumpets, and loudly shouted the spectators, while the names of Tristram and Lancelot were in every mouth, some voting one the prize, some the

other. But neither of these good comrades would have it alone, so that in the end it was divided between them.

When evening drew near, and the knights had all withdrawn to their pavilions, Palamides rode up to that of Sir Tristram, in company with the kings of Wales and Scotland. Here he drew up his horse, praying his companions to wait a while[Pg 86] while he spoke to the knight within. Then he cried loudly at the entrance,—

"Where are you, Tristram of Lyonesse?"

"Is that you, Palamides?" answered the knight. "Will you not dismount and join us?"

"I seek better company, sir traitor," cried Palamides, in tones that trembled with fury. "I hate you now as much as I once esteemed you, and bear this in mind, if it were daylight as it is night, I would slay you with my own hands. You shall die yet for this day's deeds."

"You blame me wrongly, Palamides," said Tristram, mildly. "If you had done as I advised you would have won honor instead of disgrace. Why come you here seeking to lay your own fault on me? Since you give me such broad warning, I shall be well on my guard against you."

"Well you may, sir dastard, for I love you not," and, fiercely spurring his horse, the hot-blooded Saracen joined his kingly companions.

When the next day dawned the festive array which had long spread bustle and splendor round Lonazep broke up, and knights and ladies rode off in all directions through the land, to carry far and wide the story of the wondrous deeds of valor that had been performed at the great tournament. Tristram and his two comrades, with Hector de Maris and Bleoberis, escorted La Belle Isolde to Joyous Gard, where for seven days the guests were nobly entertained, with all the sports and mirthfulness that could be devised. King Arthur and his knights drew back to Camelot, and Palamides rode onward with the two kings, his heart torn with[Pg 87] mingled sorrow and despair. Not alone was he in grief for his disgrace in the field, under the eyes of her he loved, but was full as sorrowful for the hot words he had spoken in his wrath to Tristram, who had been so kind and gentle to him that his heart was torn to think how falsely and treacherously he had requited him.

His kingly companions would have had him stay with them, but he could not be persuaded, so the king of Ireland presented him with a noble courser, and the king of Scotland with valuable gifts, and he rode his way, still plunged in a grief that was almost despair. Noon brought him to a forest fountain, beside which lay a wounded knight, who sighed so mournfully that the very leaves on the trees seemed to sigh in echo.

"Why mourn you so, fair knight?" asked Palamides, mildly. "Or if you care not to tell, at least let me lie beside you and join my moans to yours, for I dare say I have a hundredfold deeper cause for grief, and we may ease our hearts by mutual complaints."

"What is your name, gentle sir?"

"Such as I am, for better or worse, men call me Palamides, son to King Astlabor."

"Noble sir, it solaces me much to meet you. I am Epinegris, son to the king of Northumberland. Now repose you on this mossy bank and let us tell our woes, and so ease somewhat our sad hearts."

Then Palamides dismounted and laid himself beside the wounded knight.

"This is my source of woe," he said. "I love the fairest queen that ever drew breath, La Belle Isolde, Cornwall's queen."

[Pg 88]"That is sheer folly," said Epinegris, "for she loves none but Tristram de Lyonesse."

"Know I it not? I have been in their company this month, daily reaping sorrow. And now I have lost the fellowship of Tristram and the love of Isolde forever, through my envy and jealousy, and never more shall a glad thought enter my sorrowful heart."

"Did she ever show you signs of love?"

"Never. She hated me, I fear. And the last day we met she gave me such a rebuke that I will never recover from it:—yet well I deserved it by my unknighly acts. Many great deeds have I done for her love, yet never shall I win a smile from her eyes."

"Deep is your grief, indeed," said Epinegris, with a heart-breaking sigh, "yet it is but a jest to my sorrow. For my lady loved me, and I won her with my hands. But, alas! this day I have lost her and am left here to moan. I took her from an earl and two knights that were with her; but as we sat here this day, telling each other of our loves, there came an errant knight, named Helior de Preuse, and challenged me to fight for my lady. You see what followed. He wounded me so that he left me for dead and took my lady with him. So my sorrow is deepest, for I have rejoiced in my love, and you never have. To have and lose is far worse than never to own."

"That is true," said Palamides. "But yet I have the deepest cause for grief, for your love is not hopeless, like mine. And I shall prove this, for if I can find this Helior he shall be made to[Pg 89] yield you your lady, unless he prove able to deal with me as he has with you."

Then he helped Epinegris on his horse and led him to a hermitage near by, where he left him under the care of the holy hermit. Here Palamides stayed not long, but walked out

under the shadow of the green leaves, to be a while alone with his woes. But not far had he gone before he saw near him a knight, who bore a shield that he had seen Hector de Maris wear. With him were ten other knights, who sheltered themselves from the noontide heat under the green leaves.

As they stood there another knight came by whose shield was green, with a white lion in its midst, and who led a lady on a palfrey. As he came up, the knight who bore Sir Hector's shield rode fiercely after him, and bade him turn and defend his lady.

"That I must, in knightly duty," cried the other.

Then the two knights rode together with such might that horses and men together were hurled to the earth. Drawing their swords, they now fought sturdily for the space of an hour. In the end the knight of the white lion was stricken to the earth and forced to beg for his life.

Palamides stood under the leaves, watching this combat till it came to its end. Then he went to the lady, whom he believed to be her whom he had promised to rescue. Taking her gently by the hand, he asked her if she knew a knight named Epinegris.

"Alas! that ever I did," she sadly replied. "For his sake I have lost my liberty, and for mine he has lost his life."

[Pg 90]"Not so badly as that," said Palamides. "He is at yonder hermitage. I will take you to him."

"Then he lives!" she cried in joy. "You fill my heart with gladness."

But not many steps had Palamides led her before the victorious knight cried out in tones of fierce anger,—

"Loose the lady, sirrah! Whither take you her?"

"Whither I will?" answered Palamides.

"You speak largely, sir knave," cried the knight. "Do you fancy you can rob me of my prize so lightly? Think it not, sirrah; were you as good a knight as Lancelot or Tristram or Palamides, you should not have that lady without winning her at a dearer rate than I did."

"If fight it is, I am ready for you," answered Palamides. "I promised to bring this lady to her lover from whom yonder knight stole her, and it will need more swords than one to make me break my word."

"We shall see if that be so," said the other, attacking him so fiercely that Palamides had much ado to protect himself. They fought for so long a time that Palamides marvelled much who this knight could be that withstood him so sturdily after his late hard battle.

"Knight," he said, at length, "you fight like a hero. I would know your name."

"You shall have it for yours in return."

"I agree to that."

"Then, sir, my name is Safere. I am son of King Astlobar, and brother to Palamides and Segwarides."

[Pg 91]"Then heaven defend me for having fought you, for I am your brother Palamides."

At these words Safere fell upon his knees and begged his brother's pardon; and then they unlaced their helms and kissed each other with tears of joy.

As they stood thus, Epinegris advanced towards them, for he had heard the sounds of fighting, and, wounded as he was, he came to help Palamides if he should stand in need.

Palamides, seeing him approach, took the lady by the hand and led her to him, and they embraced so tenderly that all hearts there were touched.

"Fair knight and lady," said Safere, "it would be a cruel pity to part you, and I pray heaven to send you joy of each other."

"You have my sincere thanks," said Epinegris. "And deeper thanks has Sir Palamides for what he has done for me this day. My castle is near by; will you not ride there with me as a safeguard?"

"That we gladly will," they said, and when Epinegris had got his horse they rode with him and the lady to the castle, where they were nobly received and treated with the highest honor. They had such good cheer and such enjoyment as they had rarely before known. And never burned the flame of love more warmly than that between Epinegris and his rescued lady.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIVALRY OF TRISTRAM AND PALAMIDES.

When morning again dawned over the forest and the smiling fields that surrounded the castle of Epinegris, the two brothers rode out, taking with them the blessings and

prayers for good fortune of those they left behind. But had they known into what deadly peril they ventured they would not for days have left those hospitable gates.

For they rode on hour by hour, until afternoon came, and then found themselves in front of a noble manor-house from which came to their ears doleful sounds of woe and lamentation.

"What means this woful noise? Shall we enter and see?" said Safere.

"Willingly," answered Palamides.

Leaving their horses at the gates, they entered the court-yard, where they saw an old man tremblingly fumbling his beads. But when they came within the hall they beheld many men weeping and lamenting.

"Fair sirs, why make you such a moaning?" asked Palamides.

"We weep for our lord, who is slain," they dolefully replied.

But one of the knights observed the new-comers closely, and said secretly to his fellows,—

"Know you not this man? Fortune has thrown into our hands the knight who slew our lord at Lonazep. That tall fellow is Palamides. Let him not go as easily as he came."

[Pg 93]Hearing this, most of them quietly withdrew and armed themselves, and then came suddenly upon their visitors to the number of threescore, crying,—

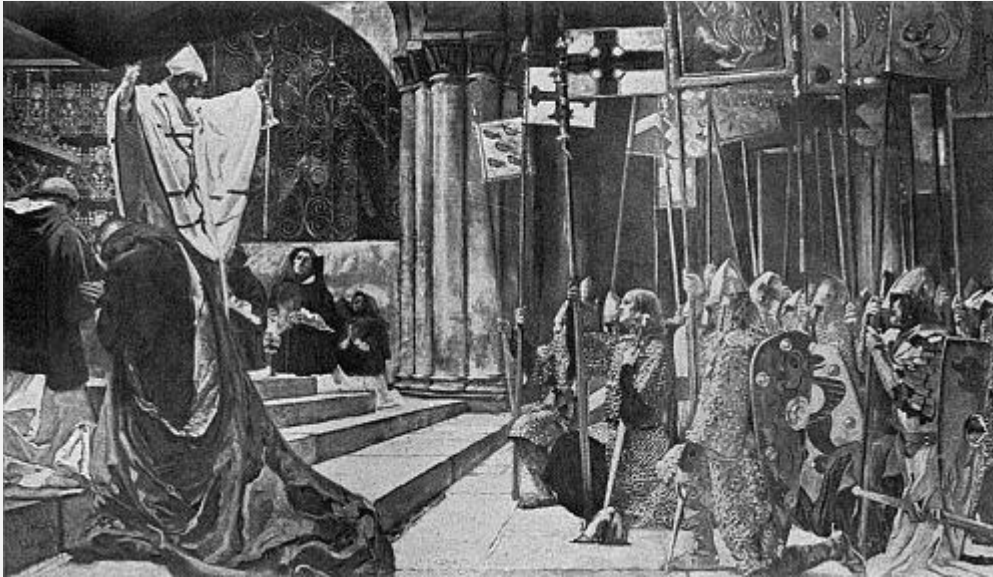
"Defend yourself, if you can, Sir Palamides. We know you for the murderer of our lord, and it is our duty to revenge him. Die you shall, though you had the might of a giant."

Palamides and his brother, finding themselves in this desperate strait, set themselves back to back in the midst of their assailants, and fought like very giants, keeping their ground for two hours, though they were attacked by twenty knights and forty gentlemen and yeomen. But strength cannot hold out forever against odds, and at the end they were forced to yield, and were locked up in a strong prison.

Within three days thereafter a court of twelve knights sat upon the charge against them, and found Sir Palamides guilty of their lord's death.

Sir Safere, who was adjudged not guilty, was given his liberty, and bidden to depart from the castle. He parted with his brother in the deepest woe.

"Dear brother, grieve not so greatly," said Palamides. "If die I must, I shall meet death bravely. But had I dreamed of such a doom as this, they should never have taken me alive."



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THE DEPARTURE.

Then Safere departed in untold sorrow, though not without hope of rescue if he could raise a force to storm the castle. This he had no chance to do, for on the next morning Palamides was sent under an escort of twelve knights to the father of the[Pg 94] dead knight, who dwelt in a strong castle by the sea-side, named Pelownes, where it had been decided that the sentence should be put into execution.

Palamides was placed on a sorry old steed with his feet bound beneath it, and, surrounded by the guard of twelve armed knights, was taken towards the place of death.

But through the favor of fortune their route lay by the castle of Joyous Gard, and here they were seen by one who knew Palamides, and who asked him whither he was borne.

"To my death," he answered, "for the slaying of a knight at the tournament. Had I not left Sir Tristram this would not have happened to me. I pray you, recommended me to your lord and to my lady Isolde, and beg them to forgive me my trespasses against them. And also to my lord King Arthur, and to all my fellows of the Round Table."

When the yeoman heard this he rode in all haste to Joyous Gard, where he told Tristram of what he had seen and heard.

"To his death, you say?" cried Tristram. "And for an accident of the tournament? Why, I and twenty others might be served in the same manner. I have reason to be angry with Palamides, but he shall not die the death of a dog if I can rescue him."

This said, he armed in all haste, and taking two squires with him, he rode at a fast gallop towards the castle of Pelownes, hoping to overtake the party before they could pass its gates.

But fortune had decreed that the prisoner should be otherwise rescued. For as the guard of knights rode on their way they passed by a well where[Pg 95] Lancelot had alighted to drink of the refreshing waters.

When he saw the cavalcade approach he put on his helmet and stood watching them as they passed. But his heart swelled with anger when he saw Palamides disarmed and bound in their midst, and seemingly led to his death.

"What means this?" he cried. "What has this knight done that deserves a shameful death? Whatever it be, I cannot suffer him to be foully dealt with."

Then he mounted and rode after the twelve knights, soon overtaking them.

"Sir knights," he said, "whither take you that gentleman? To ride thus bound is not befitting for a man of his metal."

At this the guard of knights turned their horses and faced Lancelot.

"We counsel you not to meddle with us," they said, sternly. "This man has deserved death, and to death he is adjudged."

"I tell you, sirs, it shall not be. He is too good a knight to die a shameful death. Defend yourselves, then, for I will try my one hand against your twelve, and rescue him or die in the effort."

The knights of the guard now put their spears in rest, and Lancelot rode upon them with such fury that the foremost and three of those behind him were hurled to the ground before his spear broke. Then he drew his sword and laid about him so shrewdly that in a little time the whole twelve of them were stretched upon the earth, most of them being sorely wounded. Lancelot now cut[Pg 96] the bonds of Palamides, mounted him upon the best of their horses, and rode back with him towards Joyous Gard.

As they went forward they saw Sir Tristram approaching. Lancelot knew him at sight, but was himself unknown, because he bore a golden shield which neither Tristram nor Palamides recognized. He therefore mystified them for a time, and declined to enter Joyous Gard on the plea that he had other pressing business on hand. But when strongly entreated, he at length consented, and entered the castle with them.

Great was their surprise and joy when he had unhelmed, to find that they had their host for guest. Tristram took him in his arms, and so did Isolde, while Palamides kneeled before him and thanked him for his life. When Lancelot saw this he took him by the hand and made him rise.

"Good sirs," he said, "could I, or any knight of worship in this land, hesitate to rescue from an ignoble death such a knight as Palamides? Had there been fifty instead of twelve, I fear I should have braved them all."

Much joy was there in Joyous Gard at the visit of the lord of the castle, but Lancelot stayed there but four days. Palamides, however, remained for two months and more, his love and grief growing deeper, till he faded away to a shadow of himself.

One day, at the end of this time, he wandered far into the neighboring forest, and here by chance saw the reflection of his face in a clear pool. The wasted visage disturbed and affrighted him.

"What does this mean?" he asked himself.[Pg 97] "Am I, who was called one of the handsomest knights in the world, wasted to such a frightful figure? I must leave this life, for it is idle to grieve myself to death for that which I can never possess."

Then he threw himself beside the well, and from the fulness of his heart began to make a song about La Belle Isolde and himself, a rhyme made up of music, love, and grief.

As chance would have it, Tristram had ridden into the forest that day in chase of the hart. And as he rode up and down under the green leaves the summer air brought to his ears the sound of a voice singing loud and clear. He rode softly towards the sound, for he deemed that some knight-errant lay there solacing himself with song.

When he came nigh he tied his horse to a tree and advanced on foot. Then he became aware that the singer was his guest Palamides, and that his song was about La Belle Isolde, a doleful and piteous, yet marvellously well-made song, which the singer sang loudly and in a clear voice. Tristram stood listening till he had heard it from beginning to end. But at the last his anger grew so high that he needed to restrain himself from slaying the singer where he lay.

Remembering that Palamides was unarmed, he resisted this impulse, and advanced slowly towards him.

"Sir Palamides," he said, in a gentle voice, "I have heard your song, and learned your treason to your host. If it were not for the shame of an unknighly act I would deal you here the meed[Pg 98] you have earned. How will you acquit yourself of treachery?"

"Thus will I," said Palamides, springing to his feet in his surprise. "As for Queen Isolde, you may know well that I love her above all other ladies in the world. I loved her before you ever saw her, as you know, and have never ceased nor shall ever cease to love her. What honor I have won is due for the most part to my love of her. Yet never for a moment has she returned my love, and I have been her knight without guerdon. Therefore I dread not death, for I had as lief die as live."

"Well have you uttered your treason," said Tristram.

"No treason is it," said Palamides. "Love is free to all men, and I have a right to love any lady I will. If she return it not, no man is harmed. Such wrong as is done I have

suffered, not you, for your love is returned and mine has brought me but pain. Yet I shall continue to love La Belle Isolde to the end of my days as deeply as you can."

That there was reason in these words Tristram could not but have seen, had not anger blinded his wisdom.

"None shall love my lady but myself," he cried, in passion. "And for what you have said I challenge you to battle to the uttermost."

"I can never fight in a better quarrel," said Palamides. "And if you slay me I can never die by a nobler hand. Since I cannot hope for favor from La Belle Isolde, I have as good will to die as to live."

[Pg 99]"Then set a day in which we shall do battle in this cause."

"Let it be fifteen days hence. And let the place be in the meadow under Joyous Gard."

"Why so long a time?" demanded Tristram. "To-morrow will suit me better."

"It is because I am meagre and weak, and have fallen away to a shadow through hopeless love. I must rest until I get my strength again before I can face so doughty a knight."

"So let it be, then," said Tristram. "Yet once before you broke a promise to meet me in battle at the grave near Camelot."

"What could I do?" rejoined Palamides. "I was in prison, and could not keep my word."

"If you had done so, there would have been no need of a fight now," said Tristram, as he strode haughtily away.

Then Palamides took his horse and rode to Arthur's court, where he did his utmost to rest and regain strength. When the appointed time approached he returned, attended by four knights and four sergeant-at-arms.

Meanwhile Tristram spent his time at the chase. And by evil fortune, about three days before the time of battle, a wild arrow shot by an archer at a hart struck him in the thigh and wounded him so deeply that he could scarcely return to Joyous Gard.

Great was his heaviness of heart, and neither man nor woman could bring him cheer, for it was now impossible to keep his word with his rival; and his heart grew full of the fancy that Palamides[Pg 100] himself had shot that arrow, so as to prevent him doing battle on the appointed day. But this no knight about Tristram would believe.

When the fifteenth day came Palamides appeared at the place fixed, with the knights and sergeants whom he had brought with him to bear record of the battle. One sergeant

bore his helm, a second his spear, and a third his shield. And for two hours he rested in the field, awaiting the approach of his antagonist.

Then, seeing that Tristram failed to come, he sent a squire to Joyous Gard to remind him of his challenge. When Tristram heard of this message he had the squire brought to his chamber, and showed him his wound.

"Tell Sir Palamides," he said, "that were I able to come he would not need to send for me, and that I had rather be whole to-day than have all King Arthur's gold. Tell him, moreover, that as soon as I am able I shall seek him throughout the land, as I am a true knight; and when I find him he shall have his fill of battle."

This message the squire brought to his master, who heard it with much secret satisfaction.

"I would have had hard handling of him, and very likely have been vanquished," he said, "for he has not his equal in battle, unless it be Sir Lancelot. So I am well content to give up the fight."

A month passed before Tristram was well. Then he took his horse and rode from country to country in search of Palamides, having many strange adventures by the way, but nowhere could he meet[Pg 101] or hear of his rival in love. But during his search Tristram did so many valiant deeds that his fame for the time quite overtopped that of Lancelot, so much so that Lancelot's kinsmen in their anger would have waylaid and slain the valiant warrior.

For this jealousy Lancelot sternly rebuked them, saying,—

"Bear it well in mind, that if any of you does any harm to Sir Tristram, that man shall I slay with my own hands. To murder a man like this for his noble deeds! Out upon such base designs! Far rather should you worship him for his valor and royal prowess."

And so time went on for the space of two years, during which Tristram sought in vain for his rival.

At the end of that time he came home to Joyous Gard from one of his journeys of adventure, and there was told by La Belle Isolde of a great feast to be held at the court on the coming day of Pentecost, which she counselled him strongly to attend.

Much debate passed between him and his lady-love on this subject, for he was loth to go without her, and she cared not to go. In the end he declared that he would obey her wishes, but would ride thither unarmed, save for his sword and spear.

This he did, and though she in her loving anxiety sent after him four knights, he sent them back within half a mile. Yet he soon had reason to repent his rashness. For hardly had he gone a mile farther when he came upon a wounded knight, who told him he

owed his hurt to Sir Palamides. What to do now, Tristram knew not. Near by was [Pg 102] the foe he had so long sought in vain, and he was unarmed. Should he ride back for his armor, or go on as he was?

While he stood thinking, Palamides appeared, and knew him at sight.

"Well met, Sir Tristram!" he cried. "I have heard much of your search for me. You have found me now, and we shall not part till we have settled our old scores."

"As for that," answered Tristram, "no Christian can boast that I ever fled from him, nor shall a Saracen make this boast, even if I be unarmed."

Then he put his horse to the gallop and rode on Palamides with such fury that his spear broke into a hundred pieces. Throwing it away, he drew his sword and struck Palamides six great strokes upon the helm, while the Saracen stood unresisting, and wondering at the folly and madness of his foe. Then Tristram cried out in fury,—

"Coward knight, why stand you thus idly? You dare not do battle with me, for doubt not but I can endure all your strength and malice."

"You know well, Sir Tristram," answered Palamides, "that I cannot in honor strike at your unarmed head. If I should slay you thus, shame would be my lot. As for your valor and hardiness, those I shall never question."

"You speak well," answered Tristram.

"Tell me this," continued Palamides. "Were I here naked of armor, and you full armed as I am, what would you do?"

"I shall not answer from fear, but from truthfulness. I would bid you depart, as I could not have ado with you."

[Pg 103]"No more can I with you," said Palamides, "therefore ride on your way."

"I shall ride or abide as I may choose," said Tristram. "But tell me this, Palamides: how is it that so good a knight as you refuses to be christened, as your brothers have long been?"

"I cannot become a Christian till a vow I made years ago is fulfilled. I believe fully in Jesus Christ and His mild mother Mary; but there is one battle yet I must fight, and when that is done I will be baptized with a good will."

"If that is the battle with me," said Tristram, "you shall not long wait for it. For God defend that through my fault you should continue a Saracen. Yonder is a knight whom you have hurt. Help me to put on his armor and I will aid you to fulfil your vow."

So they rode together to the wounded knight, who was seated on a bank. Tristram saluted him, and he weakly returned the salute.

"Will you tell me your name, sir knight?" asked Tristram.

"I am Sir Galleron of Galway, and a Knight of the Round Table."

"I am sorry for your hurts, and beg you to lend me your armor, for I am unarmed, and would do battle with this knight who wounded you."

"You shall have it with a good will. But you must beware, for this is no common knight."

"I know him well," answered Tristram, "and have an old quarrel with him."

"Will you kindly tell me your name?"

"My name is Tristram de Lyonesse."

[Pg 104]"Then it was idle to warn you. Well I know your renown and worship; and Sir Palamides is likely to have no light task."

Tristram now took off the armor of the wounded knight, who, as well as he could, helped him to put it on himself. This accomplished, Tristram mounted his horse and took in his hand Sir Galleron's spear.

Riding to where Palamides stood waiting, he bade him make ready. In a minute more the two strong knights came hurtling together like two lions. Each smote the other in the centre of the shield, but Palamides's spear broke, while that of Tristram overturned the horse of Palamides. In a moment the unhorsed knight had sprung to his feet and drawn his sword, while Tristram alighted, tied his horse to a tree, and advanced to the fray.

The combat that succeeded was a hard and well-fought one, as only it could be between two such knights. For more than two hours it continued, Tristram often bringing Palamides to his knees by his mighty strokes, while Palamides cut through Tristram's shield and wounded him. Then, in a fury of anger, Tristram rushed upon his rival and hurled him to the earth. But in an instant the agile Saracen was on his feet again, fighting with all his old strength and skill. And so the combat went on, hour by hour, and, hard as Tristram fought, Palamides stood as nobly to his work, and gave him stroke for stroke.

But, as fortune willed, in the end a fierce blow struck the sword from Palamides's hand, nor dare he stoop for it, for fear of being slain. So he[Pg 105] stood moveless, regarding it with a sorrowful heart.

"Now," said Tristram, "I have you at advantage, as you had me this day. But it shall never be said that Tristram de Lyonesse killed a weaponless knight. Therefore take your sword, and let us make an end of this battle."

"As for that, I am willing to end it now," said Palamides. "I have no wish to fight longer. Nor can I think that my offence is such that we may not be friends. All I have done is to love La Belle Isolde. You will not say that I have done her aught of dishonor by holding that she is peerless among ladies, or by the valor which love for her has given me. As for such offence as I have given you, I have atoned for it this day, and no one can say that I have not held my own like a man. But this I will affirm, that I never before fought with a man of your might. Therefore I beg you to forgive me for all wrongs which I have done you, and as my vow is now fulfilled, I stand ready to go with you to the nearest church, there to be confessed, and to receive baptism as a true and earnest Christian knight."

"I gladly forgive you all you have done against me," said Tristram; "the more so that you have done it rather from love than from hatred. It fills my heart with joy to be the means of bringing the valiant Palamides into the Church of Christ, and hereafter I shall hold you among my best friends. Within a mile from here is the suffragan of Carlisle, who will gladly give you the sacrament of baptism; and all Christendom must rejoice to gain so noble a convert."

[Pg 106]Then they took their horses and helped Galleron to his, and rode to the church, where Tristram told the suffragan the purpose of their coming. Proud to bring into the fold of the church so notable a convert, the suffragan filled a great vessel with water, and hallowed it. This done, he confessed and baptized Sir Palamides, while Tristram and Galleron stood as his godfathers.

Afterwards the three knights rode to Camelot, much to the joy of the king and queen, who gladly welcomed Tristram to their court, and were no less glad to learn that the valiant Palamides had become a Christian, and that the long rivalry between him and Tristram was at an end. The great feast of Pentecost that followed was the merriest that had ever been held at Arthur's court, and the merriest that ever would be, for the breath of coming woe and trouble was in the air, and the time was near at hand in which that worthy fellowship of noble knights was destined to break up in dire disaster.

But first of all the tide of disaster came upon Tristram the brave and Isolde the fair, as we must now relate. The chronicles tell the story at length, but the record of treachery and crime had always best be short, and so we shall make that of King Mark, the murderer.

Many years before the time to which we have now come, King Mark's treachery had filled Cornwall with mischief and all the land with horror, through a deed of frightful crime. And in thus wise it came about. Cornwall had been invaded by a host of Saracens,

but before they could do any[Pg 107] mischief, Prince Baldwin, King Mark's brother, attacked them, burned their ships, and utterly destroyed them. Furious at heart that his brother should win such honor, while he lay cowering with fear in his castle, Mark invited him to Tintagil, with his wife and child. There suddenly charging him with treason for attacking the Saracens without orders, he stabbed him to the heart, and would have slain his wife and child as well had not the lady Anglides fled for life with her child.

Mark sent after them an old knight named Sir Sadok, with orders to bring them back to Tintagil. But he suffered them to escape, and brought back to the king a false tale that he had drowned the boy.

Many years now passed by, during which Baldwin's son, Alexander the orphan, grew up to be a youth large of limb and strong of arm. In due time he was made a knight, whereupon Anglides produced the bloody doublet and shirt of her murdered husband, which she had carefully preserved, and laid upon the young knight the duty of revenging his father's death. The story of the crime had been diligently kept from him, but he now accepted this heavy charge with alacrity, and vowed solemnly to devote his life to the duty of revenging his murdered father.

News of all this was quickly brought to King Mark, by a false knight who hoped to win favor by turning informer.

"By my halidom," cried Mark, "whom can I trust? I fancied the young viper was dead years ago. That false hound, Sadok, let him escape. As I am a living man, he shall pay the penalty of his treason."

[Pg 108]Seizing a sword, he burst furiously from the chamber, and rushed madly through the castle in search of the knight who had deceived him. When Sadok saw him coming, with fury in his face, he guessed what had happened, and drew his own sword in haste.

"King Mark," he cried, "beware how you come nigh me. I saved the life of Alexander, and glory in it, for you slew his father cowardly and treacherously. And it is my hope and prayer that the youth may have the strength and spirit to revenge the good Prince Baldwin on his murderer."

"What, traitor! What, dog! Do you dare rail thus at me?" cried the king, and in a voice of fury he bade four knights of his following to slay the traitor.

These knights drew their swords and advanced in a body on Sadok; but he got the wall of them, and fought so shrewdly that he killed the whole four in King Mark's presence.

Then, shaking his clinched fist at the king, he said,—

"I would add your false body to the heap, but that I leave you for Alexander's revenge."

This said, he took horse and rode briskly away, and in all his court Mark could not find a knight willing to pursue him, for all that held with the king feared the old knight's sturdy arm.

King Mark now finding his wrath of no avail, set himself to devising some scheme of treachery by which the danger that threatened him might be removed. In the end he made a compact with Morgan le Fay and the queen of Northgalis, both false[Pg 109] sorceresses, in which they agreed to fill the land with ladies that were enchantresses, and with false knights like Malgrim and Breuse Sans Pit , so that the young knight Alexander le Orphelin should be surrounded with magic and treachery, and without doubt be taken prisoner or slain.

Soon after his knighting, Alexander set out for King Arthur's court, and on the way there had many adventures, in which he proved himself a knight of great valor and skill. Among these was a mighty battle with the false knight Malgrim, whom in the end he killed.

But now Morgan le Fay sought to entrap him by her false devices. She gave him a sleeping draught, and had him taken in a horse-litter to a castle of hers named La Belle Regard.

Here she cured him of his wounds by healing salves, but not until he had promised that he would not set foot beyond the boundaries of that castle for a twelvemonth and a day. When he had recovered, Alexander chafed bitterly at his confinement, for he felt sure that the pledge had been exacted from him to save King Mark from his vow of revenge. Yet his word held him close prisoner.

As one day he wandered through the halls of the castle, like a young lion in a cage,—now heavy and sad, now burning with desire for action,—there came to him a damsel who was cousin to Morgan le Fay, and to whom the castle of La Belle Regard by right belonged.

"Sir knight," she said to him, "I find you doleful of aspect; yet I bear tidings that should make you merry!"

[Pg 110]"I pray you tell them to me," he answered. "I am here now a prisoner by promise, but must say that time hangs very heavy on my hands."

"You are more of a prisoner than you deem," she replied. "My cousin, Morgan le Fay, keeps you here for purposes of her own which you will scarcely find to your liking."

"I fancy she keeps me here through an understanding with King Mark," he rejoined. "I have no faith in her, but I cannot break my word of honor."

"Truly, fair sir," she said, "I pity your unhappy lot, and have a plan in mind through which you may escape from this durance without loss of honor."

"Do that and I shall owe you my life's service," he answered, warmly. "Tell me, dear lady, by what means I can be freed."

"This I may justly say, that this castle of right belongs to me. I have been unjustly deprived of it, and in right and honor you are my prisoner, not Morgan's. I have an uncle who is a powerful nobleman, the Earl of Pase, and who hates Morgan le Fay above all persons. I shall send to him, and pray him for my sake to destroy this castle, which harbors only evil customs. He will come at my wish and set fire to the building throughout. As for you, I shall get you out at a private postern, and there have your horse and armor ready."

"Truly, fair maiden, you are as wise as you are beautiful," he answered, in eager accents. "Release me from imprisonment to Morgan and I will hold myself your prisoner for life."

[Pg 111]Then she sent to her uncle the earl, and bade him come and burn that haunt of mischief,—a design which he already had in mind.

When the appointed day came the Earl of Pase sought the castle with four hundred knights, and set fire to it in all parts, ceasing not his efforts till there was not a stone left standing of the once proud stronghold.

But Alexander was not willing to take this as a release from his vow, but stationed himself within the limits of the space where had stood the castle of La Belle Regard, and made it known far and wide that he would hold that ground against all comers for a twelvemonth and a day.

Word of this knightly challenge soon came to Arthur's court, where was then a lady of famous beauty and great estate, known as Alice la Belle Pilgrim, daughter of Duke Ansirus, called the pilgrim, since he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem every third year.

When this fair maiden heard of Alexander's challenge, she went into the great hall of Camelot and proclaimed in the hearing of all the knights that whoever should overcome the champion of La Belle Regard should wed her and be lord of all her lands.

This done, she went to La Belle Regard, where she set up her pavilion beside the piece of earth held by the young knight. And as the weeks passed by there came from all directions knights who had heard of Alexander's challenge and Alice's offer, and many a hard battle was fought. Yet from them all Alexander came as victor.

[Pg 112]But the more he triumphed over his knightly foes the deeper he fell captive to his fair neighbor, for whom he grew to feel so deep a love that it almost robbed him of

his wits. Nor was his love unrequited, for his valor and youthful beauty had filled her heart with as ardent a passion for him in return, and she prayed as warmly for his victory in every combat as though he had been her chosen champion.

And so time passed on, varied by fighting and love-making, till one day, after Alexander had unhorsed two knights, there came to him the lady to whom he owed the burning of the castle, who told Alice the whole story of what had then occurred.

"You worked wisely and well," answered Alice. "Sir Alexander, indeed, has not gained much more freedom, except it be freedom to fight. But that is more his fault than yours."

"Have I not?" exclaimed the young knight. "I have gained freedom to love also; for which I am ever beholden to this fair damsel."

At this Alice turned away with a rosy blush, while the maiden stood regarding them with merry smiles.

"I have, by right, the first claim on you, Sir Alexander," she said. "But if this fair lady wants you, I should be sorry to stand in love's light. I yield my claim in her favor."

As they thus conversed in merry mood, three knights rode up, who challenged Alexander to joust for the proffered prize of the hand and estate of Alice la Belle Pilgrim. But the three of them[Pg 113] got such falls that they lost all desire to wed the lady, and, like all knights whom Alexander overcame, they were made to swear to wear no arms for a twelvemonth and a day.

Yet love may bring weakness as well as strength, as the young lover was to find to his cost. For there came a day in which, as he stood looking from his pavilion, he saw the lady Alice on horseback outside, and so charming did she appear in his eyes that his love for her became almost a frenzy. So enamoured was he that all thought of life and its doings fled from his brain, and he grew like one demented.

While he was in this state of love-lorn blindness the false-hearted knight Sir Mordred rode up with purpose to joust. But when he saw that the youthful champion was besotted with admiration of his lady, and had no eyes or mind for aught beside, he thought to make a jest of him, and, taking his horse by the bridle, led him here and there, designing to bring the lover to shame by withdrawing him from the place he had sworn to defend.

When the damsel of the castle saw this, and found that no words of hers would rouse Alexander from his blind folly, she burned with indignation, and bethought her of a sharper means of bringing him back to his lost senses.

So she put on her armor and took a sword in her hand, and, mounting a horse, rode upon him with the fury of a knight, giving him such a buffet on the helm that he thought that fire flew from his eyes.

When the besotted lover felt this stroke he came[Pg 114] of a sudden to his wits, and felt for his sword. But the damsel fled to the pavilion and Mordred to the forest, so that Alexander was left raging there, with no foe to repay for that stinging blow.

When he came to understand how the false knight would have shamed him, his heart burned with wrath that Sir Mordred had escaped his hands. But the two ladies had many a jest upon him for the knightly stroke which the damsel had given him on the helm.

"Good faith," she said, "I knew not how else to bring back his strayed wits. I fancy I would have given him some shrewd work to do if I had chosen to stand against him. These men think that none but they can wear armor and wield swords. I took pity on your champion, Alice, or it might have gone hard with him," and she laughed so merrily that they could not but join her in her mirth.

After that nearly every day Alexander jousting with knights of honor and renown, but of them all not one was able to put him to the worse, and he held his ground to the twelvemonth's end, proving himself a knight of the noblest prowess.

When the year had reached its end and his pledge was fully kept, he departed from that place with Alice la Belle Pilgrim, who afterwards became his loving wife, and they lived together with great joy and happiness in her country of Benoye.

But though he let love set aside for the time his vow of revenge on King Mark, he did not forget the duty that lay before him, nor did that evil-minded king rest at ease under the knowledge that an avenger was in the land. Many a false scheme[Pg 115] he devised to keep Alexander from his court, and in the end his treacherous plots proved successful, for the young knight was murdered by some of King Mark's emissaries, with his father's death still unrevenged.

But vengeance sleeps not, and destiny had decided that the false-hearted king should yet die in retribution for the murder of Prince Baldwin. Alexander left a son, who was named Bellengerus le Beuse, and who grew up to become a valiant and renowned knight. He it was who avenged the slaughter of Prince Baldwin, and also of Sir Tristram, for this noble knight was also slain by the felonious king, as we must now tell.

Through the good services of King Arthur and Queen Guenever, after Tristram and Isolde had long dwelt at Joyous Gard, peace was made between them and King Mark, and they returned to Tintagil, where for a long time all went on in seeming friendship and harmony.

But the false king nursed the demon of jealousy deep within his breast, and bided his time for revenge. At length, on a day when Tristram, dreaming not of danger, sat harping before La Belle Isolde, the treacherous king rushed suddenly upon him with a naked sword in his hand and struck him dead at her feet.

Retribution for this vile deed came quickly, for Bellengerus was at Tintagil Castle at the time, brought there by thirst of vengeance, and with a heart filled with double fury by the news of this dastardly deed, he rushed upon King Mark as he stood in the midst of his knights and courtiers,[Pg 116] and struck him to the heart with his father's avenging blade.

Then, aided by Dinas, Fergus, and others of Tristram's friends, he turned upon Andred and the remainder of King Mark's satellites, and when the work of blood was done not one of these false-hearted knights remained alive, and the court of Cornwall was purged of the villany which had long reigned there supreme.

But La Belle Isolde loved Tristram with too deep a love to survive his death, and she fell swooning upon the cross above his tomb and there sobbed out her life; and she was buried by his side, that those who had been so united in life should not be parted in death.

Great was the grief and pity aroused throughout England, and through all lands where knighthood was held in honor, by this distressful event, for never before had two such faithful lovers breathed mortal air. And long thereafter lovers made pilgrimages to their tomb, where many prayed fervently for a draught from that magic goblet from which Tristram and Isolde drank, and whose wine of love forever after ran so warmly in their veins.

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BOOK IX.

THE QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENCHANTED CASTLE OF KING PELLAM.

After many years had come and gone, and all at the court of Arthur the king had grown older and wiser, there came to pass a series of adventures more marvellous than had ever been known upon the earth before, and of a nobler kind than mere tourneyings and

joustings, being no less than the quest of the holy vessel named the Sangreal, in which was kept a portion of the blood of our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And through this quest much disaster came upon the land, and the noble fellowship of the Round Table was broken up and destroyed, for many went in search of the holy vessel who had lived evil lives, and of these few came back, but most of them died deaths of violence.

This sacred talisman—the Sangreal—had been brought to England centuries before by Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of our Saviour, and had passed down from him to his descendant, King Pellam, of Listengeise, him whom Balin struck the dolorous stroke, and who was destined to lie in[Pg 118] misery and pain until he should be healed of his wound by the winner of the holy vessel.

But to tell how this perilous quest began we must go long years back and relate a story of strange adventures and marvellous deliverances.

For it had happened that during a feast of Whitsuntide Lancelot du Lake left Arthur's court at Camelot and rode afar in search of adventures. And after a long journey, in which many strange things came to pass, he arrived at Listengeise, the land of King Pellam. Here he rescued the king's fair daughter, Elaine, from a dismal enchantment, under which she had long lain through the wiles of Morgan le Fay and the queen of Northgalis, who hated her bitterly from her renown for beauty.

After the rescue of the lady, Lancelot fought with and killed a mighty serpent that haunted a tomb near by, and had done much harm in the land. Then there came to him a dignified and noble baron, who thanked him heartily in the name of the king, and invited him to a repast in the castle hall.

But as they sat at table a wonderful thing took place. For in at the open window of the hall there flew a dove, which bore in its mouth what seemed a little censer of gold. And from this censer came such a rich and penetrating perfume as if all the spicery of the world had been there, while upon the table suddenly appeared the most delicious of meats and drinks. Then came in a damsel, young and beautiful, who bore in her hands a vessel of gold, before which all who were there kneeled and prayed devoutly.



ON THE QUEST OF THE HOLY

GRAIL.

[Pg 119]"What may all this mean?" asked Lancelot in deep surprise.

"It has been granted you to see the most precious and wonderful thing in the world," answered the noble baron. "For you have been permitted to gaze upon the holy Sangreal. In the time to come all Arthur's knights shall take part in a quest for this precious talisman, and great shall be the woe therefrom, for through that quest the Round Table fellowship shall be broken up and many of its noble knights destroyed."

But all that passed in that land is too much for us to tell. We shall say only that the fair Elaine came to love Lancelot dearly, but he gave her no love in return, for all the affection of his heart was centred upon Queen Guenever. Yet King Pellam so desired that Lancelot should wed his fair daughter that in the end he used enchantment, and brought him to make her his wife when under a magic spell, the deluded knight fancying that it was Guenever whom he had wedded.

This delusion last not long, and when the deceived spouse came to his senses and learned how he had been dealt with, he broke away like a madman, and, gaining his horse, rode wildly through the land. And every knight-errant who dared to joust with him was made to suffer from the fury that burned in his blood.

Long afterwards, as chance and adventure brought about, there came to King Pellam's castle Sir Bors de Ganis, Lancelot's nephew. He was gladly received, and treated with all the good cheer and honor which the castle could afford. And as[Pg 120] he sat at his repast with the castle lords, there came in, as it had come to Lancelot, the dove with the censer, at which the air was filled with the richest perfume, and the table covered with the most delicious viands. Then entered the maiden with the holy grail, and all fell to their prayers.

"Truly," said Bors, "this is a strange place, and a land full of marvels."

"This I will say," answered the noble baron who sat in the king's chair, "that of the knights who come here few see the holy vessel, and fewer go away with any honor. Gawaine, the good knight, was here but lately; but he saw not what your eyes have beheld, and he left here in shame. None but those of a worshipful life and who love God devoutly can behold this marvel, or sleep in this castle without coming to harm."

"I am in quest of adventures," said Bors, "and shall lie in your castle this night, come what will. Men call me honest and virtuous, and I stand ready to dare all perils the castle may hold."

"I counsel you not," said the baron. "You will hardly escape without harm and shame."

"Let come what will come, I am ready."

"Then I advise you to confess, and go to your chamber with a clean soul, for you will be sorely tried."

"Let it be so. Your counsel is wise."

After Sir Bors had been confessed and received absolution, he was led into a fair large chamber, around which were many doors, while a bed of royal richness stood in the middle of the floor. Here he was left alone, and threw himself on the bed in[Pg 121] his armor, deeming it wise to be prepared for all that might come.

Not long had he lain there with open eyes and alert wits, when the room was all at once brilliantly lighted up, though whence the light came he could not tell. And suddenly a great and long spear, whose point burnt like a taper, shot across the chamber without hand to guide it, and struck him in the shoulder so fierce a blow that his armor was pierced, and he received a wound, a hand's-breadth in depth, which pained him bitterly.

Quickly afterwards an armed knight strode in, with shield on shoulder and sword in hand, who cried in a harsh voice,—

"Arise, sir knight, and fight with me."

"I shall not fail you," said Bors, hot with the pain of his wound. "I am sorely hurt, but I have vowed boldly to dare aught that might come to me. If that burning spear came from your hand you shall pay dearly for it."

With these words he sprang from the bed and attacked the intruder, and a hard and stern battle began, which lasted long. At the end the intruding knight was driven backward to a chamber door, through which he passed, leaving Bors master of the floor.

But hardly had he rested a minute when the defeated knight returned, as fresh as at the start, and attacked Bors with renewed strength. Again the battle went on fiercely. But when Bors saw his antagonist once more retreating towards the chamber door, he cried out,—

"Not so, my good fellow. You played that trick[Pg 122] on me once; you shall not again. Back and defend yourself. If you defeat me it shall be by strength, not by magic." And he stationed himself before the door, and drove back his opponent with such fury, that in a moment more he hurled him to the floor.

"Yield, or you die!" he cried, setting his foot on the fallen knight's head.

"I yield," came the answer.

"What is your name?"

"I am Sir Pedivere of the Straight Marches."

"Then, Sir Pedivere of the Straight Marches, take yourself away. And if you have any of your fellows behind yonder door, bid them to keep out of this room, for I came here to sleep, not to fight. At Whitsunday next, present yourself at King Arthur's court, and tell him that you have come thither as a prisoner of Sir Bors of the sharp sword."

This, Sir Pedivere swore to do, and left his conqueror to what rest he could get. But this was little, for enchantment surrounded the daring knight. The room suddenly became full of frightful noises and alive with peril. Whence they came he knew not, whether through doors or windows, but a flight of arrows and of crossbow bolts filled the air, whistling shrewdly past his ears, while many of them fell upon him and pierced his flesh through the open places in his armor.

"Who can sleep in such a den of witchcraft as this?" he cried, in a rage, springing from the bed. As he did so one of the doors opened, and a great lion leaped fiercely in, with a hideous roar.

[Pg 123]"It is better to fight a lion that one can see, than arrows which nobody shoots," cried Bors, and he rushed without hesitation on the dangerous animal.

Sharp was the fight that followed, but of short duration. The lion sprang wildly upon him, and tore the shield from his arm, while the sharp claws rent his flesh. But the knight retorted with a sweeping stroke that cut off the frightful beast's head, and stretched its tawny body lifeless on the floor.

Then Bors walked to the window to see whither the arrows had come, and as he looked into the castle court he beheld a wondrous sight. For before his eyes stood a dragon, huge and horrible of aspect, in whose forehead were letters of gold which seemed to him to form King Arthur's emblem. And as he gazed there leaped into the court an old and mighty leopard, which sprang upon the dragon and engaged in desperate battle with the huge monster.

At last the dragon spit out of its mouth a hundred of what seemed small dragons, and these quickly leaped upon the frightful beast and rent it to fragments. Then all the animals disappeared, and an old man came into the court, around whose neck two adders wreathed their folds. In his hand was a harp, upon which he played, while he sang an old song telling how Joseph of Arimathea came to that land. When his song was ended he said to Sir Bors,—

"Go from this land, sir knight, for you shall have no more adventures here. You have played[Pg 124] your part well and nobly, and shall do still better hereafter, for wondrous things are reserved for you."

Then Bors saw a dove of whitest plumage fly across the court with a golden censer in its mouth, from which seemed to stream the most delicious perfumes. And the tempest which had raged in the sky suddenly ceased, while from the rent clouds the full moon poured down its white light to the earth.

Next there came into the court four children who bore four tapers, and an old man in their midst with a censer in one hand a spear in the other, and that spear was called the spear of vengeance.

"Go to your cousin, Sir Lancelot," said the old man, "and tell him what you have seen, and that if he had been as clean of sin as he should be, the adventure which all this signifies would have been his. Tell him, moreover, that though in worldly adventures he passes all others in manhood and prowess, there are many his betters in spiritual worth, and that what you have seen and done this night he was not deemed worthy of."

Then Bors saw four meanly-dressed gentlewomen pass through his chamber, and enter an apartment beyond which was lit up with a light like that of midsummer. Here they knelt before an altar of silver with four pillars, where also kneeled a man in the dress of a bishop. And as the knight looked upward he beheld a naked sword hovering over his

head, whose blade shone like silver, yielding a flashing light that blinded him as he gazed. As he stood thus sightless, he heard a voice which said,—

"Go hence, Sir Bors, for as yet thou art not worthy to be in this place."

Then the door of that chamber closed, and he went backward to his bed, where he lay and slept undisturbed till morning dawned. But when the regent of King Pellam learned what had happened to his guest in the night, and how he had escaped the perils of the enchanted chamber, he greeted him joyfully, and said,—

"You are the first that ever endured so well that chamber's mysteries. And more has been shown to your eyes than any others have seen. Go home, worthy knight. You are chosen for great deeds in the time to come."

Sir Bors thereupon took his horse and rode away, thinking long and deeply on all that had happened to him.

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CHAPTER II.

THE MARVEL OF THE FLOATING SWORD.

Many and strange were the events that followed those we have just related, and great trouble and woe came therefrom. For when Sir Bors returned to Camelot and told the story of the wedding of Lancelot and Elaine, much was the secret talk and great the scandal. And when the news came to Guenever's ears she flamed with wrath.

Not long afterwards, Lancelot returned, still half frenzied with the deception that had been practised[Pg 126] upon him. When Guenever saw him she accused him bitterly of being a traitor to love, and harshly bade him leave the court, and never come again within her sight.

This bitter reviling turned Lancelot's frenzy to a sudden madness. With distracted brain he leaped from a window into a garden, and ran like a wild man through wood and brake, heedless that his clothes were torn and his flesh rent with thorns and briers. Thus hotly burns despised love in the human heart and brain, and thus it may turn the strongest senses away and bring madness to the clearest mind.

On learning what had passed, Bors and Hector went to the queen, and accused her harshly of the great wrong she had done to the noble Lancelot. But she was already torn

with remorse, and she knelt before these noble knights, begging their forgiveness, and praying them pitifully to seek Lancelot and bring him back to the court.

Months passed and Lancelot returned not, nor could he be found, though he was sought through many lands. For he kept afar from cities and courts, and roamed through wilds and wastes, where he had many adventures in his madness, and did strange and wild things.

For two years he wandered hither and thither in frenzy, until at length he came to King Pellam's city of Corbin, and to the castle where dwelt the fair Elaine. Here he was given shelter in a little outhouse, with straw to sleep on, while every day they threw him meat and set him drink, for none would venture near a madman of such savage aspect.

[Pg 127]But one day as he slept, Elaine chanced to behold him, and knew him at once for Lancelot. Telling a trusty baron of her discovery, she had the distracted knight borne still sleeping into a tower chamber in which was kept the holy vessel, the Sangreal, concealed from all eyes save those of persons of saintly life. Lancelot was laid near this, and when all had left the chamber a man of sanctity entered and uncovered the vessel. Such was its holy influence that it wrought marvellously upon the distracted knight as he lay there asleep and the madness passed away from his brain. When he woke he was himself again, as whole a man in mind and body as any that stood upon the earth. For so healing was the virtue of that precious vessel that it not only drove the cloud of madness from his mind, but gave him back all his old might and comeliness of body.

Then, ashamed of his frenzy, and anxious not to be known, Lancelot assumed the name of the Chevalier Mal Fet, or the knight who has trespassed, and took up his abode with Elaine and many knights and ladies at a castle given him by King Pellam. This stood on an island in the midst of a deep and clear lake, which Lancelot named the Joyous Isle. And now, filled again with martial fervor, he made it known far and wide that he would joust with any knights that came that way, and that any one who should put him to the worst would receive as a prize a jewel of worth and a jerrfalcon.

But none won the prize, though very many noble knights jousted with the Chevalier Mal Fet.

[Pg 128]Last of all came Percivale and Hector, who had been long in search of Lancelot. Learning the challenge, Percivale jousted with Lancelot, and afterwards they fought with swords. So long and even was their combat, that a length both paused for breath. And now Percivale, wondering who this sturdy knight could be, told his name, and asked for his in return. At this, Lancelot threw away his weapon, and took his late opponent in his arms, crying out that he was Lancelot du Lake.

Glad was the meeting between these old friends and comrades, and richly were the newcomers entertained in the castle. But in the end they persuaded Lancelot to go with them

to Camelot, and the disconsolate Elaine was left to return, with her knights and ladies, to her father's castle.

After these events years came and went, until many summers and winters had passed over England's fair isle, and age had begun to lay its hand on those who had been young, while those who had been children grew up and became knights and ladies. Then came at length the time fixed by destiny for the adventure of the Sangreal. And thus this adventure began.

When again approached the vigil of Pentecost, and all the fellowship of the Round Table had come to Camelot, and the tables were set to dine, there rode into the great hall a gentlewoman of noble aspect, whose horse was white with sweat and foam.

She saluted Lancelot and begged him to go with her, though whither and for what purpose she would not say. Stirred by his love of adventure, he armed[Pg 129] and rode with her, and before the day's end reached an abbey of nuns in a secluded valley. Here, as he stood conversing with the abbess, there came in to him twelve nuns, bringing with them a youth who had not yet reached manhood, but was large and powerful of frame, and as handsome of face as any man he had ever seen.

"Sir," said the ladies, with weeping eyes, "we bring you this child, whom we have long nourished, and pray you to make him a knight; for there is no worthier man from whom he can receive the order of knighthood, and we hold him worthy of your sword."

Lancelot looked long at the young squire, and saw that he was seemly, and demure as a dove, and of wonderful beauty of form and features, and his heart went out with great love for the beautiful youth.

"What is his name?" asked Lancelot.

"We call him Galahad."

"Comes this desire from himself?"

"It does," said they all.

"From whom has he sprung?"

"His mother is dead. His father is a full noble knight, as you shall soon learn."

"Then he shall be knighted by my hand to-morrow at the morning services, for truly he seems worthy of it."

That night, Lancelot's cousins, Bors and Lionel, stopped at the abbey, and spent there a cheery evening with their noble kinsman. At early morn of the next day he gave the accolade to the youth, pronouncing him knight, and bidding Bors and[Pg 130] Lionel to stand as his godfathers in the order of knighthood.

"And may God make you a good man and a noble knight," he said. "Beauty you have now, equal to any I have ever seen, and strength and courage I doubt not; if you bear with these a noble heart and an earnest mind you have the best treasures that God can confer or man possess."

Then, when they had broken their fast, Lancelot said to the demure and modest young knight,—

"Fair sir, will you come with me to the court of King Arthur?"

"I humbly beg your pardon," said Galahad, "but I cannot come at this time. Trust me to follow soon."

Then Lancelot and his cousins left the abbey and rode to Camelot, where they arrived before the hour of the feast. In the great hall were many noble knights, some of them strangers, who walked about the Round Table, reading the names in letters of gold in the several seats, and saying,—

"Here sits Gawaine, here Lancelot, here Percivale," and so with the others.

At length they came to the seat perilous, in which no man but Percivale had hitherto dared to sit, and which he no longer occupied. To their deep surprise they found there newly written in letters of gold these words,—

"Four hundred and fifty-four winters after the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the knight shall come for whom this seat is held by destiny."

"What marvellous thing is this?" cried all who saw it. "Here is a miracle."

[Pg 131]"In the name of God, what means it?" cried Lancelot. "Percivale long since had warning to leave that seat. Who shall fill it to-day, for this is the feast of Pentecost of the four hundred and fifty-fourth year. The year and day have come, but where and who is the man? I advise that these letters be hidden, till he come for whom this seat is pre-ordained."

Then it was ordered that the writing should be covered with a cloth of silk; and the king bade his guests to hasten to dinner, and forget for the time being what they had seen.

"Sir," said Kay, the steward, "if you go to table now you will break your old custom, not to sit at dinner on this day till you have seen or heard of some adventure."

"Very true," said the king. "I had forgotten my custom through this strange event."

As they stood thus speaking, there came hastily into the court a squire, whose eyes were big with wonder.

"Sire, I bring you marvellous tidings," he cried to the king.

"What are they?" demanded Arthur.

"As I stood but now by the river, I saw floating on its waters a great square stone, and above this stood the hilt of a sword, whose blade was thrust deeply into the stone."

"A stone that floats!" said the king. "That is strange, indeed. I must see this marvel."

Then he, followed by all the knights, went to the river, and saw there that the squire had spoken[Pg 132] truly; for a great stone that seemed of red marble floated like wood on the water, and thrust deeply into it was a rich sword, in whose pommel were many jewels of price. As they looked in wonder the stone whirled inward on an eddy and came aground at their feet. And now they saw that the precious stones were set in letters of gold, which none there could read. But there was a man at the court learned in strange tongues, and he being sent for, read these with ease, and thus interpreted them,—

"Never shall the hand of man draw me from this stone until he comes by whose side I am to hang; and he shall be the best knight in the world."

"Lay your hand on this sword and draw it," said the king to Lancelot. "To you it surely belongs; for you are the best knight in the world."

"Best of hand, mayhap, but not of heart and life," said Lancelot, soberly. "Certes, sir, that sword is not for me, nor have I the hardiness to set hand thereto. I had a vision in my last night's sleep, and this it told me: that he who seeks to draw that sword, and fails therein, shall in time receive from it a wound which shall be very long in healing. And this more I learned, that this same day, and with the drawing of that sword, shall begin the marvellous quest of the holy vessel, the Sangreal. For fate has destined that this precious amulet shall be sought throughout the world; and to him who finds it the greatest of earth's honors shall come."

The king and all the knights heard these words with wonder, for Lancelot spoke like one inspired. Then Arthur turned to Gawaine.

[Pg 133]"Fair nephew," he said, "try you this task for my love."

"Saving your good grace," said Gawaine, "that I shall not do."

"Then, sir, seek to draw the sword at my command."

"Your command I must obey," said Gawaine, "yet I dread to meddle with magic."

Then he took the sword by the handle, and pulled with all his might, but he could not stir it.

"I thank you," said the king, "for the trial, even if you have failed."

"My lord Gawaine," said Lancelot, "bear well in mind, this sword shall touch you so sore that you would give the best castle in this kingdom not to have set your hand thereto."

"It may be," answered Gawaine. "Yet I could not disobey the command of the king."

Then the king turned to Percivale, and asked him for his love to try the task.

"Gladly will I," he said, "if only to bear Gawaine fellowship."

But pull as strongly as he would, the sword yielded not to his hand. And there were more there so hardy as to disregard Lancelot's warning and seek to draw the sword, but to no hand would it yield.

"Try no more," said Kay to the king. "You have seen your marvel, and now may, with a good appetite, go to your dinner."

This advice seemed timely to the king, and all went to the court, where the knights took their seats at the Round Table, and were served by young[Pg 134] men lately made knights. When they had been fully served, every seat being filled save the seat perilous, another marvellous thing happened. For suddenly all the doors and windows of the hall shut of themselves. Yet the room was not greatly darkened, and men looked into one another's faces with abashed and frightened visages.

"Fair fellows and lords," said the king, "this is a day of strange events. And I doubt if we shall not see greater before night comes, for it seems a day set aside by the fates."

As he spoke, there came into the hall an ancient man, clothed all in white, but no knight knew through which door he had entered. By the hand he led a young knight, clad in red armor, but without sword or shield, an empty scabbard hanging by his side.

"Peace be with you, fair lords," said the old man. Then he turned to King Arthur, and said,—

"Sir, I bring with me a young knight who is of kingly lineage, and of the kindred of Joseph of Arimathea. By his hand many strange marvels are destined to be accomplished."

The king heard these words with close attention, and answered graciously,—

"Sir, you are right welcome here, and the young knight you bring."

Then the old man removed the youth's armor, and put upon him a coat of red sendal and a mantle that was furred with ermine. And Lancelot saw that the young man was he whom he had knighted that morning at the abbey.



JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.

But the chief wonder of the day was now to[Pg 135] appear. For the old man said to his young companion,—

"Sir, follow me." He led him around the table till they came to the seat perilous, beside which sat Lancelot. Here the old man lifted up the silken cloth, and lo! the letters which had been covered were gone, and new letters of gold were visible, which read,—

"This is the seat of Galahad, the high prince."

"Sir," said the old man, "this seat is yours. Long has it waited your coming."

And he seated him therein, while all the circle of knights looked on in wonder. Now for the first time the young knight spoke.

"Dear sir," he said, "you may now depart, for you have done well what you were commanded to do. Recommend me to my grandsire, King Pellam, and say to him that I will come and see him as soon as I may."

With this the old man departed. Outside there waited twenty noble squires, who mounted when he came, and rode away with him. The Knights of the Round Table marvelled greatly at all this, and the more so on seeing that he who occupied that chair of peril was one so tender of age, and a youth whom no one knew, nor whence he came; but to one another they privately said,—

"This is he by whom the Sangreal shall be achieved; for none ever sat there before but Percivale, and he was not long deemed worthy to occupy that seat."

The talk of this strange event quickly passed through the palace, and came to the queen, who[Pg 136] heard it with wonder. Those who brought word said that the youth resembled Sir Lancelot.

"I must see this strange thing," she said, and, followed by her ladies, she entered the hall.

"It is Sir Lancelot in youth again," she cried, on looking the young knight in the face. "Fair sir, tell me truly, what father had you, and what mother."

"King Pellam is my grandsire," answered Galahad, "and Elaine was my mother. As for my father, I know him not."

"Then do I," cried the queen, "for he sits beside you. Sir Lancelot is your father. You are son unto the noblest knight that ever wore sword."

At these words Lancelot rose up in haste, for he had not dreamed of what was to come; and he clasped the youth in his arms and kissed his fair young face with a love that overflowed his heart.

"My son!" he said. "Can it be? Greatly, indeed, have I felt drawn unto you."

"And my heart went out to you, dear father," said Galahad, "from the moment I looked upon your noble face."

The sight of this affecting meeting filled all hearts there with joy, and the king warmly congratulated Lancelot on having found so worthy a son; "for to him, I dare avow," he said, "is destined that great achievement of the Sangreal of which you have this day told us."

Then Arthur took Galahad by the hand, and said,—

"Come with me, young sir," and led him from the palace to the river to show him the marvel[Pg 137] of the stone. After them followed the knights, and the queen and ladies of the court, all full of hope of greater wonders yet to come.

"Sir," said the king, "that sword floated hither this day. Many knights of great prowess have tried to draw it and failed."

"That is no marvel," said Galahad. "The sword is not theirs, but mine. And since I knew it awaited me I have brought no sword; but its scabbard, as you may see, hangs by my side."

Then he laid his hand upon the sword, and, while all eyes opened wide with wonder, drew it from the stone as easily as if it came from the water only, and thrust it into the scabbard, saying to the king,—

"It fits there better than in a floating stone."

"God has sent it you," said the king. "And I doubt not he will send you a shield in as marvellous a manner."

"This is the sword that at one time belonged to Balin le Savage," said Galahad, "and with which he killed his brother Balan, in that terrible joust which happened many years ago. The scabbard I wear was Balin's scabbard, and it was Merlin who put the sword into that stone, saying that no hand should draw it but that of Lancelot, or his son Galahad. Nor can any man have forgotten the dolorous stroke which Balin dealt my grandfather King Pellam, of which he is not yet healed, nor shall be till I heal him. So has Merlin prophesied."

As they talked thus a lady on a white palfrey was seen riding down the river side to where they[Pg 138] stood. Reaching the group, she saluted the king and queen, and asked if Sir Lancelot were there.

"I am here, fair lady," he answered.

"Sad is it," she said, while tears flowed from her eyes, "that all your great renown is changed since this day's dawn."

"Damsel, why say you this?"

"Until to-day you were the best knight in the world," she answered. "But he who should say this now would speak falsely, for there has come a better than you. And this is proved by the adventure of the sword to which you dared not set your hand. Remember well what I have said."

"As touches that," rejoined Lancelot, "I never had the pride of being the best knight in the world, nor do I envy my son if any worship has passed from me to him."

"Yet you were the greatest; and still are among sinful men," she persisted. "And, sir king," she said to Arthur, "this more I am bid to say, from the holy lips of Nancien the hermit, that to you shall fall to-day the greatest of honors; for this day the Sangreal shall appear in your palace, and feed you and all your fellowship of the Round Table!"

With these words she turned her palfrey and rode away as she had come, leaving all who had heard her lost in wonder and admiration.

When they had a little got over their wonder at what they had seen, the king gave orders that the stone should be taken from the water, saying that he would have it set up as a monument of those strange events.

[Pg 139]"And as it may be long before you all come together here again, I should like to have you joust in the meadow of Camelot, by way of honor to this day."

Thus he spoke; but his real purpose was to see Galahad proved, for he feared that if he once left the court it might be long before he should see him again. Then the knights put on their armor and rode to the meadow in a gallant cavalcade. Galahad also, at the earnest request of the king, put on armor, but he would take no shield, though the king and Lancelot prayed him to do so. The most he would consent to do was to take a spear.

But noble work he did that day, meeting all men who cared to break spears with him, so that by the end of the joust he had thrown down many good Knights of the Round Table. Only two of them, Lancelot and Percivale, were able to keep their seats against the vigorous onset of the strong young knight.

When the jousting was at an end, the king and knights went back to Camelot, where they attended even-song at the great minster. Thence they proceeded to the palace hall, where all took their seats at the table for supper.

But as they sat eating, there came outside a terrible crash of thunder, and a wind arose that seemed as if it would rend the great hall from its foundations. In the midst of this blast the hall was lighted by a sudden gleam seven times brighter than the midday light, in whose glare the knights sat dumb, none daring to speak. But each looked at the others, and it seemed to each that his fellows[Pg 140] were fairer of visage than he had ever seen them before.

Then the storm and the glare passed away as suddenly as they had come, and there entered the hall the holy grail. None there saw it, for it was covered with white samite, but the hall was filled with the rarest odors, and each knight saw on the table before him the meats and drinks that he loved best in the world.

When the holy vessel had passed through the hall, it suddenly vanished, none knew how. And not till then dared any man speak.

"Certes," said the king, "we ought to thank God devoutly for what he has shown us this day."

"We have enjoyed the richest of perfumes, and have before us the rarest of food," said Gawaine; "and we have but one thing to regret, that the sacred vessel was so precious

covered that no eye might behold it. But this miracle has filled my soul with the warmest desire to see this holy thing, and I therefore vow that to-morrow, without delay, I shall set out in quest of the Sangreal, and shall not return hither till I have seen it more openly, if it take me a twelvemonth or more. If I fail in the end, I shall return as one who is not worthy to behold the holy vessel."

On hearing these words the other knights arose as one man, and repeated the vow which Gawaine had made.

Upon this, King Arthur sprang to his feet in deep displeasure, for there came to his mind like a vision a host of evil consequences from this inconsiderate vow.

"You are over-hasty, Gawaine," he said, sharply, "and have done me a lifelong evil with your vow. For you have bereft me of the fairest fellowship that ever came together in this world. When my knights depart hence on that difficult search, well I know that they will never all meet again in this world, for many shall die in the quest. Therefore it distresses me deeply, for I have loved them as I loved my life, and I would rather have my soul depart from my body than to lose their noble fellowship. Long have we dwelt together in sorrow and in joy, but I fear our happy days are at an end, and that trouble and suffering await us in the time to come. What God wills must be, but my heart is sore at the thought of it."

And men who looked upon the king could see tears of distress and grief flowing from his eyes.

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CHAPTER III.

HOW GALAHAD GOT HIS SHIELD.

When morning came the knights made ready for their departure, amid the tears and lamentations of ladies, and with the deep sorrow of the king and queen. For there were a hundred and fifty of them in all, comprising the whole fellowship of the Table Round, and King Arthur had deep reason for his [Pg 142] fear that he would never gather all these gallant knights round his festal board again. And so they mounted and rode through the streets of Camelot, where was weeping of rich and poor, and the king turned away and could not speak for grief, while Queen Guenever hid herself in her chamber, to be alone with her bitter sorrow at the going of Lancelot.

Onward they rode in company until they came to a castle and town that were named Vagon. There they stopped and were well entertained by the lord of the castle, who was a man of great hospitality. But when morning came it was decided between them that they should separate, each taking his own course, so that the Sangreal might be sought in all quarters. This they did with much sorrow and many fervent farewells, each knight taking the way that he liked the best, and riding alone and afar on his perilous quest.

First must we follow the young knight Galahad, who still rode without a shield, and who passed onward for four days without an adventure. Near eventide of the fourth day he came to a white abbey, where he was received with great respect, and led to a chamber that he might lay off his armor. And here, to his surprise, he met with two of the goodly company from which he had lately parted, Sir Uwayne and King Bagdemagus.

"Sirs," said Galahad, "what adventure brought you hither?"

"We are told," they replied, "that within this place is a shield of perilous significance. For he who bears it about his neck runs deep risk of being[Pg 143] slain within three days, or maimed forever. Yet," said Bagdemagus, "I shall bear it to-morrow and try my fortune."

"In the name of God, try it," said Galahad. "Yet truly you take a great risk."

"If I fail therein, you shall take the adventure. I am sure you will not fail."

"I agree to that," said Galahad. "I have ridden far enough without a shield."

Then they went to supper, and afterwards to sleep. When morning came Bagdemagus asked of the abbot where the magic shield was, and a monk led him behind an altar where hung a shield as white as snow, but with a red cross in its centre.

"I hope you are well advised of what you do," said the monk. "No knight, unless he be the worthiest in the world, can safely bear this shield."

"I know well that I am not the best of knights," said Bagdemagus; "and yet I shall wear it and dare the danger."

Then he took it out of the monastery, and said to Galahad,—

"If it please you, await me here till you learn how I shall speed."

"I shall await tidings," said Galahad.

Bagdemagus now rode forward with a squire, that he might send back tidings of his good or ill fortune, and passed onward for two miles, when he found himself in a valley before a hermitage. Here he saw a stalwart knight in white armor, horse and all, who, in seeing the red-cross shield, rode upon him at the full speed of his charger.

Bagdemagus put his spear in rest and rode to meet[Pg 144] him, but his spear broke on the white knight, while he was wounded in the right shoulder and borne from his horse, the treacherous shield refusing to cover him. Then the victor knight alighted and took the white shield from him, saying,—

"Sir knight, you have acted with more folly than wisdom, for you should have known that only he who has no peer living can safely bear this shield."

Then he went to the squire who had come with King Bagdemagus, and said,—

"Bear this shield to the good knight Sir Galahad, whom you left in the abbey, and greet him from me."

"What shall I tell him is your name?"

"Take no heed of my name. That is not for you to know, nor for any earthly man. Content yourself with telling Sir Galahad that this shield is for him, and for no other man to wear. And may God aid him to bear it worthily and worshipfully."

But the squire went first to Bagdemagus and asked him if he were seriously wounded.

"Forsooth, I am," he said. "I shall scarce escape from death."

The squire then conveyed him in great pain to the hermitage, and left him in care of the hermit. And as the chronicle tells, he lay there long, and barely escaped with life.



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OATH OF KNIGHTHOOD.

"Sir Galahad," said the squire, when he had returned to the abbey, "King Bagdemagus has paid dearly for his venture. He lies at a hermitage sorely wounded. As for you, the knight that overthrew him sends you greeting, and bids you to bear[Pg 145] this shield, through which marvellous adventures shall come to you."

"Then blessed be God and fortune," said Galahad.

He now resumed his arms and mounted his horse, hanging the white shield about his neck and commending himself to God. Uwayne offered to bear him company, but this was not to be.

"Sir knight," said Galahad, "I thank you for your offer, but I must go alone, save that this squire shall bear me fellowship."

With these words the youthful knight rode away, and soon came to where the white knight abode by the hermitage. They saluted each other courteously, and fell into a conversation in which the white knight told Galahad the story of the magical shield.

"In the far past time," he said, "soon after Joseph of Arimathea took down the body of our Lord from the holy cross, and bore it from Jerusalem to a city named Sarras, there was a king of Sarras named Evelake, who was then at war with the Saracens. This king, through the teachings of Joseph, was converted from the old law to the new, and for him this shield was made, in the name of Him who died on the cross. Afterwards, when Evelake was in battle, the shield was covered with a cloth, which was only removed in times of deadly peril, and then his enemies saw the figure of a man on the cross, before which they fell back discomfited. At times the cross of the shield would vanish away, and at times stand out clear and bright; and such was its virtue that a soldier whose hand was stricken[Pg 146] off was made whole again by touching the cross. The time came at length when Joseph left Palestine and journeyed westward, and King Evelake with him, till they came to Great Britain, where all the people had been pagans, but were then converted to the Christian faith. Soon afterwards Joseph sickened and came near to death, and while he lay in his bed he bade Evelake bring him the shield, and on it he traced a red cross with his own blood. Then he said to Evelake, 'No man hereafter shall bear this shield but he shall repent it, until Galahad, the last of my lineage, shall come to seek it, and with it he shall do marvellous deeds.' 'Where shall the shield await his coming?' asked Evelake. 'You shall leave it in the abbey where Nancien the hermit shall lie after his death, and thither the knight Galahad shall come for it soon after he receives the order of knighthood.' This is the story of the shield, and this day has the prediction been fulfilled. Wear the shield worthily and well, young knight, for much glory and renown shall come to you through it. You are in God's hands; to God commend yourself."

With these words the white knight vanished away, and in the place where he had stood was seen but empty air.

Then the squire, who had heard these words, alighted and kneeled at Galahad's feet, praying that he would make him a knight.

"That I shall consider," said Galahad. "But now let us return to the abbey."

Here Galahad drove away a fiend that had long dwelt in a tomb near by, where it made such noise[Pg 147] that none could venture near it. But the virtue of the shield protected him from all harm from this evil shape, which was forced to depart.

When morning came, he asked the young squire his name.

"Sir," he answered, "men call me Melias de Lile, and I am the son of the king of Denmark."

"Then, fair sir, since you come of kings and queens, I shall make you a knight; and look you that knighthood sit well on you, for you should be a mirror of chivalry."

"That shall I seek to be," said Melias.

Then Galahad gave him the accolade as he kneeled before him, and bade him rise a knight.

"Now, dear sir," said Melias, "since you have done me this high honor, it is but right that you grant me my first request, so that it be in reason."

"You speak justly," said Galahad.

"I beg, then, that you let me ride with you in the quest of the Sangreal till some adventure shall part us."

"That I grant willingly."

Armor was now brought to Melias, and when it had been girded upon him he and Galahad rode away, and passed onward all that week without an adventure. But on the Monday next, as they set out from an abbey, they came to where a cross marked a parting of the road. On the cross was written,—

"Ye knights-errant, that ride in quest of adventures, here lie two ways. He that takes the right-hand road shall not leave it again, if he be a good man and a worthy knight. He that takes the left-hand[Pg 148] shall not lightly win fortune, for his strength and endurance will be soon tried."

"If you will suffer me to take the left-hand road I should like it greatly," said Melias. "My strength and skill need trial."

"It were better not. I fancy that I only should face the danger that there confronts us."

"Nay, my lord, I pray you let me have this adventure."

"Take it, then, in God's name," said Galahad; "and do your duty worthily."

So Melias rode forward and soon found himself in a forest, through which he passed for two days, seeing there neither man, woman, nor child. Then he came from the forest into a broad meadow, where stood a lodge built of green boughs. And in that lodge was a chair, on which lay a crown of gold wrought with rich and subtle skill. Also there were cloths spread upon the earth, upon which delicious meats were laid.

Melias beheld all this and thought it marvellous. He felt no hunger, but the crown of gold roused his covetousness, and he took it up and rode away with it. But not far had he ridden when a knight came after him, who said,—

"Sir knight, why have you taken that crown? It is not yours; therefore defend yourself."

Then Melias blessed himself, and said,—

"Fair Lord of Heaven, help and save thy new made knight."

Then they rode together at full speed, but Melias's prayer availed him naught, for the spear-head of the other went through his hauberk, and[Pg 149] wounded him so deeply in the left side that he fell to the earth like a dead man. Then the victor knight took the crown and rode away.

But with wise forethought Galahad had followed Melias, and now rode into the valley, where he found him in peril of death.

"Ah, Melias!" he cried, "better for you had you taken the other way. Who has done you this harm?"

"For God's love, let me not die in this place!" said Melias in reply. "Bear me to some abbey near by, where I may be confessed and have the rites of the church."

"It shall be done," said Galahad. "But where is he who has wounded you?"

The reply came from the edge of the forest, where Galahad heard a voice cry in stirring tones,—

"Knight, defend yourself from me."

"Beware, sir," warned Melias. "He it is that has left me thus."

"Sir knight," said Galahad, "come on at your peril."

Then they rode together as fast as their horses could run, and Galahad drove his spear through the shoulder of his opponent, hurling him from his horse. But in his fall the spear broke. Then, before the young knight could turn, another knight rode from under the leaves and broke his spear upon him.

At this treacherous act Galahad drew his sword in wrath, and with a keen blow smote off the left arm of his antagonist, whom he pursued into the forest.

[Pg 150]He soon returned, however, and took up Melias gently, for the truncheon of the spear was in his body, and bore him on his horse in his arms to an abbey near at hand. Here the wounded knight was unarmed and laid upon a bed, where the rites of the church were administered to him.

"Sir Galahad," he then said, "let death come when it will, I am at peace with God." And he drew the truncheon of the spear from his body, and swooned away.

But an old monk who stood there, and who was a skilful leech, examined the wound, and said, "He need not die. By the grace of God I hope to heal him of this wound within seven weeks."

This gladdened Galahad, and he remained at the abbey three days to see how Melias should fare. Then he asked him how it stood with him.

"I feel now as if I may live," he answered.

"God be thanked for that," said Galahad. "Now must I depart, for I have much to do, and the quest of the Sangreal will not permit long leisure and delay."

"Sir," said the monk, "it is for his sin this knight is so bitterly wounded. He took on him the high order of knighthood without clean confession, which was a sinful thing to do. As for the two ways to which you came, the way on the right betokens the highway of righteousness, and the way on the left, which he chose, betokens that of sinners and infidels. And when the devil saw his presumption in taking the quest of the Sangreal without being worthy of it, he caused his overthrow. And when he took the crown of gold he[Pg 151] sinned in covetousness and theft. As for you, Sir Galahad, the two knights with whom you fought signify the two deadly sins which abide in Sir Melias. But they could not withstand you, for you are without deadly sin."

"God send I may keep so," said Galahad. "Now must I depart. I pray you do your utmost for this knight."

"My Lord Galahad," said Melias, "I shall get well, and shall seek you as soon as I can ride."

"God grant you speedy health," said Galahad, and he left the room and sought his horse, and rode away alone.

After he had ridden for days in various directions, it chanced that he departed from a place called Abblasoure, where he had heard no mass, as was his daily custom. But ere the day was old, he came to a mountain, on which he found a ruined chapel, and here he kneeled before the altar, and besought God's counsel. And as he prayed he heard a

voice that said, "Go now, thou adventurous knight, to the Castle of Maidens, and do away with the wicked customs which there are kept."

When Galahad heard this he took his horse and rode away, full of gladness that he might thus serve God. And not long nor far had he ridden before he saw in a valley before him a strong castle, with high towers and battlements and deep ditches; and beside it ran a broad river, named the Severn.

Here he met an aged man, whom he saluted, and asked the castle's name.

"It is the Castle of Maidens," said the old man.

"Then it is a cursed castle, and an abode of[Pg 152] sin," said Galahad. "All pity is wanting within those walls, and evil and hardness of heart there have their abode."

"Then, sir knight, you would do well to turn and leave it."

"That shall I not," said Galahad. "I have come here to punish the evil-doers that there abide."

Leaving the old man, he rode forward, and soon met with seven fair maidens, who said to him,—

"Sir knight, you ride in folly, for you have the water to pass."

"And why should I not pass the water?" asked Galahad.

He continued his ride, and next met a squire, who said,—

"Sir knight, I bring you defiance from the knights in the castle, who forbid you to go farther till they learn your purpose."

"You may tell it to them, if you will. I come to destroy the wicked customs of this castle."

"Sir, if you abide by that, you will have enough to do."

"Go now and bear them my answer."

Then the squire returned to the castle, from which there soon after rode seven knights, in full armor. When they saw Galahad they cried,—

"Knight, be on your guard, for you have come to your death."

"What!" asked Galahad, "will you all assail me at once?"

"That shall we; so defend yourself."

Then Galahad rode against them and smote the foremost such a blow that he nearly broke his neck.[Pg 153] The others rode on him together, each striking his shield with might. But their spears broke and he still held his seat.

He now drew his sword, and set upon them with such energy that, many as they were, he put them all to flight, chasing them until they entered the castle, and following them within its walls till they fled from the castle by another gate.

Galahad was now met by an old man, clad in religious costume, who said to him,—

"Sir, here are the keys of the castle."

Then the victor ordered that all the gates should be thrown open, and in the streets of the neighboring town were crowds of people, crying gladly,—

"Sir knight, you are heartily welcome. Long have we waited for the deliverance which you bring us."

And a gentlewoman came, who said to him,—

"These knights are fled, but they will come again. Therefore, sir, I counsel you to send for all the knights that hold their lands of this castle, and make them swear to restore the old customs, and do away with the evil practices which these villanous knights have fostered."

"That is good counsel," said Galahad.

Then she brought him a horn of ivory, richly adorned with gold, and said,—

"Blow this horn loudly. It will be heard two miles and more from the castle, and all that hear it will come."



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SIR GALAHAD FIGHTING THE SEVEN SINS.

Galahad took the horn, and blew so loud a blast that the very trees shook therewith. Then he seated himself and waited to see what would come[Pg 154] from the summons. As he sat there a priest came to him and said,—

"Sir knight, for seven years these brethren have held the castle, whose lord, Duke Lianor, they killed, and held his daughter prisoner; and by force they have kept all the knights of the castle under their power, and have acted as tyrants, robbing the common people of all they had, and taking tribute and demanding service from all the country round. Seven years ago the duke's daughter said to them, 'You shall not hold this castle for many years, for by one knight you shall be overcome.' 'Say you so,' they replied. 'Then shall never knight or lady pass this castle, but all that come shall stay or lose their heads, till comes that knight of whom you prophesy.' Therefore this is called the Maidens' Castle, since its tyrants have so long made war upon maidens."

"Is the duke's daughter still here?"

"No; she died three days after the castle was taken. But her younger sister and many other ladies are held prisoners."

Soon afterwards the knights of the country began to flock in, in response to the bugle-call, and glad were they to find what had occurred. Galahad made them do homage and fealty to the duke's daughter, which they did with great willingness of heart.

And when the next day dawned great news was brought in, for a messenger came to Galahad and told him that the seven felon brothers had been met by Gawaine, Gareth, and Uwaine, and all slain.

"So ends their rule and power," said Galahad, fervently. "It is well done, and well are all here delivered."

Then he commended them to God, and took his armor and horse, and rode away amid the prayers of those he had delivered.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPTATION OF SIR PERCIVALE.

Many adventures had the other knights that set out in search of the Sangreal, and much reproof did many of them receive for the evil lives they had led; but all this we cannot stop to tell, but must confine ourselves to the deeds of a few only. As for Sir Gawaine, he parted from Gareth and Uwaine after they had slain the seven wicked knights of the Castle of Maidens, and rode from Whitsuntide to Michaelmas without an adventure. Then came a day in which he met Sir Hector de Maris, and glad were both at the meeting.

"Truly," said Gawaine, "I am growing weary of this quest."

"And I as well," said Hector. "And of the twenty knights I have met from time to time, they all complain as we do."

"Have you met with Lancelot?"

"No, nor with Percivale, Bors, or Galahad. I can learn nothing of these four."

"They are well able to take care of themselves," [Pg 156] said Gawaine. "And if they fail to find the Sangreal, it is waste of time for the rest of us to seek it, for outside of them there is little virtue in the Round Table fellowship."

Afterwards these two knights went far in company, and had strange dreams and visions, the meaning of which was expounded to them by the hermit Nancien. This holy man also reproved Gawaine severely for his evil life, and bade both him and his companion to give up the search for the Sangreal, as that high achievement was not for hands like theirs.

Soon after they met an armed knight in the road, who proffered to joust with them. Gawaine accepted the challenge, and rode against this unknown opponent, dealing him so severe a blow that he was hurled from his horse with a mortal wound. But when they had removed his helmet, what was their horror to find that it was their friend and comrade, Uwaine.

"Alas!" cried Gawaine, "that such a fatal misadventure should have befallen me! I would sooner have died myself."

"Thus ends my quest of the Sangreal," said Uwaine. "And thus will end that of many a noble knight. Dear friends, commend me to King Arthur, and to my fellows of the Round Table, and sometimes think of me for old brotherhood's sake."

And he died in their arms, leaving them plunged in the deepest grief, from which they were long in recovering.

Meanwhile Lancelot and Percivale rode far in company, and many things happened to them.[Pg 157] While journeying through a strange region they met an unknown knight, whom they challenged to joust. But the event turned out little to their satisfaction, for Lancelot was hurled to the ground, horse and man, and Percivale received so fierce a sword-blow that he would have been slain had not the sword swerved.

Then the victor knight rode rapidly away, leaving them to recover as they best could. But a recluse near whose hut this encounter had taken place told them that the victor was Sir Galahad. On learning this they pursued him at all speed, but in vain.

Percivale now turned back to question the recluse further, but Lancelot kept on, passing through waste and forest till he came to a stone cross at the parting of two ways.

Near by was a ruined chapel, with broken door, and other signs of waste and decay, if it had been long deserted. But when he looked within he saw to his great surprise a high altar richly dressed with cloth of white silk, on which stood a lofty candelabra of silver which bore six great candles, all lighted.

Lancelot sought to enter the chapel, but try as he would he could not pass the broken door, nor find entrance elsewhere. Some invisible power seemed to stand between him and admission to that sacred place.

Then, out of heart at this ill success, he took off his helm and sword, relieved his horse of saddle and bridle, and lay down to sleep before the cross. Night came upon him as he lay there, and with the night came strange visions.

[Pg 158]For as he lay but half asleep he saw a sick knight brought thither in a litter. This knight prayed earnestly for aid in his affliction, and as he did so Lancelot saw the silver candlestick come from the chapel to the cross, and after it a table of silver on which was

the holy grail. The sick knight crawled painfully to it on his hands and knees, and raised himself so as to touch and kiss the sacred vessel. No sooner had he done so than he grew whole and sound, with all his pain and sickness gone, and rose to his feet with his former strength and vigor.

"Lord, I thank thee deeply," he said; "for through thy infinite grace I am healed of my affliction."

Then the holy vessel returned to the chapel, and Lancelot strove hard to rise and follow it. But his limbs were powerless, and he lay like one chained to the ground.

He now fell into deep slumber, and waked not till near morning. And as he raised himself and sat on the ground he heard a voice in the air, that seemed to come from no earthly lips.

"Sir Lancelot," it said, "more hard than is the stone, more bitter than the wood, more bare than the barren fig-tree, arise and go from hence, and withdraw thyself from this holy place."

Lancelot arose with a heavy heart, for the sense of these words sank deeply within him. But when he sought his horse and helm and sword he found they were gone, for they had been taken by the knight whose healing he had seen.

Deeply depressed and unhappy at this misfortune,[Pg 159] he left the cross on foot, and wandered onward till he came to a hermitage on a high hill.

Here he told the hermit what had happened to him, and confessed all the evil deeds of his life, saying that he had resolved to be a different man from what he had been, and to live a higher life than that of doing deeds of arms that men might applaud.

Then the holy man gave him absolution, with injunctions of penance, and prayed that he would abide with him all that day. This Lancelot did, talking much with him upon his sins, and repenting sincerely the worldly life he had led.

Meanwhile Percivale had returned to the recluse, and questioned her as to how he should find Galahad.

"That I cannot surely tell," she said. "Ride hence to a castle which is called Goothe, where he has a cousin-german. If he can give you no tidings, then ride straight to the castle Carbonek, where the maimed king lies, and there you shall hear sure tidings of him."

Percivale, leaving her, rode onward till eventide, and as he looked around him for shelter he heard a clock strike loud and clear. He now perceived before him a mansion, with lofty walls and deep ditches. Here he knocked loudly, and was let in without delay.

After laying off his armor, he was led to the supper hall, where he was well served, and afterwards spent the night in comfort. When morning dawned he entered the chapel for the mass, and found there a priest ready at the altar. On the right[Pg 160] side was a pew closed with iron, and behind the altar a rich bed, covered with cloth of silk and gold. On this bed lay a person with covered visage, so that he could not tell if it were man or woman.

After the service was over the occupant of the bed sat up and threw back the covering, and then Percivale saw that it was a man of very great age, on whose head was a crown of gold. But his shoulders and body to the middle were unclad, and were covered with wounds, as were also his arms and face.

To all seeming he might have been three hundred years of age, for so venerable a face Percivale had never gazed upon, and as he sat up he prayed fervently, with joined hands. When the mass was over the priest bore the sacrament to the sick king. And when he had used it, he took off his crown and commanded it to be set on the altar. Then he lay down again.

Percivale now asked one of the attendants who this venerable man was.

"You have heard of Joseph of Arimathea," was the reply, "and how he came into this land to convert the heathen. With him came a king named Evelake, whom he had converted in the city of Sarras, in Palestine. This king afterwards had an earnest desire to be where the Sangreal was, and on one occasion he ventured so nigh it that God was displeased with him, and struck him almost blind. Then King Evelake prayed for mercy and pardon, and begged that he might not die until he who was to achieve the Sangreal should come, that he might see him and kiss him. There answered[Pg 161] him a voice that said: 'Thy prayers are heard; thou shalt not die till he has kissed thee. And when he comes thy eyes shall be opened to see clearly, and thy wounds shall be healed; but not until then.' So King Evelake has lived in this mansion for three hundred winters, waiting for the coming of the knight who shall heal him. Now, sir, will you tell me what knight you are, and if you are of the Round Table fellowship?"

"That am I, and my name is Percivale de Galis."

On hearing this the good man welcomed Percivale warmly, and pressed him to remain. But the knight replied that he could not, for his duty led him onward.

Percivale now left the chapel, and, arming himself, he took his horse and rode onward. And that day more strange things happened to him than we have space to tell. Not far had he ridden when he met twenty men-at-arms, who bore on a bier a dead knight. On learning that he was from King Arthur's court, they assailed him fiercely, killed his horse, and would have slain him; but when he was at the worst strait a knight in red armor came hastily to his rescue, and rode fiercely on the assailants.

He attacked these, indeed, with such fury that many of them were soon stretched on the ground; while the others fled into a thick forest, whither they were hotly pursued by their assailant.

On seeing him thus ride away, Percivale was deeply grieved, for he well knew his rescuer was Galahad, and he had no horse to follow him.

[Pg 162]He went forward as fast as he could on foot, and had not gone far when he met a yeoman riding on a hackney, and leading a great war-horse, blacker than any bear.

Percivale begged that he would lend him this horse, that he might overtake a knight before him. But this the yeoman refused, saying that the owner of the horse would slay him if he should do so.

Not long afterwards, as Percivale sat woebegone beneath a tree, an armed knight came riding past on the black horse, pursued by the yeoman, who called him robber, and moaned bitterly that his master would kill him for the loss of his charge.

"Lend me your hackney," said Percivale; "I may get you your horse again."

This the yeoman gladly did, and Percivale pursued the robber knight, loudly bidding him to stand and deliver.

The knight at this turned and rode fiercely upon him, but directed his spear against the horse instead of the rider, striking it in the breast, so that it fell to the earth.

He now rode away, without heeding Percivale's angry demand that he should stop and fight it out on foot. When the dismounted knight found that his antagonist would not turn, he was so filled with chagrin that he threw away his helm and sword, and raved like one out of his wits. Thus he continued till night came on, when he lay down exhausted and fell into a deep slumber.

Near the midnight hour he suddenly awakened, and saw in the road before him a woman, who said,—

[Pg 163]"Sir Percivale, what do you here?"

"I do neither good nor ill," he replied.

"You need a horse," she said. "If you will promise to do my will when I shall summon you, I will lend you mine. You will find him no common one."

"I promise that," cried Percivale. "I would do much for a horse just now."

"Wait, then; I shall fetch you the noblest animal you ever bestrode."

She departed, but quickly came again, leading a horse of midnight blackness, and richly apparelled for knightly service.

Percivale looked at it with admiration. He had not hoped for so great and noble a steed as this. Thanking her warmly, he sprang to his feet, leaped to the saddle, and put spurs to the horse, from whose nostrils fire seemed to glare.

Away went the black horse under the moonlight, making such marvellous strides that it seemed to leave the earth behind it in its magical progress. With such wondrous speed did it go that in an hour it had made a four days' journey. Then it came to the brink of a great body of water, whose waves foamed and leaped boisterously against the shore.

When Percivale saw the heaving waves, which stretched far away under the moonlight, he drew with all his force upon the rein; but the fiendish brute which he rode heeded not his hand, but bore him madly to the brink. Fear and doubt now filled the knight's mind, and with a hasty impulse he made the sign of the cross. At this the beast[Pg 164] roared loudly in rage, while flame a foot long poured from its nostrils, and with a wild rear it shook off its rider, and plunged madly into the wild billows. And the showering drops which fell upon Percivale from the plunge burnt like sparks of fire.

"God be thanked that I am here alive," cried the knight, fervently. "I have ridden the foul fiend in the image of a horse, and barely have I escaped perdition."

Then he commended himself to God, and prayed earnestly to the Lord to save him from all such perils and temptations. He continued in prayer all the remainder of that night until the next day dawned upon the earth.

When sunrise came he looked needfully about him, anxious to learn whither he had been borne by the unholy brute. To his surprise and alarm he found himself in a wild waste, which was closed in on one side by the sea, and on the other by a range of rough and high mountains, impassable to human feet; a land that seemed without food or shelter, and the lurking-place of wild beasts.

He trembled with fear on seeing this, and went forward with doubtful steps. Not far had he gone before he saw a strange thing, for a great serpent passed near him, bearing a young lion by the neck. Fiercely after it came a great lion, roaring with rage, and fell upon the serpent, which turned in defence, so that a mighty battle was waged before the knight.

"By my faith," he cried, "the lion is the most natural beast of the two, and it fights for its young. The lion it is my duty to help."

[Pg 165]He drew his sword with these words and struck the serpent so fierce a stroke that it fell dead. Then he turned his shield against the lion, but as the latter made no show of fighting him, but fawned upon him with every mark of joy and gratitude, he cast down his shield and removed his helm, and sat there stroking the neck and shoulders of the beast.

Until noon he comforted himself with the fellowship of the lion. Then it took up its whelp and bore it away, leaving Percivale alone. But he was not unhappy, for he believed fervently in God, and prayed with all earnestness that he might be saved from unholy things, and chosen as a champion of right and truth.

When night came, Percivale, to his joy, saw the lion coming towards him. It crouched at his feet like a spaniel, and all that night the lion and the knight slept in company, his head being pillowed on the shoulder of the beast.

But during the night a strange dream came to him. He seemed to see two women, one of whom was young, and rode upon a lion, and the other was old, and sat upon a gliding serpent. And the younger spoke to him as follows,—

"Sir Percivale," she said, "my lord salutes you, and sends a warning to you to make ready, for to-morrow you will have to fight with the strongest champion in the world. And if overcome you will be shamed to the world's end."

"Who is your lord?" he asked.

"The greatest lord in all the world," she said; and then suddenly vanished.

[Pg 166]Then came the lady upon the serpent, and said,—

"Sir Percivale, I have done you no harm, and yet you have worked me injury."

"What have I done? I have been always heedful to offend no lady."

"I have long nourished here a great serpent, and yesterday you killed it for seeking its prey. Why did you this? The lion was not in your care."

"I aided the lion because it was a nobler beast than the serpent. In that I did nothing against you."

"You did me a great wrong, and in return for this injury I demand that you become my man."

"That shall I never be," he answered.

"Beware, then, proud knight, who pride yourself on your piety. You have robbed me of that which I loved; take heed that I catch you not unawares, or mine you shall be, body and soul."

With these words she departed, and Percivale finished his sleep without further vision. In the morning, when he awoke, he felt feeble. And as he rose and blessed himself he saw not far off in the sea a ship that sailed towards him. As it came near he perceived it to be covered within and without with white samite, while on the deck stood an old man dressed in a surplice like a priest.

"Sir," said Percivale, "you are welcome."

"God keep you," said the old man; "whence come you?"

"I am of King Arthur's court, and a Knight of the Round Table, and am in quest of the Sangreal. But here I find myself in a wilderness, with no hope of escape."

[Pg 167]"Doubt not, if you be a true knight."

"Who are you?" asked Percivale.

"I have come hither from a strange country to comfort you," said the old man.

"Then, sir, can you tell me what my dream signifies?" and Percivale related what had befallen him.

"That can I," said the old man. "She that rode on the lion betokens the new law of holy church, and she came through love, to warn you of the great battle that is before you."

"With whom shall I fight?" asked Percivale.

"With the strongest champion of the world, and if you fail in the fight you shall not escape with the loss of a limb, but shall be shamed to the world's end. As for her that rode on the serpent, she betokens the old law. Heed her not. The serpent you slew betokens the devil that you rode hither, and whom you overcame by the sign of the cross. Yield not to her or any of her kindred, or worse will befall you."

Then the ship turned and sailed away, leaving Percivale again alone. But when he went up the rocks he found there the lion, which he stroked and made joyful fellowship with.

And thus time went on till midday. Then Percivale saw a ship approaching with such speed as if all the winds in the world had driven it. On it kept till it reached land at the beach below him. He hurried hopefully to meet it, and saw that it was covered with black silk, while on the deck stood a lady of great beauty, who was dressed in the richest apparel.

[Pg 168]"What brought you into this wilderness?" she cried to the knight. "Here you are likely to die of hunger, for no man may cross yonder rocks and escape."

"I serve the best master in the world," said Percivale. "He will not suffer harm to come to me."

"Sir Percivale," said she, "know you who I am?"

"Who taught you my name?" he answered.

"I know you better than you deem," she replied, laughing. "This much I may tell you, that not long since I was in the waste forest, where I saw the red knight with the white shield."

"Ah! is that so? Fain would I meet with him."

"I shall bring you to him; but only on covenant that you will come to my aid when I summon you."

"If it be in reason and uprightness, you may trust me," he replied.

"I saw him," she continued, "chase two knights into the stream that is called Mortaise, and follow them into the water. But they passed over, and his horse was drowned, and only by his great strength he got safe to land again."

"That I am very glad to hear. It would have been a sad day had that good knight been drowned."

"You look pale and thin," she remarked. "Have you eaten lately?"

"Not these three days," he answered. "Yet I spoke of late with a good man, whose words refreshed me as if I had partaken of rich viands."

[Pg 169]"Ah, sir knight," she said, "beware of that old man. I know him better than you. He is a false enchanter, who seeks your harm. If you heed his words shame will be your lot, and you will die on this rock and be devoured by wild beasts. I am here to help you in your need, for I am not content to see so good a knight come to harm and disgrace."

"Who are you," asked Percivale, "that proffer me so great a kindness?"

"Once I was the richest woman in the world," she answered. "Now I am disinherited and in want."

"Then I pity you greatly. Who is it that has disinherited you?"

"I dwelt with the greatest man in the world," she answered, "and to him I owe my beauty,—a beauty of which I was, alas! too proud. Then I said that which offended him deeply, and he drove me away from him, and robbed me of my heritage, and has never since had pity for me nor for my friends. Since this has happened I have done my best to wean his men from him, and many of them now cling to me, and I and they war against him day and night. I know no good knight, nor good man, but that I strive to win him to my side, and all such I repay well for their services. For he against whom I wage war is strong, and I need all the aid to be had. Therefore, since I know you for a valiant knight, I beseech you to help me. A fellow of the Round Table cannot, under his vow, fail any woman that is disinherited, and that seeks his aid."

[Pg 170]"That is true, indeed," said Percivale, "and I shall do all I can for you."

"You have my earnest thanks," she said.

Then, as the weather was hot, she called some of her attendants, and bade them bring a pavilion and set it up on the gravel near the sea-line.

"Sir knight," she said, "I pray you to rest here in the heat of the day, while my attendants prepare food for you."

He thanked her and laid aside his helm and shield, and fell asleep within the pavilion, where he slumbered long. When he awoke he asked her if the food was ready.

"Yes," she answered; "I have worked while you slumbered."

Then a table was set within the pavilion, and covered with a rich array of meats and drinks, of which Percivale ate with great appetite, while the lady sat opposite him with a very gracious aspect. The wine he drank was the strongest that had ever passed his lips, and its strength soon got into his veins and heated his brain.

The lady now smiled graciously upon him, and it seemed to him that he had never beheld so fair a creature. Her beauty so worked upon his heated blood, indeed, that he proffered her his love, and prayed earnestly for hers in return.

When she saw his loving ardor, and that the wine worked like fire in his blood, she said, with a smile of witchery,—

"Sir Percivale, if I become yours, you must become mine. I shall not grant you my love unless you swear that henceforth you will be my true[Pg 171] servant, and do nothing but what I shall command. Will you thus bind yourself, as you are a true knight?"

"That will I, fair lady, by the faith of my body."

"Then this I will say, that of all the knights in the world you are he whom I most love. And you may seal upon my lips the compact we have made."

But when Percivale came towards her, to claim the proffered kiss, which she offered with such bewitching grace, by chance or through God's aid he saw his sword, which lay on the ground at his feet, and in its pommel a red cross, with the sign of the crucifix therein. Then came to his mind the promise he had made to the old man, and his knightly vows, and with a pious impulse he raised his hand and made the sign of the cross on his forehead, the while his eyes were fixed on the lovely face of the tempter before him.

As he did so her smile changed to a look of deadly hate, and the loveliness of her face to a hideous aspect, while in the same moment the pavilion fell as before a great wind, and then vanished in smoke and cloud.

Over the sea the wind rose and roared, and as he looked he saw the ship battling with heaving waves, while the water seemed to burn behind it. On the deck stood the lady, who cried,—

"Sir Percivale, you have betrayed me! Beware, proud knight, I shall have my revenge." Then the ship drove out to sea, and vanished from his sight.

But in a passion of remorse Percivale snatched[Pg 172] up the sword that lay before him, and crying, "Since my flesh has been my master I will punish it," he drove the naked blade through his thigh, till the blood spouted out like a fountain.

"Wretch that I am, how nearly was I lost!" he cried, in a torment of conscience. "Fair sweet Father, Jesus Christ my Lord, let me not be shamed, as I would now have been but for thy good grace. Take this wound in recompense for what I have done against thee, and forgive me my deep transgression, I humbly pray thee."

But as he lay moaning and bleeding the wild winds went down and the sea grew smooth, while he saw coming from the Orient the ship with the good man, on board, on beholding whom he fell into a swoon.

When he awoke he found that his wound had been dressed and the bleeding stopped. Beside him sat the good man, who asked him,—

"How hast thou done since I departed?"

"Weakly and wickedly enough," he answered. "A witch beguiled me, and I nearly fell a victim to her wiles."

"Knew you her not?"

"Only that I deem the foul fiend sent her here to shame me."

"Worse than that, good knight. Your victory is greater than you deem. That seeming woman who deceived you was no less an adversary than the master-fiend of hell, who has power over all the lesser devils, and, had you yielded you had been lost forever. For this is the mighty champion against whom you were forwarned; he who was once the brightest angel of heaven, and was driven out by our Lord Christ for his sins, and thus lost his heritage. But that the grace of God was on your side you would have fallen before this champion of evil. Take this, Sir Percivale, as a warning and an example."

With these words the good man vanished away. Then the mariners carried the wounded knight on board their ship, and set sail, bearing him rapidly away from that scene of temptation and victory.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF SIR BORS.

When Sir Bors parted from his companions, on the quest of the Sangreal, not far had he gone when he met a religious man riding on an ass, whom he courteously saluted.

"Who are you?" asked the good man.

"I am one of those knights who have set out in quest of the Sangreal," said Bors. "I would fain have your counsel in this high duty, for great honor shall come to him who succeeds therein."

"That is true," said the good man. "He that wins the Sangreal will be counted the best knight and the purest soul among men. None can hope to attain it except through cleanness of spirit."

Then they rode together till they came to a hermitage. Here Bors went into the chapel with[Pg 174] his companion, and confessed to him, and ate bread and drank water with him.

"Now," said the good man, "I charge you that you take no other food than bread and water till you sit at the table where the Sangreal shall be."

"To that I agree. But how know you that I shall ever sit there?"

"I know it, let that suffice; but few of your comrades shall have that honor."

"All that God sends me will be welcome," said Bors.

"Also, instead of a shirt, and in token of chastisement, you shall wear this garment," and the good man produced a scarlet coat, which Bors promised to wear next his skin till the Sangreal should be won.

Then, after further wholesome advice, he resumed his armor and departed. He had gone but a little way from the hermitage when he passed a tree that was little more than an old and leafless trunk, and on one of its boughs he saw a great bird, surrounded by young that were nearly dead with hunger. As, he continued to look at this strange sight, the bird smote itself in the breast with its sharp beak, and bled till it died among its young. Then the young birds fed on their mother's blood, and were revived thereby.

This to Bors seemed full of deep significance, and he pondered deeply upon it as he rode onward. By even-song he found himself near a strong and high tower, where he asked shelter for the night, and was hospitably welcomed.

When he had disarmed he was led to a richly[Pg 175] furnished apartment, where he found a young and fair lady, who welcomed him gladly to her tower, and invited him to take supper with her.

The table was set with rich meats and many dainties, but Bors forgot not the hermit's charge, and bade an attendant to bring him water. In this he sopped bread and ate it.

"How is this?" asked the lady in surprise. "Like you not my meat?"

"Truly I do, madam; yet I may eat no other food this day."

Then the lady was silent, for she feared to displease him by questioning. After supper, while they sat talking, a squire came, who said,—

"Madam, you know well what is set for to-morrow. You must provide a champion to fight in your quarrel against Pridam le Noire, or your sister will have this castle and all your lands."

"I know that," she said, with a deep sigh. "May God save me from being robbed, for I see no earthly aid."

Her sorrow touched Bors, who asked,—

"What means this, madam?"

"Sir," she said, "I shall tell you. There was formerly a king named Aniause, who owned all these lands. By chance he loved my sister, who is much older than I,—and much wickeder also, I fear. He gave her this land to govern; but she brought into it many evil customs, and caused the death of many of his kinsmen. When the king saw how vilely she governed, he drove her away, and put me over this district. But he is now dead, and she is making war on me, and has destroyed[Pg 176] many of my men, and turned others from me, so that I have little left but this tower, and the few men that guard it. Even this she now threatens to take from me, unless I can find a knight to fight her champion, who will appear before my gates to-morrow."

"Is it so?" said Bors. "Who is this Pridam le Noire?"

"He is the most stalwart knight in this country, and has no equal among us."

"Madam," said Bors, "you have given me shelter; in return I shall aid you as far as I can in your trouble. You may send word that you have found a knight who will fight with this Pridam the Black, in God's quarrel and yours."

"Then may God's blessing rest upon you," she cried, gladly. And word was sent out that she had found a champion who would take on himself her quarrel.

That evening she did what lay in her power to make Bors welcome, and sent him at bedtime to a chamber whose bed was soft as down, and spread with silken coverings.

But in no bed would he rest, but laid himself on the floor, as he had vowed to do till he found the Sangreal.

As he lay there asleep there came to him a vision. He seemed to see two birds, one white as a swan, the other of smaller size, and shaped like a raven, with plumage of inky blackness. The white bird came to him and said, "If thou wilt give me meat and serve me, I shall give thee all the riches of the world, and make thee as fair and white as I[Pg 177] am." Then the white bird departed, and the black bird came and said, "I beg that you will serve me to-morrow, and hold me in no despite; for this I tell you, that my blackness will avail you more than the other's whiteness." And this bird, too, departed.

But his dream continued, and he seemed to come to a great place, that looked like a chapel. Here he saw on the left side a chair, which was worm-eaten and feeble. And on the right hand were two flowers of the shape of a lily, and one would have taken the whiteness from the other but that a good man separated them, and would not let them touch. And out of each came many flowers and plentiful fruit. Then the good man said, "Would not he act with great folly that should let these two flowers perish to succor the rotten tree, and keep it from falling?" "Sir," said the dreamer, "it seems to me that the flower is of more value than the wood." "Then take heed that you never choose the false for the true."

With this Bors awoke, and made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and then rose and dressed. When he had come to the lady she saluted him, and led him to a chapel, where they heard the morning service. Quickly afterwards there came a company of knights that the lady had sent for, to lead her champion to battle. After he had armed, she begged him to take some strengthening food.

"Nay, madam," he answered, "that I shall not do till I have fought this battle, in which I ask but God's grace to aid me."

This said, he sprang upon his horse, and set out[Pg 178] with the knights and men, closely followed by the lady and her train. They soon came to where the other party were encamped, and with them the lady of their choice.

"Madam," said the lady of the tower, "you have done me great wrong to take from me the lands which King Aniause gave me. And I am sorry that there should be any battle."

"You shall not choose," said the other, "unless you withdraw your knight and yield the tower."

"That I shall not do. You have robbed me enough already."

Then was the trumpet sounded, and proclamation was made that whichever champion won the battle, the lady for whom he fought should enjoy all the land. This done, the two champions drew aside, and faced each other grimly in their armor of proof.

But when the sound for the onset was blown they put spurs to their steeds, which rushed together like two lions, and the knights struck each other with such force that their spears flew to pieces and both fell to the earth.

They quickly rose and drew their swords, and hewed at each other like two woodmen, so that soon each was sorely wounded and bleeding profusely. Bors quickly found that he had a sturdier antagonist than he expected, for Pridam was a strong and hardy fighter, who stood up lustily to his work, and gave his opponent many a sturdy blow.

Bors, perceiving this, took a new course, and played with his antagonist till he saw that he was growing weary with his hard work. Then he advanced[Pg 179] upon him fiercely, and drove him step by step backward, till in the end Pridam fell. Bors now leaped upon him and pulled so strongly upon his helm as to rend it from his head. Then he struck him with the flat of his sword upon the cheek, and bade him yield, or he would kill him.

"For God's love, slay me not!" cried the knight. "I yield me to thy mercy. I shall swear never to war against thy lady, but be henceforth her friend and protector."

With this assurance, Bors let him live; while the covetous old lady fled in fear, followed by all her knights. The victorious champion now called to him all those who held lands in that estate, and threatened to destroy them unless they would do the lady such service as belonged to their holdings. This they swore to do, and there and then paid homage to the lady, who thus came to her own again through the mighty prowess of Sir Bors de Ganis.

Not until the country was well in peace did he take his leave, refusing the offers of wealth which the grateful lady pressed upon him, and receiving her warm thanks with a humility that well became him.

Hardly would she let him go; but at length he bade her farewell, and rode away from her tears and thanks. On he journeyed for all that day, and till midday of the next, when he found himself in a forest, where a strange adventure befell him.

For at the parting of two ways he met two knights who had taken prisoner his brother Lionel,[Pg 180] whom they had bound all naked upon a hackney, while they beat him with thorns till the blood flowed from every part of his body. Yet so great of heart was he that no word came from his lips, and he made no sign of pain.

Bors, seeing this, was on the point of rushing to his rescue, when he beheld on the other side a knight who held as prisoner a fair lady, whom he was taking into the thickest part

of the forest to hide her from those who sought her. And as they went she cried in a lamentable voice,—

"Saint Mary, rescue me! Holy mother, succor your maid!"

When she saw Bors she cried out to him grievously for aid and rescue.

"By the faith you owe to the high order of knighthood, and for the noble King Arthur's sake, who I suppose made you knight, help me, gracious sir, and suffer me not to come to shame through this felon knight!"

On hearing this appeal the distracted knight knew not what to do. On one side his brother in danger of his life; on the other a maiden in peril of her honor.

"If I rescue not my brother he will be slain; and that I would not have for the earth. Yet if I help not the maiden, I am recreant to my vows of knighthood, and to my duty to the high order of chivalry."

Tears ran from his eyes as he stood in cruel perplexity. Then, with a knightly resolution, he cried,—

"Fair sweet Lord Jesus, whose liegeman I am,[Pg 181] keep Lionel my brother that these knights slay him not; since for your service, and for Mary's sake, I must succor this maid."

Then he turned to the knight who had the damsel, and loudly cried,—

"Sir knight, take your hands from that maiden and set her free, or you are a dead man."

On hearing this the knight released the maiden as bidden, but drew his sword, as he had no spear, and rode fiercely at the rescuer. Bors met him with couched spear, and struck him so hard a blow as to pierce his shield and his hauberk on the left shoulder, beating him down to the earth. On pulling out the spear the wounded knight swooned.

"You are delivered from this felon. Can I help you further?" said Bors to the maiden.

"I beg you to take me to the place whence he carried me away."

"That shall I do as my duty."

Then he seated her on the knight's horse, and conducted her back towards her home.

"You have done nobly, sir knight," she said. "If you had not rescued me, five hundred men might have died for this. The knight you wounded is my cousin, who yesterday stole me away from my father's house, no one mistrusting him. But if you had not overcome him, there would soon have been others on his track."

Even as she spoke there came a troop of twelve knights riding briskly forward in search of her. When they found her delivered their joy was great, and they thanked Bors profusely, begging him to [Pg 182] accompany them to her father, who was a great lord, and would welcome him with gladness.

"That I cannot do," said Bors, "much as I should like to; for I have another matter of high importance before me. I can but say, then, farewell, and God be with you and this fair maiden."

So saying, he turned and rode briskly away, followed by their earnest thanks. Reaching the point where he had seen Lionel in custody, he took the trail of the horses, and followed them far by their hoof-marks in the road. Then he overtook a religious man, who was mounted on a strong horse, blacker than a berry.

"Sir knight," he asked, "what seek you?"

"I seek my brother," he replied, "who came this way beaten by two knights."

"Then seek no further, but be strong of heart, for I have sad tidings for you. Your brother is dead."

He then led Bors to a clump of bushes, in which lay a newly slain body, which seemed to be that of Lionel. Seeing this, Bors broke into such grief that he fell to the earth in a swoon, and long lay there. When he recovered he said, sadly,—

"Dear brother, I would have rescued you had not a higher duty called me. But since we are thus parted, joy shall never again enter my desolate heart. I can now but say, be He whom I have taken for my master my help and comfort."

Thus grieving, he took up the body in his arms, and put it upon his saddle-bow. Then he said to his companion,—

"Can you tell me of some chapel, where I may bury this body?"

[Pg 183]"Come with me. There is one near by."



AN OLD AND HALF-RUINED

CHAPEL.

They rode forward till they came in sight of a tower, beside which was an old and half-ruined chapel. Here they alighted, and placed the corpse in a tomb of marble.

"We will leave him here," said the good man, "and seek shelter for the night. To-morrow we will return and perform the services for the dead."

"Are you a priest?" asked Bors.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then you may be able to interpret a dream that came to me last night."

Thereupon he told his dream of the birds, and that of the flowers.

"I can interpret the vision of the birds now," said the priest. "The rest must wait till later. The white bird is the emblem of a rich and fair lady, who loves you deeply, and will die for love if you pity her not. I counsel you, therefore, not to refuse her, for this I shall tell you, that if you return not her love, your cousin Lancelot, the best of knights, shall

die. Men will call you a man-slayer, both of your brother Lionel and your cousin Lancelot, since you might have saved them both easily if you would. You rescued a maiden who was naught to you, and let your brother perish. Which, think you, was your greater duty?"

"I did what I thought my duty," said Bors.

"At any rate, bear this in mind, you will be in sad fault if you suffer your cousin Lancelot to die for an idle scruple."

"I should be sad, indeed," said Bors. "Rather would I die ten times over than see my cousin Lancelot perish through fault of mine."

[Pg 184]"The choice lies in your hand," said the priest. "It is for you to decide."

As he spoke they came in front of a fair-showing tower and manor-house, where were knights and ladies, who welcomed Bors warmly. When he was disarmed there was brought him a mantle furred with ermine. Then he was led to the company of knights and ladies, who received him so gladly, and did so much to make his stay pleasant, that all thoughts of his brother Lionel and of the danger of Lancelot were driven from his mind.

As they stood in gay converse there came out of a chamber a lady whom Bors had not before seen, and whose beauty was such that he felt he had never beheld so lovely a face, while her dress was richer than Queen Guenever had ever worn.

"Here, Sir Bors," said those present, "is the lady to whom we all owe service. Richer and fairer lady the world holds not, and she loves you above all other knights, and will have no knight but you."

On hearing this, Bors stood abashed. This, then, he thought, was the white bird of his dream. Her love he must return or lose Lancelot,—so fate had spoken.

As he stood deeply thinking, the lady came up and saluted him, taking his hand in hers, and bidding him sit beside her, while her deep eyes rested upon him with looks that made his soul tremble. Never had he gazed into such eyes before.

Then she spoke of many things, luring him into pleasant conversation, in which he forgot his fears, and began to take delight in her presence. At the end she told him how deeply and how long she had[Pg 185] loved him, and begged him to return her love, saying that she could make him richer than ever was man of his age.

These words brought back all his trouble of soul. How to answer the lady he knew not, for his vow of chastity was too deep to be lightly broken.

"Alas!" she said, "must I plead for your love in vain?"

"Madam," said Bors, "I cannot think of earthly ties and delights while my brother lies dead, and awaits the rites of the Church."

"I have loved you long," she repeated, "both for your beauty of body and soul, and the high renown you have achieved. Now that chance has brought you to my home, think not ill of me if I let you not go without telling my love, and beseeching you to return it."

"That I cannot do," said Bors.

At these words she fell into the deepest sorrow, while tears flowed from her beautiful eyes.

"You will kill me by your coldness," she bewailed. Then she took him by the hand and bade him look upon her. "Am I not fair and lovely, and worthy the love of the best of knights? Alas! since you will not love me, you shall see me die of despair before your eyes."

"That I do not fear to see," he replied.

"You shall see it within this hour," she said, sadly.

Then she left him, and, taking with her twelve of her ladies, mounted to the highest battlement of the tower, while Bors was led to the court-yard below.

[Pg 186] "Ah, Sir Bors, gentle knight, have pity on us!" cried one of the ladies. "We shall all die if you are cruel to our lady, for she vows that she and all of us shall fall from this tower if you disdain her proffered love."

Bors looked up, and his heart melted with pity, to see so many fair faces looking beseechingly down upon him, while tears seemed to rain from their eyes. Yet he was steadfast of heart, for he felt that he could not lose his soul to save their lives, and his vow of chastity in the quest of the Sangreal was not to be broken for the delights of earthly love.

As he stood, some of the maidens flung themselves from the tower, and lay dead and bleeding at his feet, while above he saw the fair face of the lady looking down, as she stood balanced on the battlement, like a fair leaf that the next wind would sweep to certain death.

"God help me and guide me!" cried Bors in horror. "What shall I do? Here earthly endurance is too weak; I must put my trust in heaven." And he made the sign of the cross on his forehead and his breast.

Then came a marvel indeed. A roar was heard as if thunder had rent the sky, and a cry as if all the fiends of hell were about him. For the moment he closed his eyes, stunned

by the uproar. When he opened them again all had gone,—the tower, the lady, the knights, and the chapel where he had placed his brother's body,—and he stood in the road, armed and mounted, while only a broad, empty plain spread before him.

[Pg 187]Then he held up his hands to heaven and cried fervently: "Father and Creator, from what have I escaped! It is the foul fiend in the likeness of a beautiful woman who has tempted me. Only the sign of the holy cross has saved me from perdition."

Putting spurs to his horse he rode furiously away, burning with anxiety to get from that accursed place, and deeply glad at his escape. As he proceeded a loud clock-bell sounded to the right, and turning thither he came to a high wall, over which he saw the pinnacles of an abbey.

Here he asked shelter for the night, and was received with a warm welcome, for those within deemed he was one of the knights that sought the Sangreal. When morning came he heard mass, and then the abbot came and bade him good-morning. A conversation followed, in which he told the abbot all that had happened to him, and begged his interpretation thereof.

"Truly you are strong in the service of the Lord," said the abbot, "and are held for great deeds. Thus I interpret your adventures and visions. The great fowl that fed its young with its own blood is an emblem of Christ, who shed his blood for the good of mankind. And the bare tree on which it sat signifies the world, which of itself is barren and without fruit. Also King Aniause betokens Jesus Christ, and the lady for whom you took the battle the new law of Holy Church; while the older lady is the emblem of the old law and the fiend, which forever war against the Church.

"By the black bird also was emblemized the Holy[Pg 188] Church, which saith, 'I am black but he is fair.' The white bird represented the fiend, which, like hypocrisy, is white without and foul within. As for the rotten chair and the white lilies, the first was thy brother Lionel, who is a murderer and an untrue knight; while the lilies were the knight and the lady. The one drew near to the other to dishonor her, but you forced them to part. And you would have been in great peril had you, for the rescue of a rotten tree, suffered those two flowers to perish; for if they had sinned together they had both been damned.

"The seeming man of religion, who blamed you for leaving your brother to rescue a lady, was the foul fiend himself. Your brother was not slain, as he made it appear, but is still alive. For the corpse, and the chapel, and the tower were all devices of the evil one, and the lady who offered her love was the fiend himself in that showing. He knew you were tender-hearted, and he did all. Much you may thank God that you withstood his temptation, and that until now you have come through all your adventures pure and unblemished."

This gladdened the heart of the virtuous knight, and a warm hope of winning the Sangreal arose in his soul. Much more passed between them, and when Bors rode forth it was with the fervent blessing of the holy abbot.

On the morning of the second day Bors saw before him a castle that rose in a green valley, and met with a yeoman, whom he stopped and asked what was going on in that country.

[Pg 189]"Sir knight," he answered, "there is to be held a great tournament before that castle."

"By what people?" asked Bors.

"The Earl of Plains," was the answer, "leads one party, and the nephew of the Lady of Hervin the other."

With this the yeoman rode on, and Bors kept on his course, thinking he might meet Lionel or some other of his old comrades at the tournament. At length he turned aside to a hermitage that stood at the entrance to the forest. And to his surprise and joy he saw his brother Lionel sitting armed at the chapel door, waiting there to take part in the tournament the next morning.

Springing from his horse, Bors ran up gladly, crying, "Dear brother, happy is this meeting!"

"Come not near me!" cried Lionel, leaping to his feet in a burst of fury. "False recreant, you left me in peril of death to help a yelping woman, and by my knightly vow you shall pay dearly for it. Keep from me, traitor, and defend yourself. You or I shall die for this."

On seeing his brother in such wrath Bors kneeled beseechingly before him, holding up his hands, and praying for pardon and forgiveness.

"Never!" said Lionel. "I vow to God to punish you for your treachery. You have lived long enough for a dog and traitor."

Then he strode wrathfully away, and came back soon, mounted and with spear in hand.

"Bors de Ganis," he cried, "defend yourself, for I hold you as a felon and traitor, and the untruest knight that ever came from so worthy a[Pg 190] house as ours. Mount and fight. If you will not, I will run on you as you stand there on foot. The shame shall be mine and the harm yours; but of that shame I reckon naught."

When Bors saw that he must fight with his brother or die he knew not what to do. Again he kneeled and begged forgiveness, in view of the love that ought to be between brothers.

But the fiend that sought his overthrow had put such fury into Lionel's heart that nothing could turn him from his wrathful purpose. And when he saw that Bors would not mount, he spurred his horse upon him and rode over him, hurting him so with his horse's hoofs that he swooned with the pain. Then Lionel sprang from his horse and rushed upon him sword in hand to strike off his head.

At this critical moment the hermit, who was a man of great age, came running out, and threw himself protectingly on the fallen knight.

"Gentle sir," he cried to Lionel, "have mercy on me and on thy brother, who is one of the worthiest knights in the world. If you slay him, you will lose your soul."

"Sir priest," said Lionel, sternly, "if you leave not I shall slay you, and him after you."

"Slay me if you will, but spare your brother, for my death would not do half so much harm as his."

"Have it, then, meddler, if you will!" cried Lionel, and he struck the hermit a blow with his sword that stretched him dead on the ground.

Then, with unquenched anger, he tore loose the[Pg 191] lacings of his brother's helmet, and would have killed him on the spot but for a fortunate chance.

As it happened, Colgrevice, a fellow of the Round Table, rode up at that moment, and wondered when he saw the hermit dead, and Lionel about to slay his brother, whom he greatly loved.

Leaping hastily to the ground, he caught the furious knight by the shoulders and drew him strongly backward.

"What would you do?" he cried. "Madman, would you kill your brother, the worthiest knight of our brotherhood? And are you so lost to honor as to slay any knight thus lying insensible?"

"Will you hinder me?" asked Lionel, turning in rage. "Back, sirrah, or I shall slay you first and him afterwards."

"Why seek you to slay him?"

"He has richly deserved it, and die he shall, whoever says the contrary."

Then he ran upon Bors and raised his sword to strike him on the head. But Colgrevice pushed between them and thrust him fiercely backward.

"Off, you murderer!" he cried. "If you are so hot for blood you must have mine first."

"Who are you?" demanded Lionel.

"I am Colgrevice, one of your fellows. Round Table Knights should be brothers, not foes, but I would challenge King Arthur himself in this quarrel."

"Defend yourself, meddler," cried Lionel, rushing upon him and striking him fiercely on the helm with his sword.

"That shall I," rejoined Colgrevice, attacking him in turn.

[Pg 192]Then a hot battle began, for Colgrevice was a good knight, and defended himself manfully.

While the fight went on Bors recovered his senses, and saw with a sad heart Colgrevice defending him against his brother. He strove to rise and part them, but his hurts were such that he could not stand on his feet. And thus he sat watching the combat till he saw that Colgrevice had the worst, for Lionel had wounded him sorely, and he had lost so much blood that he could barely stand.

At this juncture he saw Bors, who sat watching them in deep anguish.

"Bors," he cried, "I am fighting to succor you. Will you sit there and see me perish?"

"You both shall die," cried Lionel, furiously. "You shall pay the penalty of your meddling, and he of his treason."

Hearing this, Bors rose with aching limbs, and painfully put on his helm. Colgrevice again called to him in anguish,—

"Help me, Bors! I can stand no longer. Will you let me die without lifting your hand?"

At this moment Lionel smote the helm from his head, and then with another fierce blow stretched him dead and bleeding upon the earth.

This murderous deed done, he ran on Bors with the passion of a fiend, and dealt him a blow that made him stoop.

"For God's love leave me!" cried Bors. "If I slay you or you me, we will both be dead of that sin."

"May God never help me if I take mercy on you, if I have the better hand," cried Lionel, in reply.

[Pg 193]Then Bors drew his sword, though his eyes were wet with tears.

"Fair brother," he said, "God knows my heart. You have done evil enough this day, in slaying a holy priest and one of our own brotherhood of knights. I fear you not, but I dread the wrath of God, for this is an unnatural battle which you force upon me. May God have mercy upon me, since I must defend my life against my brother."

Saying this, Bors raised his sword and advanced upon Lionel, who stood before him with the wrath of a fury.

Then would have been a most unholy battle, had not God come to the rescue. For as they thus stood defiant a voice came to them from the air, which said,—

"Flee, Bors, and touch him not, for if you do, you will surely slay him."

And between them descended a cloud that gleamed like fire, and from which issued a marvellous flame that burned both their shields to a cinder. They were both so affrighted that they fell to the earth, and lay there long in a swoon.

When they came to themselves Bors saw that his brother had received no harm. For this he thanked God, for he feared that heaven's vengeance had fallen upon him. Then came the voice again.

"Bors," it said, "go hence, and bear thy brother company no longer. Take thy way to the sea where Percivale awaiteth thee."

"Forgive me, brother," said Bors, "for what I have done against you."

"God has forgiven you, and I must," said Lionel.[Pg 194] "It was the foul fiend that filled my soul with fury, and much harm has come of it."

Then Bors rode away, leaving Lionel in the company of those whom he had slain, and took the most direct road towards the sea.

At length he came to an abbey that was near the water-side. And at midnight as he rested there he was roused from his sleep by a voice, that bade him leave his bed and ride onward.

He started up at this, and made the sign of the cross on his forehead; then took his harness and horse, and rode out at a broken place in the abbey wall. An hour or so brought him to the water-side, and on the strand there lay awaiting him a ship all covered with white samite. Bors alighted, and leaving his horse on the stand entered the ship, commending himself to Christ's fostering care.

Hardly had he done so before the sails spread, as of themselves, and the vessel set out to sea so fast that it seemed to fly. But it was still dark night, and he saw no one about him. So he lay down and slept till day.

When he awaked he saw a knight lying in the middle of the deck, all armed but the helm. A glance told him that it was Percivale de Galis, and he sprang towards him with joy. But Percivale drew back, asking him who he was.

"Know you me not?" asked Bors.

"I do not. But I marvel how you came hither, unless brought by our Lord himself."

Then Bors took off his helm and smiled. Great was Percivale's joy when he recognized him, and long did they converse in gladness, telling each other their adventures and temptations.

And so they went far over the sea, the ship taking them they knew not whither, yet each comforted the other, and daily they prayed for God's grace.

"Now, that we two are together," said Percivale, "we lack nothing but Galahad, the best of knights."

[Pg 195]

CHAPTER VI.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MAGIC SHIP.

After Galahad had rescued Percivale from the twenty knights, he rode into a vast forest, through which he journeyed for many days, meeting there many strange adventures. Then fortune took him past a castle where a tournament was in progress, and where the men of the castle had so much the worse of it that they were driven back to their gates, and some of them slain. Seeing this, Galahad rode to the aid of the weaker party, and did marvellous deeds of arms, soon aiding them to drive back their foes.

As it happened, Gawaine and Hector de Maris were with the outer party, and when they beheld the white shield with the red cross, they said to one another,—

"That hewer of helms and shields is Galahad, none less. We should be fools to meet him face to face."

[Pg 196] Yet Gawaine did not escape, for Galahad came at full career upon him, and gave him such a blow that his helm was cleft, and so would his head have been but that the sword slanted, and cut the shoulder of his horse deeply.

Seeing Gawaine thus dealt with, Hector drew back, not deeming it wise to meet such a champion, nor the part of nature to fight with his nephew. Galahad continued his onset till he had beaten down all the knights opposed to him. Then, seeing that none would face him, he turned and rode away as he had come, none knowing whither he, who had come upon them with the suddenness of a thunder-clap, had gone.

"Lancelot du Lake told no less than the truth," declared Gawaine, bitterly, "when he said that, for seeking to draw the sword from the stone, I would get a sore wound from that same blade. In faith, I would not for the best castle in the world have had such a buffet."

"Your quest is done, it seems," said Hector.

"As for that, it was done before. You can still seek the Sangreal if you will, but I shall seek my bed; and I fear I shall stay there much longer than I care to."

Then he was borne into the castle, where a leech was found for him, while Hector remained with him, vowing he would not leave till his comrade was well.

Meanwhile Galahad rode on, leaving many a groan and more than one sore head behind him, and at night reached a hermitage near the castle of Carbonek. Here he was welcomed by the hermit;[Pg 197] but late at night, when they were asleep, a loud knock came on the door, which roused the host. Going to see who knocked at that untimely hour, he found a lady at the door, who said,—

"Ulfin, rouse the knight who is with you. I must speak with him."

This he did, and Galahad went to the door, and asked her what she wished.

"Galahad," she replied, "I am sent here to seek you. You must arm and mount your horse at once, and follow me. Within three days I shall bring you to the greatest adventure that ever knight met."

Without further question Galahad obeyed, and, having commended himself to God, he bade his fair guide to lead, and he would follow wherever she wished.

Onward they rode during the remainder of the night and the next day, till they came to a castle not far from the sea, where Galahad was warmly welcomed, for the damsel who guided him had been sent by the lady of that castle.

"Madam," said the damsel, "shall he stay here all night?"

"No," she replied; "only until he has dined, and has slept a little. He must ride on until destiny is accomplished."

So at early nightfall Galahad was called and helped to arm by torchlight. Then he and the damsel again took horse, and rode on at speed till they suddenly found themselves at the ocean's brink, with the waves breaking at their feet. And here lay a ship covered with white samite, from which manly voices cried,—

[Pg 198]"Welcome, Sir Galahad. We have long awaited you. Come on board."

"What means this?" asked Galahad of the damsel. "Who are they that call?"

"No others than your friends and comrades, Sir Bors and Sir Percivale. Here you must leave your horse, and I mine, and both of us enter the ship, for so God commands."

This they did, taking their saddles and bridles with them, and making on them the sign of the cross. When they had entered the ship the two knights received them with great joy. And as they stood greeting each other the wind suddenly rose and drove the ship from the land, forcing it through the waves at a marvellous speed.

"Whence comes this ship?" asked Galahad.

Then Bors and Percivale told him of their adventures and temptations, and by what miracles they had been brought on board that vessel.

"Truly," said Galahad, "God has aided you marvellously. As for me, had it not been for the lady who led me, I should never have found you."

"If Lancelot, your father, were but here," said Bors, "then it would seem to me that we had all that heart could wish."

"That may not be," answered Galahad, "unless by the pleasure of our Lord."

As they conversed the ship suddenly ran between two rocks, where it held fast, but where they could not land for the raging of the sea. But just before them lay another ship, which they could reach without danger.



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THE MAGIC SHIP.

"Thither we must go," said the lady, "and there[Pg 199] we shall find strange things, for such is the Lord's will."

At this they approached the ship, and saw that it was richly provided, but without man or woman on board. And on its bow there was written in large letters,—

"You who shall enter this ship, take heed of your belief: for I am Faith, and bid you beware. If you fail I shall not help you. He who enters here must be of pure heart and earnest trust."

They stood looking earnestly at one another after having read these words.

"Percivale," said the lady, "know you who I am?"

"I do not," he replied. "Have I ever seen you before?"

"Know, then, that I am your sister, the daughter of King Pellinore. I love no man on earth as I do you. I warn you, therefore, not to enter this ship unless you have perfect belief in our Lord Jesus Christ, for if your faith fails you aught here you shall perish."

"Fair sister," he replied, "happy am I, indeed, to know you. As for the ship, I shall not fail to enter it. If I prove an untrue knight or a misbeliever, then let me perish."

As they spoke, Galahad blessed himself and entered the ship, and after him came the lady, and then Bors and Percivale. On reaching the deck they found it so marvellously fair and rich that they stood in wonder. In the midst of the ship was a noble bed; and when Galahad went thither he found on it a crown of silk. Below this lay a[Pg 200] sword, half drawn from its scabbard, the pommel being of stone of many colors. The scales of the haft were of the ribs of two beasts. One beast was a serpent, known in Calidone as the serpent of the fiend; and its bone had the magic virtue that the hand which touched it should never be weary or hurt. The other beast was a fish, that haunted the flood of Euphrates, its name Ertanax; its bone had the virtue that he who handled it should not think on the joys and sorrows of his past life, but only of that which he then beheld. And no man could grasp this sword but the one who passed all others in might and virtue.

"In the name of God," said Percivale, "I shall seek to handle it."

But in vain he tried, he could not grasp the magic hilt. No more could Bors, who attempted it in his turn. Then Galahad approached, and as he did so saw written on the sword in letters like blood, "He who draweth me has peril to endure. His body shall meet with shame, for he shall be wounded to the death."

"By my faith, the risk is too great," said Galahad. "I shall not set my hand to so fatal a blade."

"That you must," said the lady. "The drawing of this sword is forbidden to all men, save you. No one can draw back from that which destiny commands."

Then she told a marvellous story of that strange blade.

"When this ship arrived in the realm of England," she said, "there was deadly war between King Labor and King Hurlame, who was a christened[Pg 201] Saracen. Here they fought one day by the sea-side, and Hurlame was defeated and his men slain. Then he fled into this ship, drew the sword which he saw here, and with one stroke smote King Labor and his horse in twain. But a fatal stroke it proved, for with it there came harm and pestilence to all this realm. Neither corn nor grass would grow, fruit failed to ripen, the waters held no fish, and men named this the waste land of the two marches. Nor did King Hurlame escape. When he saw the strange carving of the sword, a craving came into his mind to possess the scabbard. Entering the ship for that purpose, he thrust the sword into the sheath; but no sooner had he done so than he fell dead beside the bed. And there his body lay till a maiden entered the ship and cast it out, for no man could be found hardy enough to set foot on that fatal deck."

The three knights on hearing this looked earnestly at the scabbard, which seemed to them made of serpent's skin, while on it was writing in letters of gold and silver. But the girdle was poor and mean, and ill suited to so rich a sword. The writing was to this effect: "He who shall wield me must be hardy of nature. Nor shall he ever be shamed while he is girt with this girdle; which must never be put away except by the hands of a maiden and a king's daughter. And she, if she shall ever cease to be a maid, shall die the most villanous death that woman ever endured."

"Turn the sword," said Percivale, "that we may see what is on the other side."

On doing so they found it red as blood, with[Pg 202] coal-black letters, which said: "He that shall praise me most shall find me most to fail him in time of great need; and to whom I should be most fair shall I prove most foul. Thus is it ordained."

Then Percivale's sister told them the history of the sword, which was a very strange and admirable thing to hear. More than once had it been drawn in modern times; once by Nancien, who afterwards became a hermit, and in whose hands the sword fell in half, and sorely wounded him in the foot. Afterwards it was drawn by King Pellam, and it was for this boldness that he was destined to be deeply wounded by the spear with which Balin afterwards struck him.

The knights now observed the bed more closely, and saw that above its head there hung two swords. With them were three strange spindles, one of which was white as snow, one red as blood, and one as green as emerald. As they gazed at them with curious wonder, the damsel told a strange story of the surprising things they had gazed upon. And thus her story ran.

When mother Eve gathered the fruit for which Adam and she were put out of Paradise, she took with her the bough on which the apple grew. As it kept fair and green, and she had no coffer in which to keep it, she thrust it in the earth, where, by God's will, it took root, and soon grew to a great tree, whose branches and leaves were as white as milk. But afterwards, at the time of Abel's birth, it became grass-green. It was under this tree that Cain slew Abel, and then it quickly lost its green color, and grew red as blood. So it lived and [Pg 203] thrived, and was in full life when Solomon, the wise king, came to the throne.

It came to pass that, as Solomon studied over many things, and, above all, despised women in his heart and in his writings, a voice came which told him that of his line would be born the Virgin Mary, the purest and noblest of human kind, and that afterwards would come a man, the last of his blood, as pure in mind as a young maiden, and as good a knight as Joshua of Israel. This revelation he told to his wife, who had questioned him as to the reason of his deep study.

"Sir," she said, "since this knight is to come, it is our duty to prepare for him. Therefore, I shall first have made a ship of the best and most durable wood that man may find."

This was done by Solomon's command. When the ship was built and ready to sail, she made a covering for it of cloth of silk, of such quality that no weather could rot it. And in the midst she placed a great bed, of marvellously rich workmanship, and covered with silk of the finest texture.

"Now, my dear lord," she said to Solomon, "since this last knight of your lineage is to pass in valor and renown all other knights that have been before or shall come after him, therefore I counsel you to go into the Temple of the Lord, where is the sword of the great King David, your father, which is of magic temper and virtue. Take off the pommel of this sword and make one of precious stones, skilfully wrought. And make a hilt and sheath of great richness and beauty. As for the girdle, leave that to me to provide."

[Pg 204]Solomon did as she advised, and she took the sword and laid it in the bed; but when he looked at it he grew angry, for the girdle was meanly made of hemp.

"I have nothing," she said, "fit to make a girdle worthy of such a sword. But when the time comes a maiden will change this for a girdle worthy of him that is to wear it."

This done, she went with a carpenter to the tree under which Abel was slain.

"Carve me from this tree as much wood as will make me a spindle," she said.

"Ah, madam," said he, "I dare not cut the tree which our first mother planted."

"Do as you are bidden," she ordered. "Dare not disobey me."

But as he began to cut the tree drops of blood flowed out. Then he would have fled, but she made him cut sufficient to form a spindle. Next she went to the green and the white trees, which had grown from the roots of the other, and bade him cut as much from each of these. From this wood were three spindles wrought, which she hung up at the head of the bed.

"You have done marvellously well," said Solomon, on seeing this. "Wonderful things, I deem, shall come of all this, more than you yourself dream of."

"Some of these things you shall soon know," she answered.

That night Solomon lay near the ship, and as he slept he dreamed. There came from heaven, as it seemed to him, a great company of angels, who[Pg 205] alighted in the ship, and took water that was brought by an angel in a vessel of silver, and sprinkled it everywhere. Then the angel came to the sword and drew letters on the hilt, and on the ship's bow he wrote, "You who shall enter this ship take heed of your belief," and further as the knights had read. When Solomon had read these words he drew back, and dared not enter, and there soon arose a wind which drove the ship far to sea, so that it was quickly lost to sight. Then a low voice said, "Solomon, the last knight of thy lineage shall rest in this bed." With this Solomon waked, and lo! the ship was gone.

This was the story that the fair damsel, Percivale's sister, told to the knights, as they stood curiously surveying the bed and the spindles. Then one of them lifted a cloth that lay on the deck, and under it found a purse, in which was a written paper, telling the same strange story they had just heard.

"The sword is here," said Galahad; "but where shall be found the maiden who is to make the new girdle?"

"You need not seek far," said Percivale's sister. "By God's leave, I have been chosen to make that girdle, and have it here."

Then she opened a box which she had brought with her, and took from it a girdle that was richly wrought with golden threads and studded with precious stones, while its buckle was of polished gold.

"Lo, lords and knights," she said, "here is the destined girdle. The greater part of it was made[Pg 206] of my hair, which I loved dearly when I was a woman of the world. When I knew that I was set aside for this high purpose, I cut off my hair and wrought this girdle in God's name."

"Well have you done!" cried Bors. "Without you we would have learned nothing of this high emprise."

Then the noble maiden removed the mean girdle from the sword, and put upon it the rich one she had brought, which became it wonderfully.

"By what name shall we call this sword?" they now asked her.

"Its name is," she answered, "the sword with the strange girdle; and that of the sheath is, mover of blood. But no man with blood in him shall ever see the part of the sheath that was made of the tree of life."

Then she took the sword and girded it about Galahad, fastening the golden buckle about his waist.

"Now reckon I not though I die," she said, "for I hold that I am one of the world's blessed maidens, since it has been given to me to arm the worthiest knight in the world."

After this they left the magic ship at her bidding, and entered the one in which they had come. And immediately there rose a great wind which blew their vessel from between the rocks, and carried it afar over the sea.

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CHAPTER VII.

HOW LANCELOT SAW THE SANGREAL.

The ship that bore the three knights and the maiden came ashore at length near a castle in Scotland, where they landed. From here they journeyed far, while many were their adventures, all of which tried their virtue and belonged to the quest of the Sangreal. In them all the sword with the strange girdle proved of such marvellous worth that no men, were they a hundred in number, could stand before it.

Finally they came to a castle which had the strange custom that every maiden who passed that way should yield a dish full of blood. When they asked the reason of this dreadful custom, they were told,—

"There is in this castle a lady to whom the domain belongs, and who has lain for years sick of a malady which no leech can cure. And a wise man has said that she can only be cured if she have a dish full of blood from a pure virgin and a king's daughter, with which to anoint her."

"Fair knights," said Percivale's sister, "I alone can aid the sick lady, who must die otherwise."

"If you bleed as they demand, you may die," said Galahad. "Is not your life worth more than hers?"

"This I answer," said she. "If I yield not my blood there will be mortal war between you and the knights of the castle to-morrow, and many[Pg 208] men must die that one woman may not bleed. If I die to heal the sick lady I shall gain renown and do God's will, and surely one harm is better than many. That you will fight for me to the death, I know, but wherefore should you?"

Say what they would, she held to her will, and the next morning bade the people of the castle bring forth the sick lady. She lay in great pain and suffering, and bent her eyes pleadingly on the devoted maiden.

Then Percivale's sister bared her arm, and bade them bleed her. This they did till a silver dish was filled with her life blood. Then she blessed the lady, and said,—

"Madam, I have given my life for yours; for God's love, pray for me!" and she fell in a swoon.

Galahad and his fellows hastened to stanch the blood, but it was too late, her life was ebbing fast.

"Fair brother Percivale," she said, "death is upon me. But before I die I have this to tell you. It is written that I shall not be buried in this country. When I am dead, seek you the sea-shore near by, and put my body in a boat, and let it go where fortune bears it. But when you three arrive at the city of Sarras, in Palestine, which you will in God's good time, you shall find me arrived there before you. There bury me in consecrated soil. This further I may say, that there the holy Grail shall be achieved, and there shall Galahad die and be buried in the same place."

And as they stood there weeping beside her a voice came to them, saying,—

[Pg 209]"Lords and comrades, to-morrow at sunrise you three must depart, each taking his own way, and you shall not meet again till adventure bring you to the maimed king."

After that all was done as had been foreseen and desired. The maiden died, and the same day the sick lady was healed, through the virtue of her blood. Then Percivale wrote a letter telling who she was and what things she had done. This he put in her right hand, and laid her body in a vessel that was covered with black silk. The wind now arose and drove it far from the land, while all stood watching it till it was out of sight.

Then they returned towards the castle. But suddenly a tempest of wind, thunder, and rain broke from the sky, so furious that the very earth seemed to be torn up. And as they looked they saw the turrets of the castle and part of its walls totter and fall, and in a moment come crashing in ruin to the earth.

That night they slept in a chapel, and in the morning rode to the castle, to see how it had fared in the storm. But when they reached it they found it in ruins, while of all that had dwelt there not one was left alive. All of them, man and woman alike, had fallen victims to the vengeance of God. And they heard a voice that said,—

"This vengeance is for the shedding of maidens' blood."

But at the end of the chapel was a church-yard in which were threescore tombs, over which it seemed no tempest had passed. And in these lay all the maidens who had shed their blood and [Pg 210] died martyrs for the sick lady's sake. On these were their names and lineage, and all were of royal blood, and twelve of them kings' daughters.

The knights turned away, marvelling much at what they had seen and heard.

"Here we must part," said Galahad. "Let us pray that we may soon meet again."

Then they kissed each other, and wept at the parting, and each rode his own way into the forest before them.

But we must now leave them and return to Lancelot, whom we left sorely repentant of his sins. After he departed from the hermitage he rode through many lands and had divers adventures, and in the end came to the sea-shore, beside which he lay down and slept.

In his slumber, words came to his ear, saying, "Lancelot, rise and take thine armor, and enter into the first ship that thou shalt find." On hearing these words he started up, and saw that all about him was strangely clear, the skies giving out a light like that of midday. Then he blessed himself, and took his arms, and advanced to the strand, where he saw a ship without sails or oars. This he entered, as he had been bidden, and when he was within it his heart was filled with such joy as he had never before known.

Naught had he ever thought of or desired but what seemed come to him now, and in his gladness he returned thanks fervently to the Lord.

"I know not what has happened to me," he said, "but such joy as I feel I never dreamed the human heart could hold."

[Pg 211]Then he lay down and slept on the ship's deck, and when he woke the night had passed and it was broad day.

And in the ship he found a bed, whereon lay a dead lady, with a letter in her right hand which Lancelot read. From this he learned that the fair corpse was that of Percivale's sister, together with many of the strange things that had happened to her and the chosen knights.

For a month or more Lancelot abode in this ship, driven about the seas, and sustained by no food, but by the grace of the Holy Ghost, for he prayed fervently for God's aid night and morning.

At length came a night when the ship touched the shore. Here he landed, being somewhat weary of the deck. And as he stood on the strand he heard a horse approach, and soon one rode by that seemed a knight.

When he came to the ship he checked his horse and alighted. Then, taking the saddle and bridle from the horse, he turned it free and entered the ship. Lancelot, in surprise, drew near.

"Fair knight," he said, "I know not who you are or why you come. But since you seek passage on my ship you are welcome."

The other saluted him in turn, and asked,—

"What is your name? I pray you, tell me, for my heart warms strangely towards you."

"My name is Lancelot du Lake."

"Then are we well met indeed. You are my father."

"Ah! then you are Galahad?"

"Yes, truly," and as he spoke he took off his[Pg 212] helm, and kneeled, and asked his blessing.

Joyful indeed was that meeting, and gladly there father and son communed, telling each other all that had happened to them since they left the court. When Galahad saw the dead maiden he knew her well, and told his father the story of the sword, at which he marvelled greatly.

"Truly, Galahad," he said, "I never heard of aught so strange, and can well believe you were born for wondrous deeds."

Afterwards for nearly half a year the father and son dwelt together within that ship, serving God day and night with prayer and praise. Now they touched on peopled shores, and now on desert islands where only wild beasts abode, and perilous and strange adventures they met. But these we shall not tell, since they had naught to do with the Sangreal.

But at length came a Monday morning when the ship touched shore at the edge of a forest, before a cross, where they saw a knight armed all in white, and leading a white horse. He saluted them courteously, and said,—

"Galahad, you have been long enough with your father. You must now leave the ship, and take this horse, and ride whither destiny shall lead you in the quest of the Sangreal."

Hearing this command, Galahad kissed his father, and bade him farewell, saying,—

"Dear father, I know not if we shall ever meet again."

"Then I bid you," said Lancelot, "to pray to the great Father that He hold me in His service."

[Pg 213]There came in answer a mysterious voice that spoke these words,—

"Think each to do well; for you shall never see each other till the dreadful day of doom."

This voice of destiny affected them greatly, and they bade each other a tearful farewell, Lancelot begging again the prayers of his son in his behalf. Then Galahad mounted the white horse and rode into the forest, while a wind arose which blew the ship from shore, and for a month drove it up and down the seas.

But at length came a night when it touched shore on the rear side of a fair and stately castle. Brightly shone the moon, and Lancelot saw an open postern in which stood on guard two great lions. As he looked he heard a voice.

"Lancelot," it said, "leave this ship and enter the castle. There shalt thou see a part of that which thou desirest."

Lancelot at this armed himself and went to the gate, where the lions rose rampant against him. With an instinct of fear he drew his sword, but at that instant appeared a dwarf, who struck him on the arm so sharply that the sword fell from his hand.

"Oh, man of evil hope and weak belief," came the mysterious voice, "trust you more in your armor than in your Maker? Does He who brought you here need a sword for your protection?"

"Truly am I reprov'd," said Lancelot. "Happy am I to be held the Lord's ward and servant."

He took up his sword and put it in the sheath, then made a cross on his forehead, and advanced[Pg 214] to the lions, which raged and showed their teeth as if ready to rend him in pieces. Yet with a bold step and tranquil mien he passed between them unhurt, and entered the castle.

Through it he went, room by room, passage by passage, for every door stood wide and no living being met him as he advanced. Finally he came to a chamber whose door was closed, and which yielded not to his hand when he sought to open it. He tried again with all his force, but the door resisted his strength.

Then he listened, and heard a voice that sang more sweetly than he had ever heard. And the words seemed to him to be, "Joy and honor be to the Father of Heaven!"

Lancelot no longer sought to open the door, but kneeled before it, feeling in his heart that the Sangreal was within that chamber.

"Sweet Father Jesus," he prayed, "if ever I did aught in thy service, in pity forgive me my sins, and show me something of that which I seek."

As he prayed the door opened without hands, and from the room came a light brighter than if all the torches of the world had been there. He rose in joy to enter, but the voice spoke sternly in his ear,—

"Forbear, Lancelot, and seek not to enter here. If you enter, you shall repent it dearly."

Then he drew back hastily, and looked into the chamber, where he saw a table of silver, on which was the holy vessel covered with red samite, with angels about it, one of which held a burning candle of wax, and one a cross. And before the holy[Pg 215] vessel stood a priest, who seemed to be serving the mass. In front of the priest appeared to be three men, two of whom put the youngest between the priest's hands, who held him up high as if to show him. Yet so heavy seemed the figure that the priest appeared ready to fall with weakness, and with a sudden impulse Lancelot rushed into the room, crying, "Fair Lord Jesus, hold it no sin that I help the good man, who seems in utmost need."

But as he rashly entered and came towards the table of silver, a breath that seemed half fire smote him so hotly in the face that he fell heavily to the earth, and lay like one bereft of all his senses. Then many hands seemed to take him up, and bear him without the door, where he lay to all seeming dead.

When morning dawned he was found there by the people of the castle, who marvelled how he got there, and could not be sure if he were dead or alive. But they laid him in a bed, and watched him closely, for days passed without signs of life or death. At length, on the twenty-fifth day, he gave a deep sigh, and opened his eyes, and gazed in wonder on the people about him.

"Why have you wakened me?" he cried. "Why left you me not to my blessed visions?"

"What have you seen?" they asked, eagerly.

"Such marvels as no tongue can tell nor ear understand," he said. "And more had I seen but that my son was here before me. For God's love, gentlemen, tell me where I am."

"Sir, you are in the castle of Carbonek."

"I thank God of His great mercy for what I[Pg 216] have seen," he said. "Now may I leave the quest of the Sangreal, for more of it shall I never see, and few men living shall see so much."

These words said, he arose and dressed in new clothing that they brought him, and stood in his old strength and beauty before the people.

"Sir Lancelot!" they cried, "is it you?"

"Truly so," he answered.

Then word was brought to King Pellam, the maimed king, who now dwelt in that castle, that the knight who had lain so long between death and life was Lancelot. Glad was the king to hear this, and he bade them bring Lancelot to him.

"Long has my daughter Elaine been dead," he said. "But happy she lived in having been loved by you, and in the grace of her noble son Galahad."

"I was but cold to her," answered Lancelot, "for she was a lovable lady. But in truth I have been held from love and life's delights, for my fate has not been my own to control."

For four days he abode at the castle, and then took his armor and horse, saying that now his quest of the Sangreal was done, and duty bade him return to Camelot.

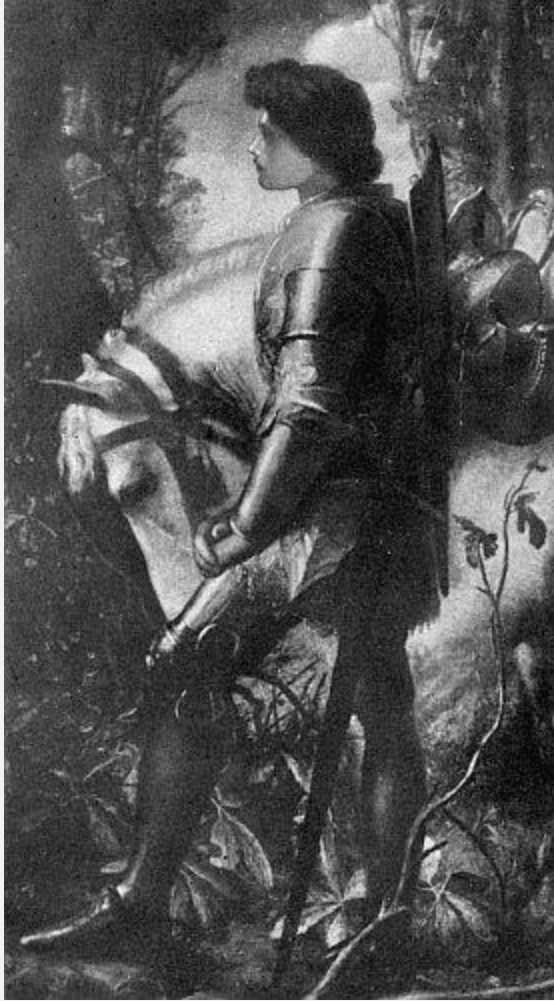
Back through many realms he rode, and in time came to the abbey where Galahad had won the white shield. Here he spent the night, and the next day rode into Camelot, where he was received with untold joy by Arthur and the queen.

For of the Knights of the Round Table who had set out on that perilous quest more than half had perished, and small was the tale of that gallant fellowship that could now be mustered. So the coming of Lancelot filled all hearts with joy.

Great was the marvel of the king when Lancelot told him of what he had seen and done, and of the adventures of Galahad, Percivale, and Bors.

"God send that they were all here again," said the king.

"That shall never be," said Lancelot. "One of them shall come again, but two you shall never see."



From the painting by George Frederick Watts.

SIR GALAHAD'S QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEEDS OF THE THREE CHOSEN KNIGHTS.

After Galahad left the ship and his father Lancelot, he rode far and had many adventures, righting many wrongs and achieving many marvels. Among these he came to the abbey where was the ancient King Evelake, who had laid blind three hundred years, as we have elsewhere told.

The old king knew well that his deliverance had come, and begged to be embraced by the pious youth. No sooner had he been clasped in his arms than his sight returned, and his flesh grew whole and young.

"Now, sweet Saviour, my destiny is fulfilled; receive thou my soul," he prayed.

As he said these words the soul left his body, and the miracle of his fate was achieved.

Many days after this Galahad met Percivale,[Pg 218] and soon the two came upon Bors, as he rode out of a great forest, that extended many days' journey through the land.

And so they rode in glad companionship, with many a tale of marvel to tell, till in time they came to the castle of Carbonek, where they were gladly received, for those in the castle knew that the quest of the Sangreal was now wellnigh achieved.

When evening approached, and the table for supper was set, the mysterious voice that so often had guided these knights spoke again.

"They that are not worthy to sit at the table of Jesus Christ arise," it said; "for now shall the worthiest be fed."

Then all arose save Eliazar, the son of King Pellam, and a maid who was his niece, and the three knights. But as they sat at supper nine other knights, in full armor, entered at the hall door, and took off their helmets and armor, and said to Galahad,—

"Sir, we have come far and in haste to be with you at this table, where the holy meat shall be served."

"If you are worthy, you are welcome," said Galahad. "Whence come you?"

Three of them answered that they were from Gaul, three from Ireland, and three from Denmark, and that they had come thither at the bidding of the strange voice.

So they all sat at table. But ere they began to eat, four gentlewomen bore into the hall a bed, whereon lay a man sick, with a crown of gold on his head. Setting him down, they went away.

[Pg 219]"Galahad, holy knight, you are welcome," said he who lay in the bed, raising his head feebly. "Long have I waited your coming, in pain and anguish, since Balin, the good knight, struck me the dolorous stroke. To you I look for aid and release from my long suffering."

Then spoke the voice again: "There be those here who are not in the quest of the Sangreal; let them depart." And the son and niece of the king rose and left the room.

Then there came suddenly four angels, and a man who bore a cross and wore the dress of a bishop, whom the angels placed in a chair before the silver table of the Sangreal.

In his forehead were letters which said, "This is Joseph, the first bishop of Christendom."

Next opened the chamber door, and angels entered, two bearing wax candles, the third a towel, and the fourth a spear that bled, the blood drops falling into a silver vessel which he held in his other hand. The candles were set on the table, the towel spread upon the vessel, and the spear set upright on this.

The bishop then said mass, at which other strange signs were seen; for a figure like a child, with a face that shone like flame, entered into the bread of the sacrament. Then the bishop kissed Galahad, and bade him kiss his fellows. This done, he said,—

"Servants of Jesus Christ, ye shall here be fed on such meats as never knights tasted;" and with these words he vanished.

But as they knelt in prayer before the table,[Pg 220] they saw come out of the holy vessel a man who bore all the signs of the passion of Jesus Christ. And he took up the vessel and bore it to Galahad and to the other knights, who kneeled to receive the sacrament; and so sweet was it that their hearts marvelled and were filled with joy.

"Now have you tasted of Christ's own food," he said, "and seen what you highly and holily desired. But more openly shall you see it in the city of Sarras, in the spiritual place. Therefore you must go hence, for this night the holy vessel will leave this realm, and will never more be seen here. To-morrow you three shall go to the sea, where a ship awaits you; and you must take with you the sword with the strange girdle."

"Shall not these good knights go also?" asked Galahad.

"Not so. They have seen all that is fitting to them. As for you, two of you shall die in my service, and the third shall return and tell what he has seen."

Then he gave them his blessing, and vanished from out their midst.

When they had somewhat recovered from the weight of these marvels, Galahad went to the spear that lay on the table, and touched the blood with his fingers, and with it anointed the wounds of the maimed king. And at this touch he started up whole and strong, thanking God fervently for his healing.

But he went not into the world again, but to a monastery of white monks, where he became a man of holy renown.

[Pg 221]At midnight came a voice to the nine knights, which said,—

"My sons, and not my chieftains; my friends, and not my warriors; go ye hence, and do well what comes to you, in my service."

"Lord," they replied, "wilt thou vouchsafe also to call us thy sinners? Thy servants we shall be henceforth."

And they arose, armed, and departed, bidding a solemn adieu to the three knights. When morning dawned these three rose also, and rode till they came to the sea. Here awaited them the ship wherein they had found the sword and the three magic spindles, and to their wonder and delight they beheld in its midst the table of silver and the Sangreal, which was covered with red samite.

It was a joyous company that sailed over the sea in that magical ship, and at the wish of his comrades Galahad slept in the bed where the sword had lain, and Bors and Percivale on the deck beside him.

And so they went by day and by night, and at length came to the city of Sarras. Here, as they would have landed, they saw beside them, just come to shore, the ship that bore the corpse of Percivale's sister, and this as fair and as fresh as when first placed within it.

Then they took up the silver table and bore it to the city, at whose gate sat an old and crooked cripple.

"Come hither, and help us carry this heavy thing," said Galahad.

"How shall I do that? I have not gone for ten years without crutches."

[Pg 222]"No matter for that. Show your good will by trying."

Then the cripple rose and took hold, and in that instant he was whole and strong, and helped them bear the table to the palace. This done, they returned, and bore to the palace the corpse of Percivale's sister, which they placed in a rich tomb, suited to a king's daughter.

Meanwhile the report had spread through the city that a cripple had been made whole by three strange knights, and people flocked to see them.

When the king of the city saw and heard all this, he came to the knights and asked them who they were, and what it was they had brought into his realm.

Galahad answered him, telling of the marvel of the Sangreal, and of God's power and grace therein.

But the king, Estorause, a tyrant in will and a pagan in faith, heard this with wrath and unbelief, and ordered the knights to be put in prison as spies and felons.

For a whole year they lay thus in prison, yet were always kept whole and in good spirits; for the holy Sangreal came to them in their dungeons, and filled their souls with joy. When the year ended, Estorause grew sick unto death, and in remorse sent for the

imprisoned knights, whose pardon and forgiveness he fervently begged. This they gave him, and he straightway died.

His death threw the city into dismay, for he had left no successor to the throne. But as the lords sat in council there came a voice that bade[Pg 223] them choose the youngest of the three knights for their king. This mysterious behest was told to the citizens, and with one acclaim they hailed it as God's will, and demanded Galahad as their king.

Thereupon he became king of Sarras, though it was not his wish; but he felt it to be God's command. And when he came to the throne he had constructed a chest of gold and precious stones, in which was placed the table of silver with the holy vessel, and before this the three knights kneeled and prayed daily with fervent zeal.

And so time rolled on till came the day that was the anniversary of that in which Galahad had taken the crown. On this morning he rose betimes, and before the holy vessel he saw a man dressed like a bishop, while round about him was a great fellowship of angels.

"Come forth, thou servant of Jesus Christ, and thou shalt see what thou hast so much desired," said the bishop.

Then Galahad began to tremble, his flesh quaking in the presence of things spiritual. And he held his hands up towards heaven, saying,—

"Lord, I thank thee, for now my desire is fulfilled. And if it be thy will that I should come to thee, I wish no longer to live."

"I am Joseph of Arimathea," said the strange presence, "and am sent by the Lord to bear thee fellowship. Thou resembllest me in two things; for thou hast seen the highest marvel of the Sangreal, and are pure of heart and of body. Now say farewell to thy comrades, for thy time is come to depart."

[Pg 224]Galahad thereupon went to Percivale and Bors, and kissed them, and commended them to God, saying to Bors,—

"Fair friend, who art destined to return to our native realm, salute for me my lord and father Lancelot, and bid him remember the evils of this unstable world, and bear in mind the duty he has been taught."

Then he kneeled before the table and prayed fervently, and suddenly his soul departed from his body, a multitude of angels bearing it visibly upward toward heaven, in full view of his late comrades. Also they saw come from heaven a hand, with no body visible, and take up the holy vessel and the spear, and bear them to heaven. And from that moment no man ever saw on earth again the blessed Sangreal.

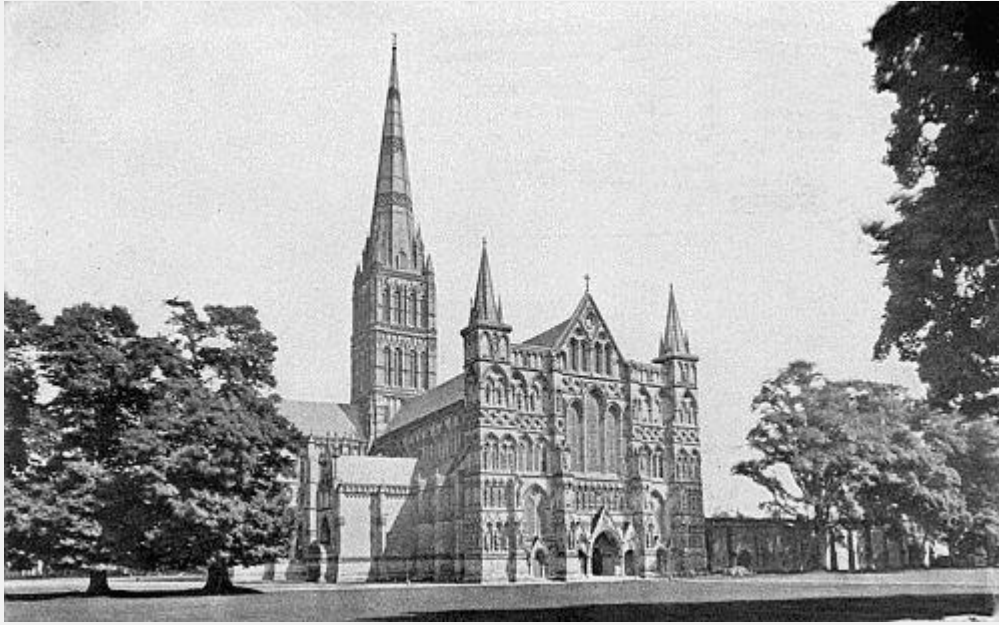
Afterwards Galahad's body was buried with great honor, and with many tears from his two fellows and from the people whom he had governed. Then Percivale betook him to a hermitage, and entered upon a religious life; while Bors stayed with him, but in secular clothing, for it was his purpose to return to England.

For a year and two months Percivale lived thus the holy life of a hermit, and then he passed out of this world, and was buried by Bors—who mourned him as deeply as ever man was mourned—beside his sister and Galahad. This pious office performed, Sir Bors, the last of the three chosen knights, felt that his duty in that land was at an end, and thereupon took ship at the city of Sarras and sailed for the realm of England, where he in good season[Pg 225] arrived. Here he took horse and rode in all haste to Camelot, where King Arthur and the court then were, and where he was received with the greatest joy and wonder, for so long had it been since any man there had set eyes on him, that all believed him to be dead.

But greater than their wonder was their admiration when the returned knight told the story of miracle and adventure which had befallen him and his two comrades, and the pious maid, Percivale's sister, and of the holy life and death of Galahad and Percivale. This marvellous narrative the king had told again to skilled clerks, that they might put upon record the wonderful deeds of these good knights. And it was all written down in great books, which were put in safe keeping at Salisbury.

Bors then gave to Lancelot the message which his son had sent him, and Lancelot took him in his arms, saying, "Gentle cousin, gladly do I welcome you again. Never while we live shall we part, but shall ever be true friends and brothers while life may last to us."

And thus came to an end the marvellous and unparalleled adventure of the Holy Grail.



SALISBURY

CATHEDRAL.

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BOOK X.

THE LOVE OF LANCELOT AND GUENEVER.

CHAPTER I.

THE POISONING OF SIR PATRISE.

After the quest of the Sangreal was ended, and all the knights who were left alive had come again to Camelot, there was great joy in the court, with feasts and merrymakings, that this fortunate remnant might find a glad welcome. Above all, King Arthur and Queen Guenever were full of joy in the return of Lancelot and Bors, both from the love they bore them and the special honor they had gained in the quest.

But, as is man's way, holy thoughts vanished with the holy task that gave them rise, the knights went back to their old fashions and frailties, and in Lancelot's heart his earthly

love for the queen soon rose again, and his love of heaven and holy thoughts grew dim as the days went by. Alas that it should have been so! for such an unholy passion could but lead to harm. To fatal ills, indeed, it led, and to the end of Arthur's reign and of the worshipful fellowship of the Table Round, as it is our sorrowful duty now to tell.

All this began in the scandal that was raised in the court by the close companionship between[Pg 227] Lancelot and the queen. Whisper of this secret talk at length came to that good knight's ears, and he withdrew from Queen Guenever as much as he could, giving himself to the society of other ladies of the court, with design to overcome the evil activity of slanderous tongues.

This withdrawal filled the queen with jealous anger, and she accused him bitterly of coldness in his love.

"Madam," said Lancelot, "only that love for you clung desperately to my heart, and drove out heavenly thoughts, I should have gained as great honor in the quest of the Sangreal as even my son Galahad. My love is still yours, but I fear to show it, for there are those of the court who love me not, such as Agravaine and Mordred, and these evil-thinking knights are spreading vile reports wherever they may. It is for this I make show of delight in other ladies' society, to cheat the bitter tongue of slander."

To this the queen listened with heaving breast and burning cheek. But at the end she burst into bitter tears and sobs, and wept so long that Lancelot stood in dismay. When she could speak, she called him recreant and false, declared she should never love him more, and bade him leave the court, and on pain of his head never come near her again.

This filled the faithful lover with the deepest grief and pain; yet there was anger, too, for he felt that the queen had shut her ears to reason, and had let causeless jealousy blind her. So, without further words, he turned and sought his room, prepared to leave the court. He sent for Hector, Bors,[Pg 228] and Lionel, and told them what had happened, and that he intended to leave England and return to his native land.

"If you take my advice you will do nothing so rash," said Bors. "Know you not that women are hasty to act, and quick to repent? This is not the first time the queen has been angry with you; nor will her repentance be a new experience."

"You speak truly," said Lancelot. "I will ride, therefore, to the hermitage of Brasias, near Windsor, and wait there till I hear from you if my lady Guenever changes her mood. I pray you do your best to get me her love again."

"That needs no prayer. Well you know I will do my utmost in your behalf."

Then Lancelot departed in haste, none but Bors knowing whither he had gone. But the queen showed no sign of sorrow at his going, however deeply she may have felt it in

her heart. In countenance she remained serene and proud, as though the world went well with her, and her heart was free from care.

Her desire, indeed, to show that she took as much joy in the society of other knights as in that of Lancelot led to a woful and perilous event, which we have next to describe. For she gave a private dinner, to which she invited Gawaine and his brethren and other knights, to the number of twenty-four in all. A rich feast it was, with all manner of dainties and rare devices. Much was the joy and merriment of the feasting knights.

As it happened, Gawaine had a great love for fruits, especially apples and pears, which he ate[Pg 229] daily at dinner and supper; and all who invited him to dine took care to provide his favorite fruits. This the queen failed not to do. But there was at the feast an enemy of Gawaine's, named Pinel le Savage, who was a cousin of Lamorak de Galis, and had long hated Gawaine for the murder of that noble knight.

To obtain revenge on him, Pinel poisoned some of the apples, feeling sure that only Gawaine would eat them. But by unlucky chance a knight named Patrise, cousin to Mador de la Porte, eat one of the poisoned apples. So deadly was the venom that in a moment he was in agony, and very soon it so filled his veins that he fell dead from his seat.

Then was terror and wrath, as the knights sprang in haste and turmoil from their seats. For they saw that Patrise had been poisoned, and suspicion naturally fell upon the queen, the giver of the feast.

"My lady, the queen," cried Gawaine in anger, "what thing is this we see? This fate, I deem, was meant for me, since the fruit was provided for my taste. Madam, what shall I think? Has this good knight taken on himself the death that was intended to be mine?"

The queen made no answer, being so confused and terrified that she knew not what to say.

"This affair shall not end here," cried Mador de la Porte in great wrath. "Here lies a noble knight of my near kindred, slain by poison and treason. For this I shall have revenge to the utterance. Queen Guenever, I hold you guilty of the murder of my cousin, Sir Patrise. I demand from the laws of the realm and the justice of our lord the king[Pg 230] redress for this deed. A knight like this shall not fall unrevenged, while I can wield spear or hold sword."

The queen, at this hot accusation, looked appealingly from face to face; but all stood grave and silent, for greatly they suspected her of the crime. Then, seeing that she had not a friend in the room, she burst into a passion of tears, and at length fell to the floor in a swoon.

The story of this sad business soon spread through the court, and quickly came to the ears of the king, who hastened to the banqueting hall full of trouble at what he had heard. When Mador saw him, he again bitterly accused the queen of treason,—as murder of all kinds was then called.

"This is a serious affair," said the king, gravely. "I, as a rightful judge, cannot take the matter into my own hands, or I would do battle in this cause myself, for I know well that my wife is wrongly accused. To burn a queen on a hasty accusation of crime is no light matter, though you may deem it so, Sir Mador; and if you demand the combat, fear not but a knight will be found to meet you in the lists."

"My gracious lord," said Mador, "you must hold me excused, for though you are our king, you are a knight also, and held by knightly rules. Therefore, be not displeased with me, for all the knights here suspect the queen of this crime. What say you, my lords?"

"The dinner was made by the queen," they answered. "She or her servants must be held guilty of the crime."

[Pg 231] "I gave this dinner with a good will, and with no thought of evil," said the queen, sadly. "May God help me as an innocent woman, and visit this murder on the base head of him who committed it. My king and husband, to God I appeal for right and justice."

"And justice I demand," said Mador, "and require the king to name a day in which this wrong can be righted."

"Be it so, then," said the king. "Fifteen days hence be thou ready armed on horseback in the meadow beside Winchester. If there be a knight there to meet you, then God speed the right. If none meet you, then my queen must suffer the penalty of the law."

When Arthur and the queen had departed, he asked her how this case befell.

"God help me if I know," she answered.

"Where is Lancelot?" asked the king. "If he were here, he would do battle for you."

"I know not," she replied. "His kinsmen say he has left the land."

"How cometh it," said the king, "that you cannot keep Lancelot by your side? If he were here your case would be won. Sir Bors will do battle in his place, I am sure. Go seek him and demand his aid."

This the queen did, begging Bors to act as her champion; but he, as one of the knights who had been at the dinner, demurred, and accused her of having driven Lancelot from the country by her scorn and jealousy.

Then she knelt and begged his aid, and the king,[Pg 232] coming in, also requested his assistance, for he was now sure the queen had been unjustly defamed.

"My lord," answered Bors, "it is a great thing you require of me, for if I grant your request I will affront many of my Round Table comrades. Yet for your and Lancelot's sake I will be the queen's champion on the day appointed, unless it may happen that a better knight than I come to do battle for her."

"Will you promise me this, on your faith?" asked the king.

"I shall not fail you," said Bors. "If a better knight than I come, the battle shall be his. If not, I will do what I can."

This promise gladdened the king and queen, who thanked Bors heartily, and were filled with hope, for they trusted greatly in this good knight's prowess and skill.

Bors, however, had other thoughts than they dreamed of, and left the court secretly, riding to the hermitage of Brasias, where he found Lancelot and told him of what had occurred.

"This happens well," said Lancelot. "The queen shall not suffer. Do you make ready for the battle, but tarry and delay, if I am not there, as much as you may, till I arrive. Mador is a hot knight, and will be hasty to battle. Bid him cool his haste."

"Leave that to me," said Bors. "Doubt not that it will go as you wish."

Meanwhile the news spread throughout the court that Bors had taken on himself the queen's championship. This displeased the most of the knights,[Pg 233] for suspicion of the queen was general. On his return many of his fellows accused him hotly of taking on himself a wrongful quarrel.

"Shall we see the queen of our great lord King Arthur brought to shame?" he demanded. "To whom in the world do we owe more?"

"We love and honor our king as much as you do," they answered. "But we cannot love a destroyer of knights, as Queen Guenever has proved herself."

"Fair sirs," said Bors, "you speak hastily, methinks. At all times, so far as I know, she has been a maintainer, not a destroyer, of knights, and has been free with gifts and open-handed in bounty to all of knightly fame. This you cannot gainsay, nor will I suffer the wife of our noble king to be shamefully slain. She is not guilty of Sir Patrise's death, for she never bore him ill will, nor any other at that dinner. It was for good will she invited us there, and I doubt not her innocence will be proved; for howsoever the game goeth, take my word for it, some other than she is guilty of that murder."

This some began to believe, convinced by his words, but others still held their displeasure, believing the queen guilty.

When at length the day that had been fixed for the battle came, there was a great gathering of knights and people in the meadow beside Winchester, where the combat was to take place. But many shuddered when they saw another thing, for an iron stake was erected, and fagots heaped round[Pg 234] it, for the burning of the queen should Mador win the fight.

Such, indeed, was the custom of those days. Neither for favor, for love, nor for kindred could any but righteous judgment be given, as well upon a king as upon a knight, upon a queen as upon a poor lady, and death at the stake was the penalty for those convicted of murder.

Now there rode into the lists Sir Mador de la Porte, and took oath before the king that he held the queen to be guilty of the death of Sir Patrise, and would prove it with his body against any one who should say to the contrary.

Sir Bors followed, and made oath as the queen's champion that he held her guiltless, and would prove it with his body, unless a better knight came to take the battle on him.

"Make ready then," said Mador, "and we shall prove which is in the right, you or I."

"You are a good knight, Sir Mador," said Bors, "but I trust that God will give this battle to justice, not to prowess."

He continued to talk and to make delay till Mador called out impatiently,—

"It seems to me that we waste time and weather. Either come and do battle at once, or else say nay."

"I am not much given to say nay," answered Bors. "Take your horse and make ready. I shall not tarry long, I promise you."

Then each departed to his tent, and in a little while Mador came into the field with his shield on his shoulder and his spear in his hand. But he waited in vain for Bors.

[Pg 235]"Where is your champion?" cried Mador to the king. "Bid him come forth if he dare!"

When this was told to Bors he was ashamed to delay longer, and mounted his horse and rode to his appointed place. But as he did so he saw a knight, mounted on a white horse, and bearing a shield of strange device, emerge from a neighboring wood, and come up at all speed. He continued his course till he came to Sir Bors.

"Be not displeased, fair knight," he said, "if I claim this battle. I have ridden far this day to have it, as I promised you when we spoke last. And for what you have done I thank you."

Then Bors rode to the king and told him that a knight had come who would do battle for the queen and relieve him from the championship.

"What knight is this?" asked the king.

"All I may say is that he covenanted to be here to-day. He has kept his word, and I am discharged."

"How is this?" demanded Arthur. "Sir knight, do you truly desire to do battle for the queen?"

"For that, and that alone, came I hither," answered the knight. "And I beg that there be no delay, for when this battle is ended I must depart in haste on other duties. I hold it a dishonor to all those knights of the Round Table that they can stand and see so noble a lady and courteous a queen as Queen Guenever rebuked and shamed among them all. Therefore I stand as her champion."

Then all marvelled what knight this could be, for none suspected him. But Mador cried impatiently to the king,—

[Pg 236]"We lose time here. If this knight, whoever he be, will have ado with me, it is time to end words and begin deeds."

"You are hot, Sir Mador. Take care that your valor be not cooled," said the other.

They now moved to their appointed stations, and there couched their spears and rode together with all the speed of their chargers. Mador's spear broke, but the spear of his opponent held, and bore him and his horse backward to the earth.

But he sprang lightly from the saddle, and drew his sword, challenging the victor to do battle with him on foot. This the other knight did, springing quickly to the ground, and drawing his sword. Then they came eagerly to the combat, and for the space of near an hour fought with the fury of wild beasts, for Mador was a strong knight, proved in many battles.

But at last the strange champion struck his opponent a blow that brought him to the earth. He stepped near him to hurl him flat, but at that instant Mador suddenly rose. As he did so he struck upward with his sword, and ran the other through the thick of the thigh, so that the blood flowed freely.

When he felt himself wounded he stepped back in a rage, and grasping his sword struck Mador a two-handed blow that hurled him flat to the earth. Then he sprang upon him to pull off his helm.

"I yield me!" cried Mador. "Spare my life, and I release the queen."

"I shall not grant your life," said the other,[Pg 237] "only on condition that you freely withdraw this accusation from the queen, and that no charge against her be made on Sir Patrise's tomb."

"All this shall be done. I have lost, and adjudge her innocent."

The knights-parters of the lists now took up Sir Mador and bore him to his tent. The other knight went to the foot of King Arthur's seat. By that time the queen had come thither also, and was heartily kissed by her overjoyed lord. Then king and queen alike thanked the victor knight, and prayed him to take off his helmet, and drink some wine for refreshment. This he did, and on the instant a loud shout went up from all present, for they recognized the noble face of Lancelot du Lake.

"Sir Lancelot!" cried the king. "Never were you more heartily welcome. Deep thanks I and Queen Guenever owe you for your noble labor this day in our behalf."

"My lord Arthur," said Lancelot, "I would shame myself should I ever fail to do battle for you both. It was you who gave me the high honor of knighthood. And on the day you made me knight I lost my sword through haste, and the lady your queen found it and gave it me when I had need of it, and so saved me from disgrace among the knights. On that day I promised her to be ever her knight in right or wrong."

"Your goodness merits reward," said the king, "and therein I shall not fail you."

But as the queen gazed on Lancelot, tears came to her eyes, and she wept so tenderly that she almost sank to the ground from sorrow and remorse[Pg 238] at her unkindness to him who had done her such noble service.

Now the knights of his blood came around Lancelot in the greatest joy, and all the Knights of the Round Table after them, glad to welcome him.

And in the days that followed Lancelot was cured of his wound, and Mador put under the care of skilful leeches, while great joy and gladness reigned in the court for the happy issue of that combat which had promised so fatal an ending.

About this time it befell that Nimue, the damsel of the lake, came to the court, she who knew so many things by her power of enchantment, and had such great love for Arthur and his knights. When the story of the death of Sir Patrise and the peril of the queen was told her, she answered openly that the queen had been falsely accused, and that the real murderer was Sir Pinel, who had poisoned the apples to destroy Gawaine, in

revenge for the murder of Lamorak. This story was confirmed when Pinel fled hastily from the court, for then all saw clearly that Guenever was innocent of the crime.

The slain knight was buried in the church of Westminster, and on his tomb was written,—

"Here lieth Sir Patrise of Ireland, slain by Sir Pinel le Savage, through poisoned apples intended for Sir Gawaine." And to this was added the story of how Guenever the queen had been charged with that crime, and had been cleared in the combat by Sir Lancelot du Lake, her champion.

All this was written on the tomb, to clear the queen's good fame. And daily and long Sir Mador sued the queen to have her good grace again. At length, by means of Lancelot, he was forgiven, and entered again into the grace of king and queen. Thus once more peace and good-will were restored to Camelot.

[Pg 239]

CHAPTER II.

THE LILY MAID OF ASTOLAT.

It came to pass that, within fifteen days of the Feast of the Assumption, King Arthur announced that a great tournament would be held on that day at Camelot, where he and the king of Scots would hold the lists against all who should come. This tidings went far, and there came to Camelot many noble knights, among them the king of North Wales, King Anguish of Ireland, the king with the hundred knights, Sir Galahalt the high prince, and other kings, dukes, and earls.

But when Arthur was ready to ride from London, where he then was, to Camelot, the queen begged to be excused from going with him, saying that she was not well. Lancelot, too, would not go, on the plea that he was not well of the wound which Sir Mador had given him. So the king set out in grief and anger, for the absence of his wife and Lancelot tried him sorely. On his way to Camelot he lodged in a town named Astolat, which[Pg 240] is now known as Gilford, and here he remained for several days.

But hardly had he departed before the queen sought Lancelot, and blamed him severely for not going with the king, saying that he thus exposed her to slander.

"Madam, your wisdom comes somewhat late. Why gave you not this advice sooner?" said Lancelot. "I will go, since you command it; but I warn you that at the jousts I will fight against the king and his party."

"Fight as you will, but go," said Guenever. "If you take my counsel, however, you will keep with your king and your kindred."

"Be not displeased with me, madam," said Lancelot. "I will do as God wills, and that, I fear, will be to fight against the king's party."

So the knight took horse and rode to Astolat, and here in the evening he obtained quarters in the mansion of an old baron, named Sir Bernard of Astolat. It happened that this mansion was near the quarters of the king, who, as in the dusk he walked in the castle garden, saw Lancelot draw near to Sir Bernard's door, and recognized him.

"Aha!" said the king, "is that the game? That gives me comfort. I shall have one knight in the lists who will do his duty nobly."

"Who is that?" asked those with him.

"Ask me not now," said the king, smiling. "You may learn later."

Meanwhile Lancelot was hospitably received by the old baron, though the latter knew not his guest.

"Dear sir," said Lancelot to his host, "I thank[Pg 241] you for your kindness, and I shall owe you deeper thanks if you will lend me a shield. Mine is too well known, and I wish to fight in disguise."

"That shall I willingly," answered his host. "I have two sons who were lately knighted, and the elder, Sir Tirre, has been hurt. His shield you shall have, for it is yet unknown in list or field. As for my younger son, Sir Lavaine, he is a strong and likely youth, whom I beg you will take with you. I feel that you must be a champion of renown, and hope you will tell me your name."

"Not at present, if you will excuse me," said Lancelot. "If I speed well at the tournament I will return and tell you. But I shall be glad to have Sir Lavaine with me, and to use his brother's shield."

"You are welcome to both," said Sir Bernard.

This old baron had a daughter of great beauty, and in the freshness of youth, who was known in that region as the Fair Maid of Astolat, by name Elaine le Blank. And when she saw Lancelot her whole heart went out to him in love,—a love of that ardent nature that never dies while she who wears it lives.

Lancelot, too, was strongly attracted by her fresh young face, of lily-like charm; but he had no love to give. Yet he spoke in tender kindness to the maiden, and so emboldened her that she begged him to wear her token at the tournament.

"You ask more than I have ever yet granted to lady or damsel," said Lancelot. "If I yield to your wish I shall do more for your love than any woman born can claim."



**"YOU ARE WELCOME, BOTH!" SAID SIR
BERNARD.**

[Pg 242]She besought him now with still more earnestness, and it came to his mind that if he wished to go to the lists disguised he could take no better method, for no one would recognise Lancelot under a damsel's token.

"Show me what you would have me wear, fair maiden," he said.

"It is a red sleeve of mine," she answered, "a sleeve of scarlet, embroidered with great pearls," and she brought it to him.

"I have never done this for damsel before," said Lancelot. "In return I will leave my shield in your keeping. Pray keep it safe till we meet again."

Then the evening was spent in merry cheer; but that night Elaine slept but lightly, for her slumber was full of dreams of Lancelot, and her heart burned with fears that he might come to harm in the lists.

On the next day King Arthur and his knights set out for Camelot. Soon afterwards Lancelot and Lavaine took leave of Sir Bernard and his fair daughter, while the eyes of Elaine followed the noble form of Lancelot fondly and far, as he rode. Both the knights had white shields, and Lancelot bore with him Elaine's red embroidered sleeve. When they reached Camelot they took lodging privately with a rich burgess of the town, that none might know them.

When came Assumption Day, the lists were set, the trumpets blew to the field, the two parties of knights gathered promptly to the fray, and fierce was the encounter between them. In the end, after[Pg 243] hard fighting, the party of Arthur bore back their opponents, who were headed by the kings of Northumberland and North Wales.

All this was seen by Lancelot and Lavaine, who sat their horses at a distance looking on.

"Come," said Lancelot, "let us help these good fellows, who seem to be overpowered."

"Lead on," said Lavaine. "I shall follow and do my best."

Then Lancelot, with the red sleeve fastened upon his helmet, rode into the thickest of the press, and smote down such numbers of knights with spear and sword that the party of the Round Table were forced to give back, and their opponents came on with fresh heart. And close upon Lancelot's track Lavaine smote down several good knights.

"Who can this wonderful fighter be?" asked Gawaine of the king.

"I know him well," said Arthur, "but will not name him since he is in disguise."

"I could believe it was Lancelot," said Gawaine, "but for that red sleeve. No man ever saw Lancelot wear a woman's token."

"Let him be," said Arthur. "He will be better known before he is done."

Then nine knights of Lancelot's kindred, angry at seeing this one champion beat down all before him, joined together and pressed hotly into the din, smiting down all that opposed them. Three of them—Bors, Hector, and Lionel—spurred together on Lancelot, all striking him at once with their spears. So great was their force that Lancelot's horse was hurled to the ground, and his shield[Pg 244] pierced by Bors, whose spear wounded him in the side, breaking and leaving its head deep in the flesh.

Seeing this misfortune, Lavaine spurred fiercely on the king of the Scots, thrust him from his horse, and, in despite of them all, brought that horse to Lancelot, and helped him to mount. Then, though so sorely hurt, Lancelot drew his sword, and, aided by Lavaine, did such deeds of arms as he had never surpassed in his hours of greatest strength. As the chronicles say, that day he unhorsed more than thirty knights; and Lavaine followed his example well, for he smote down ten Knights of the Round Table in this his first tournament. So does a noble example stir young hearts.

"I would give much to know who this valiant knight can be," said Gawaine.

"He will be known before he departs," answered Arthur. "Trust me for that."

Then the king blew to lodging, and the prize was given by the heralds to the knight with the white shield who bore the red sleeve. Around Lancelot gathered the leaders on his side, and thanked him warmly for gaining them the victory.

"If I have deserved thanks I have sorely paid for them," said Lancelot, "for I doubt if I escape with my life. Dear sirs, permit me to depart, for just now I would rather have repose than be lord of all the world."

Then he broke from them and galloped away, though his wound forced piteous groans from his steadfast heart. When out of sight of them all he checked his horse, and begged Lavaine to help him[Pg 245] dismount and to draw the spear-head from his side.

"My lord," said Lavaine, "I would fain help you; yet I fear that to draw the spear will be your death."

"It will be my death if it remains," said Lancelot. "I charge you to draw it."

This Lavaine did, the pain being so deadly that Lancelot shrieked and fell into a death-like swoon, while a full pint of blood gushed from the wound. Lavaine stopped the bleeding as well as he could, and with great trouble got the wounded knight to a neighboring hermitage, that stood in front of a great cliff, with a clear stream running by its foot.

Here Lavaine beat on the door with the butt of his spear, and cried loudly,—

"Open, for Jesus' sake! Open, for a noble knight lies bleeding to death at your gate!"

This loud appeal quickly brought out the hermit, who was named Baldwin of Brittany, and had once been a Round Table knight. He gazed with pity and alarm on the pale face and bleeding form before him.

"I should know this knight," he said. "Who is he?"

"Fair sir," said Lancelot, feebly, "I am a stranger and a knight-errant, who have sought renown through many realms, and have come here to my deadly peril."

As he spoke the hermit recognized him, by a wound on his pallid cheek.

"Ah, my lord Lancelot," he said, "you cannot deceive me thus."

"Then, if you know me, help me for heaven's[Pg 246] sake. Relieve me from this pain, whether it be by life or death."

"I shall do my best," said the hermit. "Fear not that you will die."

Then he had him borne into the hermitage, and laid in bed, his armor being removed. This done, the hermit stanchd the bleeding, anointed the wound with healing ointments, and gave Lancelot a refreshing and healing draught.

Meanwhile King Arthur invited the knights of both parties to a great evening feast, and there asked the king of North Wales to bring forward the knight of the red sleeve, that he might receive the prize he had won.

"That I cannot do," was the answer. "He was badly, if not fatally, wounded, and left us so hastily that we know not whither he went."

"That is the worst news I have heard these seven years," said Arthur. "I would rather lose my throne than have that noble knight slain."

"Do you know him?" they all asked.

"I have a shrewd suspicion who he is; and I pray God for good tidings of him."

"By my head," said Gawaine, "I should be sorry enough to see harm come to one that can handle spear and sword like him. He cannot be far away, and if he is to be found I shall find him."

"Fortune aid you in the quest," said the king.

Then Gawaine took a squire, and they rode in all directions for six or seven miles around Camelot, but could learn nothing of the missing knight. Two days afterwards Arthur and his fellowship set out on their return to London. On their way they[Pg 247] passed through Astolat, and here it happened that Gawaine lodged with Sir Bernard, Lancelot's former host.

He was well received, and the old baron and his fair daughter begged him earnestly for tidings of the tournament, being specially eager to know who had done best there.

"Two knights bore all before them," said Gawaine. "Both carried white shields, and one wore on his helmet a red sleeve, as some fair lady's token. Never saw I a man before do such mighty deeds, and his fellow seconded him nobly."

"Blessed be God that that knight did so well," broke out Elaine, "for he is the first man I ever loved, and shall be the last."

"You know him then?" said Gawaine. "Pray tell me his name."

"That I know not, nor whence he came; but this I truly know, that I love him, and that the token he wore was mine. This, and this only, I can justly affirm."

"This is a strange story," said Gawaine. "What knowledge have you of him? and how came you to know him?"

In response, she told him how the knight had left his shield with her, and taken that of her brother, with what else she knew.

"I would thank you much for a sight of that shield," said Gawaine.

"I have it in my chamber, covered with a case, and will send for it," said Elaine.

When the shield was brought Gawaine removed the case, and at sight he knew it to be Lancelot's shield.

[Pg 248]"Ah, mercy!" said Gawaine, "the sight of this makes my heart heavy."

"Why so?" she demanded.

"For good cause," he answered. "Is the owner of this shield your love?"

"Truly so," she replied. "I love him dearly; would to God he loved me as dearly."

"Then must I say that you have given your love to the noblest and most renowned knight in the world."

"So it seemed to me; for he carries a noble soul in his face."

"This I may say," said Gawaine. "I have known this knight for more than twenty years, and never knew him before to wear a woman's token at joust or tournament. You owe him thanks, indeed, that he wore yours. Yet I dread greatly that you will never see him again, and it is for this that my heart is heavy."

"Why say you so?" she cried, starting up with pallid face. "Is he hurt? Is he slain?"

"Not slain; but sadly hurt. This more it is my duty to tell you: he is the noble knight, Sir Lancelot du Lake. I know him by his shield."

"Lancelot! Can this be so? And his hurt—who gave it? Is it really perilous?"

"Had the knight who wounded him known him, he would have been grieved almost to death. As for Sir Lancelot, I can tell you nothing more. On receiving his hurt he left the lists with his comrade, and cannot be found. He is somewhere concealed."

"Then shall I go seek him!" cried Elaine. "Give me leave to do so, dear father, if you would[Pg 249] not have me lose my mind. I shall never rest till I find him and my brother, and nurse him back to health."

"Go, daughter, if you will," said her father, "for I am sick at heart to hear such tidings of that noble knight."

In the morning Gawaine rejoined King Arthur, and told him of what he had learned.

"I knew already it was Lancelot," said the king; "but never before knew I him to wear woman's token."

"By my faith, this lily maiden of Astolat loves him deeply," said Gawaine. "What it means I cannot say, but she has set out to seek him, and will break her heart if she fail to find him."

And so they rode on to London, where Gawaine made known to the court that it was Lancelot who wore the red sleeve and won the prize at the tournament.

This tidings made no small trouble in the court. Bors and his kinsmen were heavy at heart when they learned that it was Lancelot whom they had so hotly assailed. And Queen Guenever was beside herself with anger on learning that it was Lancelot who had worn the red sleeve at the tournament.

Meanwhile Elaine journeyed to Camelot in search of the wounded knight, and as she sought far and near about the town, sick at heart, it chanced that she espied her brother Lavaine, as he rode out to give his horse air. She called loudly to him, and when he came up asked him,—

"How does my lord, Sir Lancelot?"

"Who told you, sister, that my lord's name was Lancelot?"

[Pg 250]She told him how she had learned this, and they rode together to the hermitage, where Lavaine brought her in to see the wounded knight.

But when she saw him lying there so sick and pale, and with a death-like hue upon his face, she stood gazing upon him with dilated eyes and whitening face, and then suddenly fell to the floor in a deep swoon.

"I pray you, Lavaine, take her up and bring her to me," said Lancelot.

When she was brought near him he kissed her pale face, and at the touch of his lips her cheeks flamed out with red, and life came back to her.

"Fair maiden," said Lancelot, "it pains me to see you so deeply afflicted. Comfort yourself, I pray you. If you come here to my aid you are truly welcome; but let not this little hurt trouble you; I shall soon be well of it."

Then they fell into discourse, and Elaine told Lancelot how Gawaine had seen and known his shield. This gave him no small trouble, for he knew well that the story of the red scarf would get to Queen Guenever's ears, and he feared its effect on her hasty and jealous temper. But Elaine never left Lancelot, but watched him day and night, nursing him back to health.

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CHAPTER III.

HOW ELAINE DIED FOR LOVE.

When Sir Bors learned that his unlucky blow had brought Lancelot nearly to death's door, he became sore indeed at heart, and hastened to Camelot in search of his noble kinsman. Here he met Lavaine, who knew him and conducted him to the bedside of the wounded knight.

When he saw the pale and haggard countenance of Lancelot, he fell into a passion of tears, and accused himself bitterly. But Lancelot consoled him as well as he could, declaring that the fault was his own, and that he would bear the blame. Then Bors told him of the anger of the queen, and of his earnest but vain endeavor to overcome it.

"I deserve it not," said Lancelot. "I wore the sleeve only by way of disguise. As for Gawaine, he would have shown more wisdom and friendship had he been less free of speech."

"I told her all this," said Bors, "but she was past listening to reason. Is this maiden, who is so busy about you, she whom they call the lily of Astolat?"

"She it is," said Lancelot. "I cannot by any means put her from me."

"Why should you?" asked Bors. "She is a beautiful and tender-hearted damsel. Would to God, fair cousin, you could love her, for I see well, by her gentle and close care of you, that she loves you devoutly."

[Pg 252]"That I am sorry for," said Lancelot.

"She will not be the first that has loved you in vain," said Bors; "the more the pity."

Many other things they talked of, and Lancelot found such comfort in the presence of Sir Bors that in a few days he showed great signs of improvement. Then Bors told him of another tournament that King Arthur had ordered, to be held at Camelot on All-hallowmas day, between his party and that of the king of North Wales.

This filled Lancelot with an earnest desire to grow strong, and during the following month, under the kind care of his cousin, and the gentle ministrations of Elaine, he improved greatly in health. For Elaine waited upon him with loving diligence night and day, and never was child or wife more gentle and heedful to father or husband than this fair maid of Astolat to the wounded knight.

At length came a day when Lancelot felt so much stronger, through the healing influence of a bath of herbs which the hermit had gathered in the woods, that he determined to try if he could wear his armor and sit in his saddle. He thereupon armed and had his horse brought out. Mounting the mettled charger, in the high spirit of new health he spurred it to full speed.

But the courser's long rest in the stable had made it fresh and fierce, and on feeling the spurs it leaped forward so violently that Lancelot's wound burst open in the strain, and the blood gushed out again.

"Bors! Lavaine! help!" he feebly cried. "I am come to my end."

[Pg 253]As he spoke he fell from his horse to the earth, and lay there like a corpse.

The two knights hurried up, full of fearful concern, and when Elaine, who had heard the pitiful call, came flying to the spot, she threw herself on the prostrate form, weeping like one beside herself with grief, and kissing the insensible knight as if she hoped thus to recall him to life.

"Traitors you are!" she cried wildly to her brother and Sir Bors. "Why did you let him leave his bed? I hold you guilty of his death."

At this moment the hermit Baldwin appeared. When he saw Lancelot in that plight he grew angry at heart, though he checked the reproachful words that rose to his lips.

"Let us have him in," he said, briefly.

Lancelot was thereupon carried to the hermitage, his armor removed, and the bleeding stanchd, but it was long before he could be brought out of his death-like swoon.

"Why did you put your life thus in jeopardy?" asked the hermit, reproachfully, when the knight was again in his senses.

"I was too eager to attend the tournament, now near at hand," he said.

"Ah, Sir Lancelot, you have more courage than wisdom, I fear. As for the tournament, let Sir Bors attend it and do what he may. By the time it is over and he returned, I hope that you may be well once more, if you will but be governed by my advice."

This advice was taken and Bors went to the tournament, where he bore himself so valorously that[Pg 254] the prize was divided between him and Gawaine. Gareth and Palamides also did noble deeds, but they departed suddenly before the prize was declared, as if called away by some adventure.

All this Lancelot heard with great pleasure from Bors on his return, his only regret being that he had not been able to take part in that knightly sport. But the remedies of the hermit and the care of Elaine had meanwhile done him wonderful service, and he was soon able again to mount his horse and wear his armor in safety.

A day, therefore, quickly came when the knight felt himself in condition for a journey, and when he and his companions took the road to Astolat, escorting the fair Elaine back to her father's home. Here they were gladly received by the old baron Bernard, and his son Tirre, who had now recovered.

But when the time approached which Lancelot had set for his departure, Elaine grew pale and drooping. At length, with the boldness of speech of that period, she came to him and said,—

"My lord Sir Lancelot, clear and courteous sir, will you then depart, and leave me alone with my love and sorrow? Have mercy on me, I pray you, and suffer me not to die of grief."

"What would you have me do?" asked Lancelot.

"I brought you back to life; give me your love in return; make me your wedded wife, and I will love you as never woman loved."

"That can I never do," said Lancelot, gravely. "I shall never wed."

"Then shall I die for your love."

"Think not of death, Elaine. If I could marry[Pg 255] woman it would be you, for I could love you dearly were my heart free. For your gentleness and kindness thus only can I repay you. If you can set your heart upon some worthy knight who is free to wed you, I shall give to you and your heirs a thousand pounds yearly, as some small payment of the debt I owe you."

"You speak idly and coldly, Sir Lancelot. Your money I will have none of; and as for wedding, I have but the choice to wed you or wed my death."

"You rend my heart, fair Elaine. Would that it could be as you wish. Alas! that can never be."

At this, with a cry of heart-pain, the distressed maiden fell swooning at his feet. Thence she was borne by women to her chamber, where she lay, lamenting like one whose heart is broken.

Sir Bernard now came to Lancelot, who was preparing to depart, and said,—

"Dear sir, it grieves me to find my daughter Elaine in such a distressful state. I fear she may die for your sake."

"It grieves me as deeply," said Lancelot. "But what can I do? That she loves me so deeply I am sorry to learn, for I have done nothing to encourage it, as your son can testify. I know that she is a true and noble maiden, and will do all that I can for her as an honest knight; but love her as she loves me I cannot, and to wed I am forbidden. Yet her distress wounds me sorely."

"Father," said Lavaine, "I dare avow that she is as pure and good as my lord Sir Lancelot has said. In loving him she does but what I do, for[Pg 256] since I first saw him I could never depart from him; nor shall I leave him so long as he will bear my company."

Then Lancelot took his leave, and he and Lavaine rode together to Camelot, where Arthur and the whole court received the errant knight with the utmost joy and warmest welcome. Queen Guenever alone failed to greet him kindly, her jealous anger continuing so bitter that she would not give him a word or a look, seek as he would.

But the joy and brightness at Camelot were replaced by darkness at Astolat, for the fair Elaine was in such sorrow day and night that she neither ate, drank, nor slept; and ever she sadly moaned and bewailed the cruelty of Sir Lancelot.

Ten days of this brought her so near her end, that her old father, with sad heart, sent for the priest to give her the last sacraments. But even then she made her complaints of Lancelot's coldness so mournfully, that the ghostly father bade her cease such thoughts.

"Why should I?" she cried. "Am I not a woman, with a woman's heart and feelings? While the breath is in my body I must lament my fate; for I hold it no offence to love, and take God to witness that I never have and never can love other than Lancelot du Lake. Since it is God's will that I must die from unrequited love of so noble a knight, I pray for his mercy and forgiveness of all my sins. Never did I offend deeply against God's laws; but it was not in my nature to withstand the fervent love that is bringing me to my death."

Then she sent for her father and brother, and[Pg 257] prayed them to write a letter as she might dictate. This they did, writing down the mournful words which she spoke.

"Now," she said, "this more I command you to do. When I am dead, put this letter in my right hand before my body grows cold. Then see that I be richly dressed and laid in a fair bed, and take me in a chariot to the river Thames. There lay my body in a barge, covered with black samite, and with but one man to steer the barge down the river to Camelot."

All this they, weeping sadly, agreed to do, and soon afterwards the maiden died, slain by her love. Her sad old father then had all done as she had requested.

Meanwhile, in Camelot the world moved merrily. But one morning, by fortune, as King Arthur and Queen Guenever stood talking at a window, they espied a black barge drifting slowly down the river. Wondering much what it meant, the king called Sir Kay and two other knights, and sent them to the river, bidding them to bring him speedy word of what the barge contained.

This they did. On reaching the river-side they found that the barge had been turned inward, and lay beside the bank, and to their surprise they saw in it a rich bed, on which lay the corpse of as fair a woman as they had ever beheld. In the stern of the barge sat, with oar in hand, a poor man who seemed dumb, for no word would he speak.

"That corpse must I see," said the king, when word of this event was brought him. "Surely this betokens something strange."

[Pg 258]He took the queen by the hand and went to the river-side with her. Here the barge had been made fast, and they stepped from the shore to its deck. There they saw the corpse of a beautiful maiden, dressed in costly attire, and lying in a bed which was richly covered with cloth of gold. And as she lay she seemed to smile.

The queen now espied a letter clasped closely in her right hand, and showed it to the king.

"That will surely tell us who she is, and why she has come hither," he said.

He thereupon took the letter and returned with the queen to the palace. Here, surrounded by many knights, he broke the seal, and gave the epistle to a clerk to read. This was its purport,—

"Most noble knight, Sir Lancelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love. I was your lover, she whom men called the Fair Maid of Astolat; therefore unto all ladies I make my moan, and I beg you to pray for my soul, and at the least to bury me, and offer my mass-penny. This is my last request. God is my witness that I die a pure maiden. Pray for my soul, Sir Lancelot, as thou art peerless."

When this pitiful letter had been read, all who heard it shed tears, for never had they heard aught so moving. Then Lancelot was sent for and the letter read to him.

"A sorrowful thing is this," he said, in grievous tones. "Then she is dead, the fair Elaine, and thus, with silent lips, makes her last prayer. Truly it wounds me to the heart. Yet, my lord Arthur, God knows I had no just share in the death of this[Pg 259] maiden, as her brother here, Sir Lavaine, can testify. She was fair and good, and I owed her much, but she loved me beyond measure, and her love I could not return."

"You might have shown her," said the queen, reprovingly, "some bounty and gentleness, and thus have preserved her life."

"Madam," said Lancelot, "naught would she have but my love, and my hand in marriage. I offered to endow her with a thousand pounds yearly, if she should love and wed any other, but to this she would not listen. As for me, I had no other comfort to give her, for love cannot be constrained, but must rise of itself from the heart."

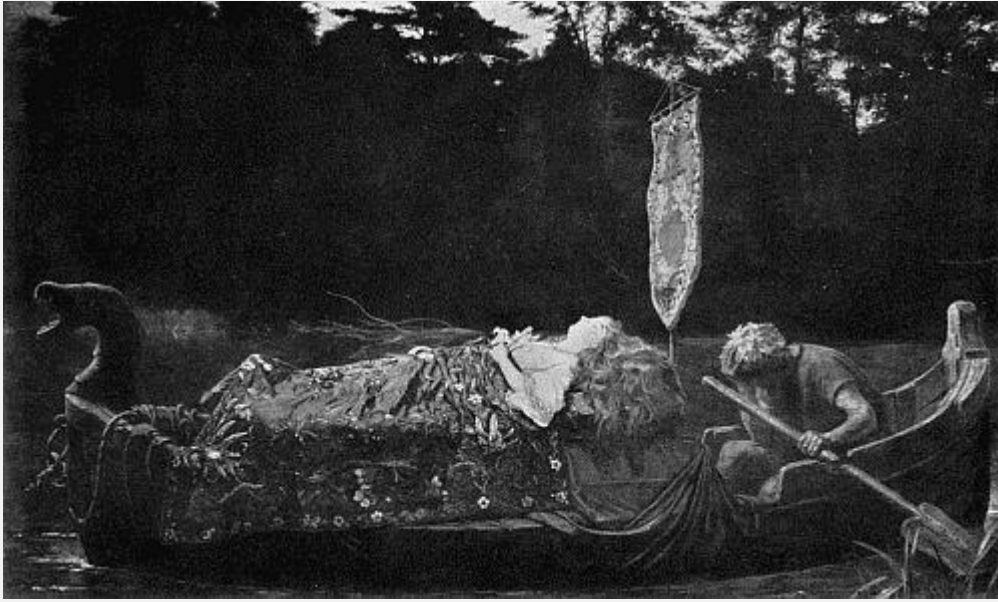
"Truly must it," said the king. "Love is free in itself, and will not be bound, for if bonds be placed upon it, it looseth itself perforce. As for this unhappy maiden, nothing is left for you but to obey her last pitiful request."

"That shall I to the utmost of my power," said Lancelot.

Then many knights and ladies went to behold the fair maiden, who had come thither in such moving wise. And in the morning she was richly interred, and with all due honor, at Lancelot's command; and he offered her mass-penny, as did all the knights who were there present.

Then the poor dumb servitor returned again with the barge, rowing it slowly and sadly back to Astolat.

Afterwards the queen sent for Lancelot, and begged his pardon humbly for her causeless anger.



ELAINE.

"This is not the first time," said Lancelot, "that you have been displeased with me without cause. What you will, I must bear, and keep my sorrow within my heart; yet I would that your love were less tainted by hasty jealousy. As for forgiving you, what else can I do, my queen? Love cannot live without forgiveness."

After these events the winter and spring passed on, with hunting and hawking, and jousts and tournaments, and the fate of the fair Elaine was wellnigh forgotten in the joy of the court. But her brother Lavaine gained great honor, and at a tournament that was given on Candlemas day did so nobly that the king promised he should be made a Knight of the Round Table at the next feast of Pentecost.

And at this tournament Lancelot again fought in disguise, wearing a sleeve of gold of the queen's, and did such deeds that the prize was adjudged to him. Thus a second time did he wear a woman's token in the lists.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE CHEVALIER OF THE CART.

The year passed on from Candlemas till after Easter, and then came the month of May, when every lusty heart begins to blossom and to bear fruit; for as herbs and trees flourish in May, so does the heart of a lover, since in this lusty month all lovers gain courage,

calling to their minds old[Pg 261] vows and deeds of gentleness, and much that was forgotten in the winter's chill.

As winter always defaces and erases green summer, so fares it with unstable love in man and woman. But as May flowers and flourishes in many gardens, so flowers the lover's heart in the joy of her to whom he has promised his faith. Yet nowadays men cannot love seven days without their love cooling; for where love warms in haste it cools as hastily; thus fareth it in our days,—soon hot, soon cold. The old love was not so. Men and women could love together seven years in truth and faithfulness. Such was the way of love in King Arthur's days; but love nowadays I liken unto summer and winter; now hot, now cold, like the changing seasons. Therefore all ye who are lovers call to your remembrance the month of May, like as did Queen Guenever, who while she lived was a true lover, and therefore she had a good end.

So it befell in the month of May that Queen Guenever called unto her certain knights of the Round Table, inviting them to ride with her in the early morn a-maying in the woods and fields beside Camelot.

"And see that you all be well horsed," she said, "and clad in green, either in silk or cloth. I shall bring with me ten ladies, and every knight shall have a lady behind him, and bring with him a squire and two yeomen."

And so, when morning came, the ten knights invited put on their gayest robes of green, and rode with the queen and her ladies, a-maying in the woods and fields, to their great joy and delight.

[Pg 262]Yet this pleasure party led to sad results, as we have now to tell. For there was a knight named Meliagrance, son of King Bagdemagus, who had a castle, the gift of King Arthur, within seven miles of Camelot. This knight loved the queen, and had done so for many years, and it had long been in his heart to steal her away; but he had never been able to find her without many knights about her, and, chief of all, Sir Lancelot.

When he heard of this Maying party, and that the queen would be attended by only ten knights, and these in green robes, he resolved to carry out his base design, and therefore placed in ambush twenty men-at-arms and a hundred archers.

So it happened that while the queen and her knights were merrily arraying one another in flowers and mosses, and with wreaths made of sprays of fresh green, this false knight rode suddenly from a wood near by, followed by a throng of armed men, and bade them stand, and yield up the queen on peril of their lives.

"Traitor knight," cried Guenever, "what seek you to do? Wouldst thou, a king's son, and a knight of the Round Table, seek to dishonor the noble king who made you what you are? You shame yourself and all knighthood; but me you shall never shame, for I had rather cut my throat than be dishonored by you."

"Madam, this language will avail you nothing," said Meliagrance. "I have loved you many a year, and now that I have you at advantage will take you as I find you."

"You must kill us first, unarmed as we are,"[Pg 263] cried the queen's knights. "You have taken us at a foul disadvantage; but you shall not have the queen so lightly as you deem."

"Fight, will you? Then fight it, if you will have it so," said Meliagrance.

Then the ten knights drew their swords, and the others spurred upon them with couched spears. But so skilfully did the queen's defenders use their blades that the spears did them no harm.

The battle then went on with swords, and the ten knights did noble deeds, slaying many of their assailants; yet they were so overmatched that they soon were all stretched upon the earth with bleeding wounds.

"Sir Meliagrance," cried the queen, in deep distress, "kill not my noble knights, I pray you. If you do them no more harm I will go with you, if you will take them with me. Otherwise I will slay myself before you shall take me."

"Madam, since you wish it, they shall be taken to my castle, whither you must come with me."

Then at the queen's command the battle ceased, and the knights had their wounds dressed. But Meliagrance watched keenly that none of the company should escape, for greatly he feared that news of this outrage might be borne to Lancelot du Lake.

But there was with the queen a little page who rode a swift horse, and to him she privily spoke.

"Slip away, when you see the chance," she said, "and bear this ring to Lancelot du Lake. Tell him what has happened, and pray him as he loves me to come in haste to my rescue. Spare not your horse, and stay not for land or water."

[Pg 264]The page took the ring, and rode carelessly to the edge of the circle. Then, seeing his opportunity, he put spurs to his horse and rode away at full speed. When Meliagrance saw this he ordered instant pursuit, and the boy was hotly chased and fired at with arrows and javelins; yet the speed of his horse soon carried him beyond danger.

"Madam," cried Meliagrance, fiercely, to the queen, "you are plotting to betray me. But if you have sent for Lancelot du Lake, he shall find the road to you a perilous one, I warrant him."

And as they rode to the castle he placed an ambush of thirty archers by the road-side, charging them if they saw a knight come that way on a white horse to slay the horse.

But he warned them not to assail him in person, as they would find him hard to overcome.

This done, the party proceeded to the castle; but here the queen would not let her ladies and knights out of her presence, and Meliagrance stood in such dread of Lancelot that he dared not use force.

In the mean time the page found Lancelot, and gave him the queen's ring and message, telling him the whole story of the treacherous assault.

"I would give all France to have been there well armed," cried Lancelot. "The queen shall be saved, or I will die in the effort. Haste you to Sir Lavaine and tell him where I have gone, and bid him follow me to Meliagrance's castle. Tell him to come quickly, if he wishes to have a hand in the rescue of the queen and her knights."

Lancelot was hastily arming as he spoke, and[Pg 265] mounting, he rode with all speed, forcing his horse to swim the Thames in his haste. In no great time he reached the spot where the fight had taken place, and where he found the garlands the knights had worn, rent with sword-strokes and reddened with their blood. Then he followed the tracks of the party till he entered a narrow passage, bordered by a wood. Here were the archers stationed, and when Lancelot came by they bade him return, for that way was closed.

"Why should I turn?" he demanded. "Whence get you the right to close the way?"

"If you go forward it will be on foot, for we shall kill your horse."

"Go forward I shall, if there were five hundred more of you," said Lancelot.

Then a cloud of arrows whistled through the air, and the noble horse, struck by a dozen shafts, fell to the earth. Lancelot leaped lightly from the falling animal, and rushed in a rage into the wood; but there were so many hedges and ditches that he found it impossible to reach his light-armed assailants.

"Shame on this Meliagrance for a dastard!" he cried in anger. "It is a true old saw that a good man is never in danger but from a coward."

The angry knight, finding that his assailants were beyond his reach, set out on foot for Meliagrance's castle, but found himself so encumbered with his armor, shield, and spear, that his progress was but slow. Yet he dared not leave any of his arms, for fear of giving his foe an advantage.

At length, by good fortune, there appeared on[Pg 266] the road a cart, that was used for hauling wood.

"Tell me, friend carter," said Lancelot, when the vehicle came near, "what shall I give you for a ride in your cart to a castle that lies a few miles away?"

"You can give me nothing," said the carter. "I am sent to bring wood for my lord, Sir Meliagrance, and it is not my fashion to work for two at once."

"It is Sir Meliagrance I seek."

"Then go on foot," said the carter, surlily. "My cart is for other work."

Incensed at this, Lancelot dealt the fellow a blow with his mailed fist that stretched him senseless on the ground. Then he turned to the carter's comrade.

"Strike me not, fair sir," pleaded this fellow. "I will bring you where you wish."

"Then drive me and this cart to the gate of Meliagrance's castle."

"Leap into the cart, and you shall be there before the day grows old."

This Lancelot did, and the carter lashed his horse forward with all speed, for he was in mortal fear of the knight's hard fist.

An hour and a half afterwards, as Guenever and her ladies stood in a window of the castle, they saw a cart approaching, in which stood upright an armed knight, resting on his spear. Even at that distance they knew him by his shield to be Lancelot du Lake.

"A noble and trusty friend he is, indeed, to come in such a fashion," said the queen. "Hard[^{Pg 267}] bested he must have been, to be forced to ride hither in a woodman's cart."

As they looked, the cart came to the castle gates, and Lancelot sprang from it to the ground, his heart full of rage and passion.

"Where art thou, traitor?" he cried, in a voice that rang throughout the castle. "Come forth, thou disgrace to the Round Table fellowship! Come, with all your men; for here am I, Lancelot du Lake, who will fight you all single-handed on this question."

As he spoke he thrust the gates open with such force that the porter, who sought to hold them shut, was hurled like a dead man to the earth.

When Meliagrance in the castle heard this loud defiance his cowardly soul sank within him, for well he knew from whom it came, and he ran in haste to the queen and fell on his knees before her, begging her to forgive him and to cool the wrath of Lancelot. So pitifully did he implore, that in the end Guenever was moved to compassion, and went with her ladies to the castle court, where Lancelot stood furiously bidding the traitor knight to come down and do battle.

"Why are you so moved, Lancelot?" asked the queen.

"Why should I not be?" he cried, in a rage. "The hound has killed my horse and stolen my queen. Is this the thing to bear like a lamb?"

"He sorely repents his fault, and has moved me to forgive him," said the queen. "Come in, then, peaceably, I beg you, for I have passed my word."

"You accord easily with this dog of a kidnapper," [Pg 268] said Lancelot, sourly. "Had I looked for this I might have spared my haste and saved my horse."

"It is not through love or favor I have forgiven him," said the queen, "but to check the voice of scandal."

"I am no fonder of scandal than yourself," said Lancelot. "Yet if I had my will I would make this fellow's heart full cold before I left this castle."

"I know that well, but beg that you will be ruled by me in this affair."

"Let it be so, if you have passed your word. But you are too soft of heart Queen Guenever."

Then she took his hand, for he had taken off his gauntlet, and led him into the castle, and to the chamber in which lay the ten wounded knights, whose hearts warmed at his coming. From them he learned in full what had occurred, a story which stirred his blood again into such a flame, that only the soft hand of the queen hindered him from seeking Meliagrance through the castle to slay him.

As they stood talking, Sir Lavaine rode furiously in at the gate, crying,—

"Where is my lord, Sir Lancelot du Lake?"

"Here I am," cried Lancelot from a window. "All is well, Lavaine."

"I found your horse slain with arrows, and judged you were hard pushed."

"As for that, Lavaine, soft words have turned hard blows. Come in. We shall right this matter at another time, when we best may."

For many a day thereafter, as the French book says, Lancelot was called the Chevalier of the [Pg 269] Cart, and many an adventure he had under that homely name.

All went peacefully that night at the castle, but the next morning there was new trouble. For one of the castle maidens brought word to Meliagrance that she had found what seemed to be the print of a bloody hand on the coverings of the queen's bed. Thither he hurried, full of jealous anger, and found what appeared, indeed, to be the crimson print of a man's hand. On seeing this he made a loud outcry, declaring that it was the blood of one of the wounded knights, and fiercely accused Guenever of having been false to her lord King Arthur.

When word of this accusation came to the wounded knights they were filled with indignation, and cried that they would meet Meliagrance or any man in the lists in defence of the queen's honor.

"Ye speak proudly," said Meliagrance. "Yet look here, and see if I have not warrant for what I say."

When he showed them the red witness of his words they were abashed, and knew not what to answer.

All this was told to Lancelot, and he came in haste and anger to the queen's chamber.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"It is that the queen has proved false to her lord and husband, and this I stand ready to prove with my body," said Meliagrance.

"Beware what you say, sir knight," cried Lancelot, "or you will find your challenge taken."

"My lord Lancelot," answered Meliagrance,[Pg 270] "good knight as you are, take heed how you do battle in a wrong quarrel, for God will have a hand in such a cause."

"This I say," answered Lancelot, hotly, "that you accuse the queen wrongly, and these noble knights as falsely. This is the work of treason or magic."

"Hold," said Meliagrance; "here is my glove, in proof that she is traitress to the king, and that one of these wounded knights is her leman."

"I accept your challenge," said Lancelot, "and will fight you to the death in this cause. When shall we do battle?"

"Let it be in eight days from this," said Meliagrance, "in the field beside Camelot."

"I am agreed," said Lancelot.

"Then let us go to dinner," said Meliagrance, "and afterwards you and the queen and her knights may ride to Camelot."

Yet fairly as he spoke his heart was full of treachery, and before going to the table he asked Lancelot if he would care to see the rooms and passages of the castle.

"If you wish to show them," said Lancelot.

Then they went from chamber to chamber, Lancelot having no fear of peril or thought of treason. But as they traversed a long and dark passage the false-hearted host trod on a spring, and down fell a trap-door, giving Lancelot a fall of more than ten fathoms into a dark cell, whose floor was covered deeply with straw. This done, Meliagrance

hastened away, after replacing the trap, and ordered one of his men to remove Lavaine's horse from the stable.

[Pg 271]When the knights came to dinner all were surprised that Lancelot was not present.

"Is this one of his old tricks?" asked the queen. "He has a fashion of thus departing suddenly, without warning."

"But not on foot," said Lavaine, and left the room.

When he returned, it was to say that his horse had vanished from the stable, and that doubtless Lancelot had taken it and ridden off. So they sat quietly at dinner, and afterwards set out for the court, the wounded knights being carried under care of Lavaine, in easily litters.

When the court was reached, and Arthur was told of what had occurred, he was full of wrath.

"So this traitor Meliagrance chooses first to kidnap my queen, and then to accuse her of treason?" he cried. "By my crown, I would deal with him in another fashion only that Lancelot has taken the challenge. I fancy the fellow will have his hands full, without my care. But where is Lancelot?"

"That we know not," said the knights. "It is like him to go off in this hasty way. He took Sir Lavaine's horse, and left us without a word of parting."

"Let him be," said the king. "He will come in good time,—unless he be trapped by some treachery."

Little dreamed they of Lancelot's true situation at that moment. He had been sorely bruised by his fall, and lay in great pain in the cave, visited only by a lady, who came to him daily with food.[Pg 272] Yet it happened, as had occurred so often to Lancelot, that the lady fell in love with his handsome face. Meliagrance had made a foolish choice in sending a woman with a soft heart to his prisoner, and was likely to pay dearly for his folly. Yet days passed on, and Lancelot continued deaf to her sighs and blind to her languishing looks.

"Sir Lancelot," she at length said, "do you not know that your lady, Queen Guenever, will be burnt at the stake unless you be there at the day of battle?"

"God forbid that such a disaster should come to pass!" cried Lancelot. "Yet if I should not be there, all men of worship will know that I am dead, sick, or in prison, for men know me well enough to know that nothing less would keep me away. Therefore, some knight of my blood or of my fellowship will take up this battle, and fight bravely in the queen's cause."

"I shall set you free, Sir Lancelot, to fight your own battle, if you will but give me your love; for truly I love you with my whole heart."

"I am sorry that I cannot return it," said Lancelot. "But I cannot lie to you in such a cause, even for life or honor."

"Take heed what you say, Sir Lancelot. Shame will be your lot if any but you fight this battle."

"As for the world's shame, may Christ defend me. As for my distress of heart, it is welcome, if God sends it."

The lady went away full of sorrowful thoughts. But on the morning of the day fixed for the battle she came to him again, and said, gently,—

[Pg 273]"Sir Lancelot, I deem you hard-hearted and cruel; yet I love you too truly to see you disgraced. If you will solace my heart-pain with but one kiss, I will set you free, and deliver to you your armor, and the best horse in the castle stables."

"Surely there is no dishonor in a kiss; and well will you earn it by such service," said Lancelot. "You offer me new life, fair lady."

Then he kissed her; and with a face half glad, half gloomy, she led him from the prison by a secret passage to the chamber where his armor had been left. And when he was armed she conducted him privily to a stable where stood twelve good horses, and bade him make his choice.

Lancelot chose a white courser, whose size and spirit pleased him most, and this he deftly saddled and bridled. Then, with spear in hand and sword by side, he commended the lady to God, saying,—

"Lady, for this good deed I shall do you ample service if ever it be in my power. If not, may God reward you."

This said, he rode with proud mien from the castle, and galloped at headlong speed away, while she, with sad eyes and sighing lips, stood looking with loving regard on his departing form.

Sadly was his coming needed, for imminent was the peril of the queen. At the place fixed for the combat knights and lords had early gathered, and Meliagrance, feeling sure that Lancelot could not appear to do battle, put on a haughty mien, and loudly demanded justice, or the combat. Yet the hour appointed came and passed, and the queen's [Pg 274] champion had not appeared; while the king and all the court grew full of pain and dread as the fatal moments went by. The laws were strict, and could not be set aside for queen or commoner. Guenever must perish at the stake, or be saved by a champion's sword and spear. Therefore, as the minutes slowly grew into hours, and nothing of

Lancelot was seen, while Meliagrance more loudly demanded justice or a champion, all hearts sank deep in despair.

"My lord the king," cried Lavaine, at length, "some sad misfortune has happened to Sir Lancelot. Never did he fail to appear to do battle unless he were sick or in prison. I beseech you, therefore, give me leave this day to do battle for him, and to strike a knightly blow for my lady the queen."

"Thanks, gentle knight," said the king. "I dare avow that the charge which Meliagrance lays upon the queen is a false one, for of these ten wounded knights who were present, there is not one but would gladly do battle to prove its falsity were he able to wear armor."

"That shall I do in the service of my lord Lancelot," said Lavaine, "if you will give me leave."

"Full leave you have," answered the king. "I pray you do your best; for it seems sure that some treachery has been done to the noble Lancelot."

Lavaine now armed in all haste, and, mounting his war-courser, rode into the lists, where he faced Meliagrance, challenging him to do battle to the death.

[Pg 275]"Lesses les aller!" cried the heralds.

The two champions couched their spears, clutched their bridles, and were about to plunge the spurs into their horses' flanks, when the sound of hoofs was heard without, and an armed knight came galloping at furious speed into the lists.

"Ho! and abide!" cried King Arthur.

"Raise your spears, sir knights, this quarrel is mine," said the new-comer. "You have my thanks, Lavaine, but only I must fight in this cause."

Then he rode to the king, lifted his visor, and showed the noble face of Lancelot, now hot with indignation.

"I am here to fight this villain and traitor," he called, loudly. "My lord the king, I have lain these eight days in a prison cell, into which the base hound entrapped me. By fortune I escaped, and here I am, ready to pay him in fitting coin for his foul treachery."

"The dog! has he done this thing?" cried the king, in anger. "Then, by my crown, whether he win or not Guenever shall not suffer from the charge which he has dared bring. But God's justice will not let him win."

That Meliagrance quaked at heart on seeing this seeming apparition from the grave need not be said. But he had dared the hazard of the die, and sat his horse in grim silence

while his foul treachery was thus made known to the court. Lancelot now rode to his place in the lists, and faced his adversary.

"Lesses les aller!" cried the heralds again.

Then, spear in rest, the warriors spurred their[Pg 276] horses, and met with a shock like thunder in the centre of the field. Lancelot kept his saddle, but Meliagrance was hurled over his horse's croup. Seeing this, Lancelot lightly sprang from his saddle, drew his sword, and advanced upon his foe, who was on his feet ready to meet him.

Hot and fierce was the combat that succeeded, many great strokes being given and returned; but at length Lancelot struck so fierce a blow that Meliagrance was felled to the ground. Then the dastard cried aloud in an agony of fear,—

"Noble knight, noble Sir Lancelot, spare my life, I humbly pray you! I yield me as overcome and recreant and beseech you, as a Knight and Fellow of the Round Table, not to slay me helpless. Alive or dead, I put myself in your hands and the king's."

Lancelot stood looking grimly down upon him, at a loss what to do. To slay him was the wish of his heart; yet it looked like murder to kill a praying wretch. In his doubt he turned towards the queen, and she nodded her head as if to bid him kill the villain.

"Rise, sir hound," cried Lancelot. "You shall fight this battle to the utterance."

"I will never rise," said Meliagrance, "till you grant me mercy as a yielding and recreant knight."

"Coward!" cried Lancelot. "If you fear to fight me as I am, I will give you odds in the combat. I will take off my armor from my head and the left side of my body, and let them bind my left hand behind me, and fight you with my right hand alone."

[Pg 277]At this perilous offer Meliagrance started hastily to his feet, and loudly cried,—

"My lord Arthur, you have heard this offer! I accept it. Let him be disarmed and bound as he says."

"You do not mean to keep this foolish promise, Lancelot?" demanded the king.

"That do I," said Lancelot. "I shall not go back on my word, be it wise or foolish."

"Then so let it be; but you invite death by such a reckless compact."

The attendant knights thereupon removed Lancelot's helmet, and took from him his shield and the armor from his left side. They then bound his left arm behind him, and thus arrayed he was placed before his antagonist, whose heart burned with hope and with murderous designs.

All those who looked on were full of fear for Lancelot, deeming it the height of folly that he should take such a frightful risk, while many ladies closed their eyes, in dread to see him slain.

With the inspiration of hope, Meliagrance came up, bearing his sword uplifted, while Lancelot stood with his head and side fully open to his stroke. Down came the blade with a deadly sweep that caused many men to close their eyes, sure that the knight's head would be cleft in twain.

But Lancelot had no such thought. With a light swing to the right he avoided the stroke, which cut idly through the air; then, stepping forward to give effect to the blow, he swung his own blade upward with giant strength, and brought it down on Meliagrance's helmet with such mighty[Pg 278] force that the hard steel and the head it covered were shorn in twain, and the traitor knight fell dead upon the field.

Wild were the shouts of joy and triumph at this unlooked-for end to the combat. The king sprang from his seat and rushed into the lists, where he warmly clasped Lancelot in his arms; while Guenever, in joy at her deliverance, kissed him on both cheeks; and all the knights crowded around them with glad cries and warm congratulations.

As for Meliagrance, he was given the burial of a recreant and traitor, the cause of his death being inscribed on his tomb, that all might read his dishonor.

But for Sir Lancelot, the king and queen made more of him, and felt more love for him in their hearts, than ever before.

After this time many events of interest took place of which we have little space to speak. Among them, Lancelot healed the wounds of a knight of Hungary, named Sir Urre, who had been held in pain, through sorcery, for seven years, till his wounds should be touched by the best knight in the world. This knight had a lovely sister, named Felelolie, whom Lavaine married, whereupon King Arthur made him a Knight of the Round Table, and gave him a barony of land.

As for Lancelot, he gained great fame as the Chevalier of the Cart. For as many lords and ladies made sport of him as the knight who had ridden in a cart, like one sentenced to the gallows, for a whole twelvemonth he never mounted horse, but rode only in a cart, during which time he had many[Pg 279] adventures and fought forty battles, in all of which he came off victor.

And so the days grew into years, and all went happily at Arthur's court, though each passing day brought the coming time of woe and disaster nearer to hand.

BOOK XI.

THE HAND OF DESTINY.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAPPING OF THE LION.

In May, when every lusty heart flourisheth and burgeoneth,—for as winter, with its rough winds and blasts, causes man and woman to cover and sit fast by the fire, this fresh and joyous season brings them forth to gladden in the coming of the flowery summer,—in this rare month of May, when only merry thoughts and gentle deeds should be known, there began a great and unhappy season of wrath, which ended not till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed. And this all came about through the hate and jealousy of two unhappy knights, Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, brothers unto Sir Gawaine.

For much in their secret souls they hated the queen and Lancelot, and they fell to watching this good knight daily and nightly, with the hope of bringing him in some way to shame.

Failing in this base endeavor, they no longer concealed their enmity, but began to talk openly of the love of Lancelot for the queen, and to hint that shameful relations existed between them. The[Pg 281] report of this slanderous talk coming to Gawaine's ears, he reproved them sharply for indulging in such base and unworthy scandal, in which he was joined by his brothers Gareth and Gaheris.

"You forget what Lancelot has done for you," said Gawaine. "Who but he rescued you both when held in prison by Sir Turquine? And many other things he has done in your favor. Methinks such kind deeds merit better return than this."

"Think as you will," said Agravaine, "I have my opinions and shall hide them no longer."

As they thus debated King Arthur approached.

"Now, brothers, stint your noise," said Gawaine.

"That will we not," they replied.

"Then the devil speed the pair of you, if you are bent on mischief! I will listen to no more of your slanderous talk."

"Nor will we," said Gareth and Gaheris. "We owe too much to Lancelot to listen to the false tales of evil tongues."

With this they turned and walked away in anger and grief, as Arthur came up.

"What is this?" asked the king. "Is there bad blood between you brethren?"

"They do not care to hear the truth," said Agravaine, "but to my fancy it has been kept too long from your knowledge. We are your sister's sons, King Arthur, and it is our duty to be honest and open with you."

"What would you say?" asked the king.

"Simply what we and all your court know well, that there are such doings between Lancelot and your queen as are a disgrace to this realm of [Pg 282] England. He is a traitor to your person and your honor, and this we stand ready to prove."

"This is a perilous charge you make," said Arthur, deeply moved. "Nor am I ready to believe such a tale on your mere word. You have gone far, gentlemen; too far, I deem, without abundant proof."

"My lord," said Mordred, "we speak not without due warrant, and proof you shall have. What we advise is, that you ride out to the hunt to-morrow. Lancelot, you will find, will have some excuse to hold back. Then, when night draws near, send word to the queen that you will lie out all that night. Let this be done, and we promise you we shall take him with the queen. If we do it will go hard with Lancelot; for we shall not lightly see our king brought to shame."

"Be it so," said the king, after deep thought, for he was little inclined to believe ill of Lancelot. "I will do as you say. Understand, sir knights, I have heard all this before; yet I believe it not, and I consent to your scheme only to put an end to the vile voice of scandal."

On the next morning, as agreed upon, Arthur rode to the hunt; but Lancelot excused himself, as his enemies had predicted, on the plea that he was in no mood for the chase. When night came near a messenger from the king brought word to Guenever that the hunting party had been drawn far away, and would not return that night.

Meanwhile Mordred and Agravaine selected twelve knights, all of them enemies of Lancelot, to whom they told their purpose, and set them on [Pg 283] guard in the castle of Carlisle, where the court then was. Of Lancelot's friends few were in the court, for nearly all had gone with the king to the hunt.

When night came, Lancelot told Bors, who dwelt with him, that he had a fancy to go and speak with the queen.

"Do not go to-night, I pray you," said Bors.

"Why not to-night?"

"I fear some plot of that rogue, Agravaine, who has it in his heart to work you ill. I have heard a whisper, and fear that the king's absence to-night is part of a plot, and that an ambush is laid to do you harm."

"Have no dread of that," said Lancelot. "I wish only some minutes' conversation with the queen, and will quickly return again."

"I should rather you would not go. I am in doubt that some evil may come of it."

"Why say you this nephew? Do you deem that I am a coward, or that the queen is my mistress, as the evil-tongued say? I go because she has sent for me, desiring to see me. Am I the man to deny her request because there are foul-mouthed slanderers abroad?"

"Go, then, since I see you will. God speed you, and send you back safe and sound."

Lancelot thereupon wrapped himself in his mantle, and taking his sword under his arm made his way to the castle, which was some distance from his residence. Here he sought and entered the queen's chamber, where she awaited him with her ladies.

But no sooner had he done so, and scarcely had[Pg 284] he spoken a word to his royal lady, than Mordred, Agravaine, and their followers burst in tumult from the chamber in which they had been concealed, and loudly exclaimed,—

"Traitor knight! Lancelot du Lake, false and caitiff wretch, now art thou taken in thy treason!"

So loud they cried that their voices rang throughout the court, and they crowded round the door of the queen's chamber, bent on taking Lancelot unarmed, and slaying him at the feet of Guenever. Fortunately the door was of solid oak, and a damsel of the queen had hastily shot the bolts.

"Alas!" cried the queen, "what vile plot is this? Mischief is around us, Lancelot!"

"Is there any armor in your chamber?" asked Lancelot. "If so, give it to me, and I will face this malicious crew."

"There is none," said the queen. "I see no hope, and fear our love has come to a fatal end. There seems to be a host of armed knights without. They will kill you, Lancelot, and death will come to me through their vile charge of unchastity."

"Why did I not even wear as much of my armor as I fought Meliagrance with!" cried Lancelot, in distress. "If I had but listened to Sir Bors! Never was I caught in such a trap before."

As they spoke the tumult without increased, and Mordred and Agravaine cried together,—

"Come out, thou traitor knight! Think not to escape, for we have you like a rat in a trap. Come out and meet your just deserts."

"Shall I bear this?" cried Lancelot, flaming into anger. "The dogs! a dozen of them in armor[Pg 285] against one man in his mantle! I would rather meet death at once than stand and hear their reviling tongues."

Then he took the queen in his arms and kissed her, saying,—

"Most noble Christian queen, I beseech you, as you have ever been my special good lady, and I your poor knight, and as I never failed you in right or wrong since the day that King Arthur made me knight, that you will pray for my soul if I be here slain. For you may be sure that Sir Bors and my other kindred, with Lavaine and others of my friends, will rescue you from harm, and I beg you to go with them and live like a queen on my lands."

"That will I not, Lancelot," said the queen. "If you are slain for me, then death may come when it will, for I shall not live long to mourn you."

"Then, since my last hour seems to have come, and our love and life must cease together, so let it be; but some of those barking curs shall go with me to the shades. I am heavier at heart for you than for myself. Ah, that I had but a knight's armor!"

"I would that God would be content with my death, and suffer you to escape," said the queen.

"That shall never be," said Lancelot. "God defend me from such a shame. And now may the Lord Jesus be my shield and my armor."

This said, he wrapped his mantle around his arm, and approached the door. As he did so the strong oaken portal trembled under their blows, for they had got a great form out of the hall, and were using it as a battering-ram.

[Pg 286]"Save your trouble, you crew of mischief," said Lancelot. "Think you that Lancelot du Lake needs to be come at like a rabbit in its hutch? I fear you not, and dread not to face an army of such hounds."

"Come out, then, or let us into that chamber. It avails you nothing to strive against us all; but we will promise to spare your life till we have brought you to King Arthur."

"Will you?" said Lancelot, "or do you think to slay me where I stand? I trust you not, liars."

Then he unbarred the door and with his left hand held it open a little, so that but one man could enter at a time. As he did so, Colgrevice of Gore, who stood nearest, pressed forcibly through the opening, and struck a spiteful blow at Lancelot with his sword. This Lancelot parried, and returned so fierce a stroke with his own good blade, that he cut through the helmet and skull of the knight, and stretched him dead upon the floor.

Then, with all his great strength, he dragged the bleeding corpse within the chamber, closed the door against the pressure of all who bore upon it, and replaced the bars. "So much for this daring fool," he cried. "Thank heaven, I have an armor now! I shall not be quite a sheep at the shambles."

As he spoke he was hastily stripping the armor from the body of the dead knight. This done, he quickly arrayed himself in it, with the aid of the queen and her ladies.

Meanwhile the assault on the door continued, and Mordred and Agravaine kept up their cry,—

"Traitor knight! come out of the queen's chamber!"

[Pg 287]"Hold your peace," cried Lancelot. "You shall not prison me here, I promise you that, and if you take my counsel, you will depart. I am ready to agree on my knighthood to appear to-morrow before the king, and answer there that I came not to the queen with any evil purpose; and this I stand ready to prove by word or deed."

"Out on you, traitor!" cried Mordred. "Have you, we will, and slay you if we wish, for the king has given us the choice to save you or slay you."

"Is that your last word, sirrahs? Then keep yourselves, for I am not of the breed that die easily."

As he spoke, he flung down the bars and threw the door wide open. Then he strode proudly and mightily among them, sword in hand and clad in full armor, and at the first blow from his mighty hand stretched Agravaine dead upon the floor. Like a maddened lion that charges upon a herd of sheep, he now rushed upon them, striking fiercely to right and left, and felling men with every blow, till in a little while twelve more of his assailants lay cold in death, for there was not a man of them all could stand one blow from his powerful arm.

Of the whole party only Mordred remained alive, and he fled wounded with craven haste. Then Lancelot, leaning on his blood-dripping sword, turned to the queen, who stood looking at his deeds of might, with white lips and starting eyes.



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SIR LANCELOT IN THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER.

"All is at an end now," he said. "Henceforth King Arthur is my foe, and I am like a wolf at bay. Yet I fear your enemies will work you fatal harm, and would have you go with me, and let me be your knight-protector."

"That I dread to do," said the queen, "for vile slander would follow my footsteps. I had better face my foes. If they devise to put me to death, then you may come to my rescue, and no one then can blame me for going with you."

"That shall I do," said Lancelot. "And I promise to make such havoc among all men who mean you harm as I have done among those who lie here."

Then he kissed her, and each gave the other a ring; and so he left the queen and went to his lodgings.

[Pg 288]

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE OF THE QUEEN.

Little sleep came that night to Lancelot and his friends. For when he came again to Bors, he had found him, with others of his kindred, armed and ready to come to his rescue.

They listened with concern and indignation to Lancelot's story of how he had been entrapped, and heard with knightly joy the story of his bold discomfiture of his foes.

But it was evident to them all that the event was one of the greatest moment; that enmity would exist between Lancelot and the king, and that Guenever might be adjudged to the stake on the charge of infidelity to her lord.

[Pg 289]Therefore Bors took it upon himself to gather in Lancelot's defence all his kindred and friends; and by seven o'clock of the next morning he had gained the word of twenty-two Knights of the Round Table. To these were added knights of North Wales and Cornwall, who joined Lancelot for Lamorak's and Tristram's sake, to the number of fourscore.

To these Lancelot told all that had occurred, and expressed his fear of Arthur's hostility.

"I am sure of mortal war," he said, "for these knights claimed to have been sent and ordained by King Arthur to betray me, and I fear the king may, in his heat and malice, condemn the queen to the fire. Trust me, that I will not suffer her to be burnt for my sake. She is and has been ever a true lady to her lord, and while I live she shall not become a victim to the malice of her enemies."

The assembled knights agreed with him in this decision, and promised their utmost aid in his purpose of rescue.

"Rescue her I shall, whoever may be hurt; and I trust to heaven that no friend of mine will aid the king to her injury. But if I rescue her, where shall I keep her?"

"Did not the noble Sir Tristram, with your good will, keep La Belle Isolde three years in Joyous Gard, against the malice of King Mark?" said Bors. "That place is your own; and there, if the king adjudge the queen to the stake, you may keep her till his heat shall cool. Then you may bring her home with worship, and gain Arthur's thanks."

"That may not work so well as you fancy," said [Pg 290] Lancelot. "You remember what a return Tristram got from King Mark."

"That is another story," replied Bors. "You know well that Arthur and Mark are men of different mould. Mark could smile and play the traitor; but no man living can say that King Arthur was ever untrue to his word."

Their conference over, by the advice of Lancelot the knights put themselves in ambush in a wood as near Carlisle as they could secretly approach. And there they remained on guard, waiting to learn what the king might do.

Meantime Mordred, though wounded by Lancelot's sword, had managed to mount his horse, and rode in all haste to tell the king of the bloody end of the ambush. On hearing the story, Arthur's mind was divided between anger and pain.

"It grieves me sorely that Lancelot should be against me," he said; "and much I fear that the glorious fellowship of the Round Table is broken, for many of our noblest knights will hold with him. But dishonor must not rest upon England's crown. The queen has played me false, and shall suffer death for her treason to her wifely duty."

For the law was such in those days, that all, of whatever estate or degree, found guilty of treason, should suffer death. And so it was ordained in Queen Guenever's case—since thirteen knights had been slain, and one escaped sore wounded, in defending the king's honor—that she should be taken to the stake, and there be burnt to death as a traitress.

"My lord Arthur," said Gawaine, "let me counsel[Pg 291] you not to be over hasty in this severe judgment, for as I take it the guilt of the queen is not proved. That Lancelot was found in the queen's chamber I admit; but he might have come there with no evil purpose. You know how he has been for years her chosen knight, and how much he has done for her. She may have sent for him privily, to avoid scandal, for conference on some innocent subject. What we do for the best often turns to the worst, and I dare affirm that my lady the queen is, and has always been, faithful and true to her lord. As for Lancelot, I doubt me not he will make good what I have said with word and body, against any and all that question or oppose."

"That I believe," said the king. "I know Lancelot's way. But his boldness does not prove the queen's innocence. For her he shall never fight again, for she shall suffer the penalty of the law. And if I can lay my hands on him, he shall die the shameful death he richly merits."

"Then may Christ save me from ever seeing it," said Gawaine.

"Why say you this?" demanded the king, angrily. "You have no cause to love him. Last night he killed your brother Agravaine, and here is Mordred sorely wounded. He also slew two of your sons, Sir Florence and Sir Lovel."

"I know all that. But I gave them warning beforehand of what would happen if they meddled in this affair. They brought this fate on themselves. As for Agravaine, he stirred up this scandalous business, and has got his deserts."

"Say no more," cried the king, in hot indignation.[Pg 292] "I am resolved. The honor of Arthur's wife must be above suspicion. She has fallen from chastity and shall die the death. As for you, Gawaine, I bid you arm in your best armor, with your brethren Gareth and Gaheris, and bring her to the fire, that she may there hear her judgment, and receive the death she merits."

"No, my most noble lord, that shall I never do," said Gawaine. "No man shall say that I had aught to do with the death of this worthy lady, or gave my word in favor of her death."

"Then bid your brothers, Gareth and Gaheris, attend."

"They are young, and may not withstand your will; but they shall not be there by my counsel," said Gawaine, stoutly.

"We must attend, if you command us," said Gareth and Gaheris to the king. "But it will be sorely against our wills. If come we must, it shall be in peaceful guise, and without warlike array."

"Come as you will," said the king. "This I say, she shall have judgment this day."

"Alas! that I have ever lived to see this woful day!" said Gawaine, sadly, and as he turned away the tears ran hotly from his eyes.

But the king was bitterly set in his deadly purpose, and no sooner had he reached Carlisle than he gave command that the queen should at once be led to the place of execution, there to be burned as a traitress.

When this fatal decision was known in the castle there was weeping and wailing and wringing of hands from many lords and ladies, while of the[Pg 293] knights there present, few would consent to wear armor to compass the queen's death.

But Arthur's commands none dared question, and the unhappy lady was shriven by her ghostly father, and bound to the fatal stake. In a circle around her stood a guard of armed knights, while others were present without armor. But the king was not there; nor would Gawaine show himself at that shameful scene.

Then fire was set to the fagots that surrounded the stake. But as the flames began to curl upwards there came a shrill bugle-blast from a neighboring wood, and of a sudden Lancelot and his knights broke from their ambush, and rode upon those about the fire, striking right and left at all who bore arms and withstood them.

Down went the guard of knights before this fierce onset, till full twenty of them lay dead on the field. But by sad fortune, as Lancelot, in his warlike fury pressed hither and thither, cutting and slashing with the hot rage of the berserker, he by mishap struck the two unarmed knights, Gareth and Gaheris, and stretched them dead upon the field.

This was in the thick of the fray, and he knew not what he had done, for rather would he have slain himself than harmed these, his faithful friends. A few minutes sufficed to kill or disperse all the guard. Then Lancelot sprang from his horse, scattered the blazing fagots with his foot, and with a blow of his sword severed the bonds that fastened Guenever to the stake.

The unhappy lady fell, weeping, into his arms, thanking him in broken accents. With all due haste[Pg 294] he mounted her on a horse that had been provided, and rode off with her and his following of gallant knights to Joyous Gard, strong of heart and stout

of frame, and resolved to fight for her to the death, for more than ever he felt himself her chosen knight.

And when word went through the country round that Arthur and Lancelot were at odds, many a good knight rode in all haste to his castle, bent on taking his side in the coming war.

But when the news was brought to Arthur of how Lancelot had rescued the queen, and slain many of his knights, and in particular Gareth and Gaheris, his anger turned to such bitter sorrow and regret that he swooned from pure grief. And when he came to his senses again he deeply moaned, and reproached himself for the evil that had befallen.

"Alas! that I ever wore the crown!" he bewailed. "Within these two days I have lost forty knights, and, above all, the noble fellowship of Lancelot and his kindred, and all because I listened to the tongue of foul detraction. Alas! that ever this fatal thing began! Fair friends, see that none of you tell Gawaine of what has happened, for he loves Gareth so deeply that I fear, when he hears of his death, he will go out of his mind. How came Lancelot to slay these knights, who both loved him devotedly?"

"He would never have harmed them had he known them," said a knight. "It was in the midst of the hurtling and fierce struggling, when swords strike they know not where. Sad he will be when he learns what he has done."

"I am heavier for the loss of my knights than[Pg 295] of my queen," said Arthur, sadly. "Other queens may be had, but such a fellowship of knights can never be brought together again. And this I know, that when Gawaine learns of Gareth's death, he will never rest, nor suffer me to rest, till I have destroyed Lancelot and his kindred, or they have destroyed me. Ah, Agravaine, Agravaine, Jesus forgive thy soul for thy evil will, for thou and thy brother Mordred have caused all this bitter sorrow."

While the king thus complained, a tale-bearer, unheeding his injunctions, came to Gawaine big with his story, and told him of the rescue of the queen, and the death of a knightly host.

"What else could Lancelot do?" said Gawaine. "I should have done as much myself had I stood in his place. But where are my brothers? Why hear I not of them?"

"Truly," said the man; "they are both killed."

"Now, Jesus forbid! What! both? Is Gareth slain? Dare you tell me so?"

"Alas! the pity of it!"

"Killed! Who killed him?"

"Sir Lancelot slew them both."

"That is false. Gareth loved him better than he did me or the king. He would have joined him against us all, had Lancelot desired. And he was unarmed. Dare you repeat this story?" and he caught the man fiercely by the shoulders and glared wildly in his face.

"Sir, it is so noised abroad," said the man.

"Then is all joy gone from my life," moaned Gawaine, and he fell to the floor in a deep swoon, in which he lay long like one dead.

[Pg 296]But when Gawaine recovered, and had sought the king, and learned that his two brothers had been killed, unarmed and defenceless, his sorrow changed to bitter and revengeful anger.

"My king, my lord, and my uncle," he sternly said, "I vow by my knighthood that I shall never forgive Lancelot for this murderous deed, but from this day forth shall remain his deadly foe, till one of us has slain the other. War to the death it shall be, and if you aid me not I shall seek Sir Lancelot alone, if it be through seven kings' realms, till I hold him to answer for this deed of blood."

"You shall not need to seek him so far," said the king. "They say that Lancelot awaits us in Joyous Gard, and that many knights have joined him."

"Well is it so," said Gawaine fiercely. "Then my lord Arthur, gather your friends, and I will gather mine. Say not that deeds like this shall go unpunished in England's realm. Your justice defied! My unarmed brothers murdered! Shall this be done, and we basely submit?"

"You speak to the point," said the king. "We must strike for honor and revenge. Strong as Lancelot's castle is, and bold as are his friends, I fancy I can gain strength enough to draw him out of the strongest tower in it."

Then King Arthur sent orders far and wide through the land, and in brief time there came to Carlisle many knights, dukes, and earls, so that he had a great host. These the king informed of what had happened, and of his purpose to force Lancelot to yield up his queen, and to punish him for his trespass.

Lancelot meanwhile, was not idle, but drew to himself, many more knights, and provisioned his castle fully, for he well knew that he must abide behind walls, as he was far too weak to meet the king's host in the field.

Not many days had elapsed when King Arthur and Gawaine with a great host of men, laid siege about Joyous Gard, both the town and the castle, and war replaced the peace that had reigned so long in the land.

But Lancelot lay secure in his castle, and for a long time would not go out himself, nor suffer any of his knights to pass the gates of town or castle. And so fifteen weeks of the siege passed away.

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CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN OF GUENEVER.

It befell upon a day in harvest-time that Lancelot looked over the walls of Joyous Gard, and seeing below him the king and Gawaine, thus spoke to them,—

"My lords both, you besiege this castle in vain. You will gain more dishonor than worship here. If I chose to come out, with my knights, I should soon bring this war to an end."

"Come forth, if thou darest!" cried the king, in anger. "I promise to meet thee in the midst of the field."

[Pg 298]"God defend that I should face on the field of battle the noble king who made me knight."

"A truce to your fair language," answered the king. "Trust me, that I am your mortal foe, and will be so till the day of my death. You have slain my knights and dishonored my queen, and hold her from me by force, like a traitor. Think you I shall lightly forgive this?"

"You may say what you will, my lord and king," answered Lancelot. "With you I will not fight; but as for your lady Guenever, I am ready to stand for her innocence against any knight under heaven. Those who have slandered me and her lie in their teeth, and I hold myself ready to prove to the death that she is as true and chaste a lady as ever lived. More than once, my lord, you have consented that she should be burnt, from the voice of slander, and more than once have I rescued her, and forced the lie down the throats of her slanderers. Then you thanked me for saving her from the fire. Now, for doing you the same high service again, you bring war upon me. Your queen is honest and true, and if you will receive her to your good grace again I stand ready to deliver her."

"Recreant knight!" cried Gawaine, in wrath, "I warrant you my lord the king shall have his queen and you too, despite your fair words and proud defiance, and shall slay you both if it please him."

"That may be, Gawaine," said Lancelot. "Yet if I chose to come out of the castle you would not find it quite child's play to win me and the queen."

"Save your boastful words," said Gawaine. "As[Pg 299] for my lady, the queen, I shall say naught to her dishonor. But, recreant knight, what cause had you to slay my brother Gareth, who loved you with his whole soul?"

"I shall not seek an excuse for that deed," said Lancelot. "I would with as good will have slain my nephew Sir Bors. All I may say is that it was done in the heat of battle, and I knew not they were slain till word was brought me here."

"You lie in your teeth!" cried Gawaine. "You killed them in despite of me; and for this foul deed I shall make war on you while I live."

"If you are so hotly set, there is no use for me to seek accord; yet I am truly sorry for their deaths and your enmity. Only for this I would soon have the good grace of my lord Arthur."

"That may be, traitor, but you will wait long for peace. You have lorded it over me, and the whole of us, too long, and slain knights at your will. Now our turn has come."

"No one dare say that I ever killed a knight through treachery, as you, Gawaine, have done."

"You mean Sir Lamorak. Him I slew, man to man."

"Who lies now? You know well that you and the crew that set upon him dared not meet him face to face. You struck him treacherously from behind."

"A truce to Lamorak. This you may know, that I will never leave you till I deal with you as I did with him."

"Murder me, you mean! I fancy you might if you caught me in such a strait, which you will not easily do."

[Pg 300]Then others took the cue from Gawaine, and the cry went up from many voices: "False and recreant knight! how long will you hide behind your castle walls, like a rat in his hole?"

"How long is this to last?" said Bors and others to Lancelot. "We pray you to keep us no longer within these walls, but let us out to do battle with them. Men will say next that you are afraid. As for fair speech, it is thrown away. Gawaine will never forgive you, nor suffer you to make accord with the king. Therefore fight for your right, for to that it must come."

"I am loath to do so," said Lancelot.

Then he called from the wall to the king,—

"My knights demand that I let them sally from the castle. I therefore pray that neither you nor Sir Gawaine come into the field, for to you two I wish no harm."

"What then? Shall we cower in our tents while others fight our battles?" cried Gawaine. "This quarrel is mine and the king's. Shall we not fight in it?"

"If you will, you will; but I seek not battle with either of you."

Then they drew back, and both sides made ready for battle. And Gawaine, with deadly intent, set aside a strong body of knights, bidding them to attack Lancelot in force, and slay him if they could.

When the next morning came, King Arthur drew up his host against the castle in three great bands. And Lancelot's fellowship issued from the castle at three gates, the three bands being led by Lancelot, Bors, and Lionel. But Lancelot had given[Pg 301] strict charge to his knights to avoid harming King Arthur and Sir Gawaine.

Fierce was the battle that followed, and many good knights were slain. It began with a challenge from Gawaine, who came out before the king's host and dared any knight of Lancelot's to joust with him. This challenge Lionel accepted, but Gawaine thrust him through the body, and dashed him to the earth like a dead man. Then his friends rushed to his rescue and drove back his foes, bearing him from the field into the castle. This affray brought on a hot and fiery battle, and soon the air was filled with shouts, and the earth strewn with dead and wounded men.

In the midst of this fray the king hotly attacked Lancelot; but that faithful knight patiently endured his assault, and lifted not a hand in defence. But Bors, seeing his danger, rushed in, and, with a spear thrust, hurled King Arthur to the ground. Quickly leaping from his horse, he drew his sword, and said,—

"Shall I make an end of this war?"

"On pain of your head, no! Harm not the king! I shall not stand by and see him slain."

Then Lancelot sprang to the ground and helped the king to his horse again, saying,—

"My lord Arthur, for God's sake, end this strife! I will not fight you, though you kill me, nor have I the heart to fight your men. My lord, remember what I have done for you. Is not this an evil reward?"

When Arthur heard these words tears flowed from his eyes, for Lancelot's courtesy had overcome[Pg 302] his anger. He turned and rode away, saying sadly,—

"Alas! that this war ever began."

Then both sides drew off, and parties of each began the sad duty of burying the dead, while the wounded were borne away, and healing salves applied to their wounds.

The next day the battle was renewed, and fought with the same deadly energy as before. On this day Bors led the foremost party, and met Gawaine as Lionel had done the day before. Fiercely together they rode, and both were hurled to the ground with deep and dangerous wounds. Around them the battle raged with double fierceness, but Lancelot broke in and rescued Bors, and had him borne to the castle, while the other party bore off Gawaine.

Then, as the battle continued, Lavaine and others begged Lancelot to put forth his strength and fight with his full might, for he imperilled them all by his forbearance.

"Why should you spare your foes?" they said. "You do but harm thereby. Your enemies spare not you."

"I have no heart to fight against the king," said Lancelot.

"If you spare them all this day they will never thank you," said Palamides. "And if they get the better of you they will slay you without mercy."

Lancelot saw that this was but the truth, and stirred by this and the wound of Sir Bors, he rushed into the fray with his old might and fury, forcing back all before him. Glad to see the old[Pg 303] Lancelot, his followers pressed forward, driving back the foe, so that by eventide they had the best of the fray, and their horses went fetlock deep in the blood of the slain.

Then, in pity for Arthur, Lancelot blew the recall, and suffered the king's party to withdraw without further slaughter.

After this there was peace between the parties for many days, for Gawaine had been so sorely hurt that he could not stir the king to active war, and Arthur after awhile returned to Carlisle, leaving the castle closely besieged.

But the story of this war had now passed through Christendom, and had reached the pope, who, feeling that war between King Arthur and Lancelot was like battle between brothers, sent a letter to the king, commanding him, under pain of an interdict upon all England, to take his Queen Guenever into favor again, and to make peace and accord with Sir Lancelot.

This Papal bull was brought to Arthur by the bishop of Rochester, who was then at Rome. When the king had heard it read he knew not what to do. He agreed to take back the queen, and in his heart desired to make friends with Lancelot; but to this Gawaine, who had then the greatest influence over him, would not consent.

In the end it was agreed that if Lancelot would bring back the queen he should come and go in safety, and that no word should be spoken to Guenever, by the king or other person, of aught that had happened in the past.

Then the bishop had from the king his assurance,[Pg 304] under the great seal of the realm, as he was a true anointed knight, that Sir Lancelot should come and return in safety, and that the queen should not be spoken to by the king, or any other, concerning what had passed. With this safe-conduct, written at length and signed by King Arthur, the holy prelate rode in state to Joyous Gard, where he made Lancelot acquainted with all that had happened, telling him of the pope's action, and of the peril he would encounter if he withheld the queen from the king.

"It was never in my thought," said Lancelot, "to withhold Queen Guenever from my lord Arthur. All men know why I have her in charge. She would have suffered a shameful death through the king's unjust anger had I not been on hand to save her life; and I hold her only from peril of that vile sentence, which has never until now been remitted. I thank the pope heartily that he has made peace between Guenever and the king, and God knows that I will be a thousand-fold gladder to take her back than I ever was to bring her away. All I demand is, that I shall come and go in safety, and that the queen shall have her liberty as before, and stand in no peril from this or any former charge against her. For else I dare venture to keep her from a harder shower than ever yet has fallen upon her or me."

"You need dread nothing either for yourself or the queen," replied the bishop. "You know full well that the pope must be obeyed, by the king as well as by you. It were not to the pope's worship nor my poor honor that you should be distressed, or[Pg 305] the queen put to shame or peril. And as for King Arthur, here is his promise, under his own writing and seal."

Then he showed Lancelot all the written documents he had brought, both from the pope and the king.

"That suffices," said Lancelot. "I would trust King Arthur's bare word as I would the oath of half Christendom. No man can say that he ever broke his plighted faith. Therefore, I beg you to ride before me to the king, and recommend me to his good grace, letting him know that in eight days from to-day, by the grace of God, I shall bring to him his lady Queen Guenever. And say this further to him, that I stand ready to meet any one in the lists for the queen's fair fame except himself and Sir Gawaine, and the latter more from the king's love for him than from aught of his own deserts."

With this agreement the bishop departed to Carlisle, and when he had told the king how nobly Lancelot had spoken, the tears started from Arthur's eyes, and much he deplored in his heart the cruel chance that had aroused war between him and his dearest friend.

Lancelot now made ready a hundred knights, who were all dressed in green velvet, with their horses trapped to their heels, while each knight held in his hand an olive branch, in token of peace. For the queen there were provided four and twenty gentlewomen, who followed her in the same guise; while Lancelot was followed by twelve coursers, on each of which sat a young gentleman, and these[Pg 306] were arrayed in green velvet with golden girdles, and the horses trapped to the heels with rich cloths, set with pearls and stones in gold, to the number of a thousand. As for Lancelot and Guenever, they were clothed in white cloth-of-gold tissue. And in this array they rode from Joyous Gard to Carlisle, and through Carlisle to the castle, while many an eye shed tears on seeing them.

Then Lancelot alighted and took the queen, and led her to where Arthur sat, with Gawaine and many great lords before him. Then he kneeled, and the queen with him.

Many of the assembled knights wept bitterly on seeing this, but the king sat in haughty silence, looking steadily upon the pair who knelt before him. Seeing his countenance, Lancelot rose and forced the queen to rise also. Then thus he spoke in knightly pride,—

"My lord the king, by the pope's command and yours I have brought you my lady, the queen, as right requireth. If there be any knight, whatever his degree, except your sacred self, who shall dare say she has been untrue to you, I, Lancelot du Lake, stand ready to make her honor good with my body. To liars you have listened, and that has caused all the trouble between you and me. Time has been, my lord Arthur, when you have been greatly pleased with me in that I did battle for my lady your queen. Full well you know, my most royal sir, that she has been put to great wrong before this time; and since it pleased you then that I should fight for her, it seems to me that I had still more cause this last time to rescue her[Pg 307] from the fire, since she was to have been burnt for my sake. Had not the might of God been with me, think you that I could, unarmed, have prevailed over fourteen armed knights? I was sent for by the queen, who wished to confer with me, but had barely stepped within her chamber, when out burst Mordred and Agravaire, calling me traitor and recreant knight."

"They called you truly," said Gawaine.

"Did they so, Gawaine? By heaven, in their quarrel they failed to prove themselves in the right."

"I have given you no cause to do evil to me, Lancelot," said the king. "For I have loved you and yours more than all my other knights."

"My good lord and liege," answered Lancelot, "I beg it may not displease you if I answer that you have better cause to love me and mine than most knights, for none have done you such service as we have at many times and in many places. Often have I myself rescued you from deadly peril, when you were hard pressed by your foes; and it has

ever been my joy to please you, and my lord Gawaine as well, in jousts and tournaments, and in set battles, both on horse and on foot. I wish not to boast of my deeds, yet you all know well that I never met a knight but that I was able to stand against him, and have always done my duty like a man. I have been matched with good knights, such as Sir Tristram and Sir Lamorak, whom I loved for their valor and honesty. And I take God to witness, that I was never angry with or jealous of any good knight whom I saw active to win honor,[Pg 308] and was ever glad at heart when I found a knight who was able to endure me on horseback or on foot. Sir Carados of the dolorous tower was a noble knight and a man of mighty strength, and this you know full well, Sir Gawaine, since he pulled you from your horse, and bound you before him on his saddle. Yet I rescued you from him, and slew him before your eyes. In like manner I found his brother, Sir Turquine, leading your brother, Sir Gaheris, bound on his saddle, and slew him, and rescued your brother, as also three-score and four of King Arthur's knights whom he held in prison. Never met I with as strong and hard-fighting knights as Sir Carados and Sir Turquine, and I fought with them to the uttermost for the sake of you and your brother. It seems to me, Sir Gawaine, that you ought to bear in mind this good service I did for you in the past. If I might but have your good will in return, I would trust to God to have my lord Arthur's kindly grace."

"The king may do as he will," said Gawaine; "but while I live I shall never be in accord with you. I cannot forget that you have killed three of my brothers, two of them treacherously and pitilessly, for they wore no armor against you, and refused to bear any."

"Would to heaven they had been armed, for then they would now be alive," said Lancelot. "I tell you this, Sir Gawaine, that I love none of my own kinsmen as I did your brother, Sir Gareth, and would far rather have slain myself than him. Never while I live shall I cease to mourn his death, not alone for your bitter sorrow and anger, but for[Pg 309] other causes which concern myself. One is, that it was I who made him a knight; another is, that he loved me above all other knights; a third is, that he was ever noble, true, courteous, and gentle. I never would have slain, or even hurt, either Gareth or Gaheris by my will; and sad at heart am I that this fatal chance has robbed me of your love and made undying war between us, and has caused my noble lord and king to be my mortal foe. May Jesus forgive me for this cruel chance, which the fates have laid upon me. In reparation for this sad misfortune, I shall freely offer, if it will please the king's good grace, and yours, my lord Gawaine, to do penance in this wise. I shall start from Sandwich, and go in my shirt, barefoot, and at every ten miles' end I shall found a religious house, of what order you wish, where shall be sung and read day and night psalms and masses for the repose of Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris. This I shall perform from Sandwich to Carlisle. This, Sir Gawaine, seems to me fairer, holier, and better for their souls than that you and the king should make war upon me; for little good to any is likely to come from it."

Then the knights and ladies there wept as though they were distracted, and the tears fell hot on King Arthur's cheeks. But no shadow of softness came to Gawaine's stern face.

"The king, as I have said, may do as it pleases him," he answered, "but I shall never forgive you for the murder of my brothers. If my uncle, King Arthur, accords with you, he shall lose my service, for I hold you false both to the king and me."

[Pg 310]"The man lives not that can make that good," cried Lancelot. "If you charge me thus, I am ready to answer you with spear and sword since words you disdain."

"That cannot be at this time," said Gawaine. "You are here under the king's safe-conduct, and so must depart. If it were not for the pope's command and the king's given word, I should do battle with you, body to body, and prove upon you that you have been false both to the king and to me. In this land you shall not abide more than fifteen days, for I give you open warning that your safe-conduct lasts only for that time. In this the king and we all were agreed before you came hither. Only for this you would now find that my words are ready to be backed up with deeds. And this you shall find wheresoever I shall meet you hereafter."

Then Lancelot sighed, and tears fell upon his cheeks.

"Alas, most Christian realm," he said, "that I have loved above all other realms, and most Christian king, whom I have worshipped next to my God. From both I am banished, without cause or warrant. Truly I am sorry that I ever came into this land, to be thus causelessly and shamefully treated, after my long service here. So is it ever with fortune, whose wheel is so changeable that there is no constant abiding; and this may be proved by the old chronicles of noble Hector of Troy, and Troilus, and Alexander the mighty conqueror, and many more. When they were highest they quickly became lowest; and thus has it fared with me. No[Pg 311] living men have brought more honor and glory to the Round Table than I and my kindred, and yet we stand banished from the land which owes us such worthy service. As for you, Gawaine, I can live upon my native lands as well as any knight here. And if you, redoubted king, shall seek me there in hostile array, I must endure you as well as I may. If you come thither, Gawaine, see that you charge me not with treason or felony, for if you do, it will scarcely end with words."

"Do your worst," cried Gawaine, hotly. "And get you gone from here as fast as you can. We shall soon come after, and tumble your strongest castle upon your head."

"That shall not need," said Lancelot. "You may find me ready to meet you in open field."

"There have been words enough," said Gawaine. "Deliver the queen and take yourself away."

"If I had looked for so short a reception I would have thought twice before coming," answered Lancelot, proudly. "If the queen had been as dear to me as you would make her, I durst have kept her from the best fellowship of knights under heaven."

Then he turned to Guenever and said, in full hearing of the king and all there,—

"Madam, now I must depart from you and this noble fellowship forever. Since it is so, I beseech you to pray for me. And if you be slandered by any false tongues, send me word, my lady, and if one knight's hands may deliver you by battle, I shall deliver you."

Then Lancelot kissed the queen, and said openly to all present,—

[Pg 312]"Now let me see who there is in this place that dare say Queen Guenever is not true unto my lord King Arthur! Let him speak who dare speak."

He looked proudly around the hall, from right to left, but no voice came in answer. Then he took the queen by the hand and led her to the king, and delivered her to his royal hand. This done, Lancelot turned and walked from the hall with haughty stride; and there was neither duke, earl, nor king, baron nor knight, lady or maiden, that wept not at the sorrowful parting, except Sir Gawaine. And when Lancelot took his horse to ride out of Carlisle there was sobbing and weeping from all the people who had gathered in the streets to see him depart. And so he took his way to Joyous Gard, which ever after he called Dolorous Gard. And thus departed Sir Lancelot du Lake from the court of King Arthur forever.

He now called his fellowship about him, and asked them what they would do.

"Whatever you will," they answered with one voice.

"Then, my brave and faithful friends, we must leave this realm. It is sore to me to be banished, and had I not dreaded shame, the lady Guenever should never have left me."

"If you stay in this land we shall not fail you," said his knights. "If you depart hence we shall go with you."

"My fair lords, I thank you heartily," answered Lancelot, with much feeling. "If you come with me to my realm beyond the sea, I shall divide my lands among you, till I have as little as any of you.[Pg 313] I care for only enough to live upon, and trust to maintain you in knightly honor."

"So let it be," they rejoined. "Here, now that the fellowship of the Round Table is broken, there will be no more peace, but only strife and turmoil. You were the stay of Arthur's court, Sir Lancelot. With you gone, all quiet and harmony will depart."

"You praise me too highly, gentlemen. I did my duty; but not I alone. Yet I fear, when we are gone, we will soon hear of wars and rebellions, from those who dared not raise

their heads when we were all together. Mordred I fear above all. He is envious and ambitious, and if King Arthur shall trust him I dread me greatly he will find him a stinging serpent."

Then, soon after, they left Joyous Gard, and shipped at Cardiff to pass beyond the seas to Lancelot's realm of Benwick. Some men, indeed, call it Bayonne, and some call it Beume, the land whence comes the wine of Beume. Yet to say sooth, Lancelot and his nephews were lords of all France, and had there a host of towns and castles, and many people at their command.

There went with him a hundred proven knights, whom he rewarded as he had promised. For he shortly called a parliament, where he crowned Lionel king of France. Bors he made king of the realm of King Claudas; and Hector de Maris, King of Benwick and Guienne; while his other knights were made dukes and earls, till all were nobly provided for.

Thus Lancelot rewarded his faithful friends. And he furnished and provisioned his towns and castles, and gathered the men of war of the realm, for he felt well assured that Gawaine would not rest till he had brought King Arthur against him in martial array.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE WAR BETWEEN ARTHUR AND LANCELOT.

What Lancelot had feared came quickly to pass. For so unrelenting was Gawaine's enmity, and so strong his influence over the king, that Arthur, at his persistent instigation, got together a great army, to the number of sixty thousand, and had shipping made ready to carry them over the sea.

Then he made Sir Mordred chief ruler of all England during his absence, and put Queen Guenever under his care, little dreaming of what fatal results would follow this unwise choice.

These preparations made, Arthur passed the sea with his host, and landed in Lancelot's realm, where, through the revengeful spirit of Gawaine, they burnt and wasted all that they overran.

When word of this was brought to Lancelot and his knights, Sir Bors thus broke out in anger,—

"My lord Sir Lancelot, it is a shame to let them thus destroy this fair realm of France. You may well be assured that, however long you forbear[Pg 315] your foes, they will do you no favor if you fall into their hands."

Then said Sir Lionel, who was wary and wise, "My lord Sir Lancelot, this is my counsel. Let us keep to our strong-walled towns till the invaders suffer from hunger and cold, and blow upon their nails for warmth. Then we may freshly set upon them, and shred them down like sheep in a field."

"Such a course would disgrace us all," said King Bagdemagus to Lancelot. "Your over-courtesy has caused all the trouble we now have. If we let Gawaine work his will, he will bring our power to naught, while we hide like rabbits in our holes."

"So say I," broke in Sir Galihud. "There are knights here who come of kings' blood, and that will not long be content to droop behind walls. Give us leave to meet them in the field, and we shall deal with them in such fashion that they will curse the time they came into this country."

Then spoke seven brethren of North Wales, men of such prowess that one might seek through seven lands before he could find seven such knights,—

"Sir Lancelot," they said together, "let us ride out with Sir Galihud, for it has never been our wont to cower in towns and castles."

"My fair lords," replied Lancelot to them all, "I am loath to ride out with my knights and shed Christian blood. And my lands, after all the wars they have endured, are too bare long to sustain this invading host. It is the part of wisdom, therefore, for the time to keep to our walls, and meanwhile I will send a messenger to King Arthur and offer him a treaty of peace."

[Pg 316]Then he sent a damsel to the king, and a dwarf with her, with a message, bidding Arthur to quit making war upon his lands, and offering him fair terms of accommodation. The damsel rode to the hostile camp on a palfrey, while the dwarf ran by her side. When she came near to King Arthur's pavilion she alighted, and there was met by a gentle knight, Sir Lucan the butler, who said,—

"Fair damsel, come you from Sir Lancelot du Lake?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, "I am come hither with a message from him to my lord the king."

"Alas, that it should be needed!" said Sir Lucan. "My lord Arthur would soon be in accord with Lancelot but for Gawaine, who has more influence over him than all his knights besides, and will not suffer him to think of peace and friendship. I pray to God,

damsel, that you speed well in your errand, for all that are about the king, except Sir Gawaine, wish well to Lancelot above all knights living."

With these words he led the damsel to the king's pavilion. There Arthur, who had been advised of her coming, sat with Gawaine to hear her message. When she had told her errand the king was so moved that tears ran from his eyes, and all the lords were ready to advise him to make peace with Lancelot. But Gawaine, who sat with lowering brow, now broke out in hot speech,—

"My lord, my uncle, what will you do? Will you turn again after having come so far? All the world will speak villany of you."

"I do not deem it wise to refuse his fair[Pg 317] proffers," said the king. "Yet since I am come so far on this journey, I leave it to you to give the damsel her answer."

"Then tell Sir Lancelot," said Gawaine to the damsel, "that he wastes his labor now to sue to my uncle. If he wished peace he should have sought it sooner. Now it is too late. Tell him, also, that I, Sir Gawaine, promise him, by the faith I owe to God and to knighthood, never to leave him in peace till he have slain me or I him."

This word the damsel brought back to Lancelot, where he stood among his knights, and sad of heart he was to hear it.

"Why do you grieve?" said the knights. "If war they want, let them have it to their fill. Let us meet them in the field."

"Never before was I so loath to do battle," said Lancelot. "I would rather flee from King Arthur than fight him. Be ruled by me, noble sirs. When I must defend myself, then I will; but haste will make fresh sorrow."

Then the knights held their peace, and that night took their rest. But in the morning, when they looked abroad, they saw a hostile host around the city of Benwick, pressing it so closely that ladders were already set up against the walls. The defenders of the town flocked in haste to the walls and threw down the ladders, and hot strife began.

Forth now rode Sir Gawaine on a strong steed, and with a great spear in his hand, and when he came before the chief gate he called out loudly,—

"Sir Lancelot, where art thou? Or what proud knight is here that dare break a spear with me?"

[Pg 318]Hearing this challenge, Sir Bors hastily made ready, and rode from the city to the encounter. But Gawaine smote him from his horse, and would have slain him had he not been rescued. Then Lionel, his brother, rode out to revenge him; but he, too, was sorely wounded, and so borne into the town.

And thus, day after day, came Gawaine with his challenge, and not a day passed but some knight fell before his spear. And for half a year the siege continued, and there was much slaughter on both sides.

At length came a day when Gawaine again appeared before the gates, armed at all points, and loudly cried,—

"Where art thou now, thou false traitor, Sir Lancelot? Why hidest thou within walls and holes like a coward? Come forth, traitor, that I may revenge on thy body the death of my three brothers?"

Then said Lancelot's knights to their leader,—

"Now, Sir Lancelot, you must fight, or you are shamed forever. It is time for you to stir, for you have slept over long and we suffered over much."

"Defend myself I must, since he charges me with treason," said Lancelot. "His words cut deeply, and I must fight or be held recreant," and with stern countenance he bade the attendants to saddle his strongest horse and bring his arms to the gate tower. Then from this tower he called to the king, who stood below,—

"My lord Arthur," he said, "sad am I, for your sake, that thus you press upon me. Had I been revengeful I might have met you in open field, and[Pg 319] there made your boldest knights full tame; but I have forborne you half a year, and given you and Gawaine free way. It is much against my will to fight with any of your blood, but since he accuses me of treason I am driven to it like a beast brought to bay."

"If you dare do battle," cried Gawaine, "leave your babbling and come out. Nothing will give deeper joy to my heart, for I have waited long for this hour."

At this Lancelot mounted and rode out, and a host of knights followed him from the city, while from the king's army a throng of knights pressed to the front. But covenant was made that none should come near the two warriors till one was dead or had yielded, and the knights drew back, leaving a broad open space for the combatants.

Gawaine and Lancelot now rode far apart, and wheeled their horses till they faced each other. Thus they stood in grim silence and energy till the signal for the onset was given, when, like iron statues come to life, they plunged their spurs in the flanks of their chargers and dashed at furious speed across the plain. A minute passed, and they met in the middle with a shock like thunder, but the knights were so strong and their spears so great, that the horses could not endure the buffets, and fell to the earth.

In a moment both knights had leaped clear of their saddles, drawn their swords, and brought their shields before them. And now began a fierce and terrible affray, for they

stood and hewed at each other with might and main, till blood burst[Pg 320] in many places through the joints of their armor.

But Gawaine had a gift that a holy man had given him, that every day in the year, from nine o'clock till noon, his strength should increase till it became threefold. And he took good care to fight all his battles during these hours, whereby he gained great honor.

None knew of this gift but King Arthur, and as Lancelot felt the strength of his antagonist constantly increasing, he wondered greatly, and began to fear that he would be overcome. It seemed to him that he had a fiend, and no earthly man, before him, and for three hours he traced and traversed, and covered himself with his shield, scarcely able to stand against the brunt of Gawaine's mighty blows. At this all men marvelled, for never before had they beheld Lancelot so sorely driven to defence.

But when the hour of noon had passed, the magic might of Gawaine suddenly left him, and he had now only his own strength. This Lancelot felt, and he drew himself up and pressed on his foe, saying,—

"You have had your day, Gawaine; now it is my turn. Defend yourself, for I have many a grievous buffet to repay."

Then he redoubled his strokes, and at length gave Gawaine such a blow on the helmet that he fell to the earth. Lancelot now withdrew a step.

"Why do you withdraw?" cried Gawaine, bitterly. "Turn, thou traitor, and slay me; for if I recover you shall fight with me again."

"It is not my way, Sir Gawaine, to strike a[Pg 321] fallen knight. When you want to fight again you shall not find me lacking."

Then he turned and went with his knights into the city, while Gawaine was borne from the field to one of the king's pavilions, where leeches were brought to attend him.

"Alas!" said the king, "that ever this unhappy war began, for Sir Lancelot ever forbearth me, and my kin also, and that is well seen in his sparing my nephew Gawaine this day."

Then Arthur fell sick from sorrow for the hurt of his nephew and regret for the war. The siege was kept up, but with little energy, and both sides rested from their toils.

Three weeks passed before Gawaine regained his strength; but as soon as he was able to ride he armed again, mounted his horse, and rode to the gate of Benwick, where he loudly repeated his challenge to Lancelot as a traitor and recreant knight.

"You got the best of me by mischance at our last battle," he said, "but if you dare come into the field this day I will make amends, and lay you as low as you laid me."

"Defend me from such a fate," said Lancelot, "for if you should get me into such a strait my days were done. But since you in this unknighly fashion charge me with treason, I warrant you shall have both hands full before you gain your end."

Then Lancelot armed and rode out, and the battle began as before, with a circle of armed knights surrounding. But in this onset Gawaine's spear broke into a hundred pieces in his hand, while Lancelot struck him with such might that his[Pg 322] horse's feet were raised, and horse and rider toppled to the earth.

"Alight, traitor knight!" cried Gawaine, drawing his sword. "If a horse has failed me, think not that a king and queen's son shall fail thee."

Then Lancelot sprang to the ground and the battle went on as before, Gawaine's strength increasing hour by hour. But Lancelot, feeling this, warily kept his strength and his wind, keeping under cover of his shield, and tracing and traversing back and forth, to break the strength and courage of his foe.

As for Gawaine, he put forth all his might and power to destroy Lancelot, and for three hours pressed him so fiercely that he could barely defend himself. But when noon passed, and Lancelot felt Gawaine's strength again decline, he said,—

"I have proved you twice, Sir Gawaine. By this magic trick of your strength increasing you have deceived many a valiant knight. You have done your worst; now you shall see of what metal I am made."

Then he attacked him fiercely, and Gawaine defended himself with all his power; but at length there fell such a heavy blow on his helmet and on the old wound, that he sank to the earth in a swoon. When he came to himself again, he struck feebly at Lancelot as he lay, and cried spitefully,—

"Thou false traitor, I am not yet slain. Come near me, and do this battle to the uttermost."

"I shall do no more than I have done," said Lancelot. "When I see you on your feet again I shall stand ready to fight you to the bitter end. But to smite a wounded and prostrate man!—God defend me from such a shame."

And he turned and went towards the city, while Gawaine with spiteful malice called him traitor, and vowed he would never cease to fight with him till one of them was dead.

A month now passed away, during which Gawaine lay sick of his wound. As he slowly recovered, the old battle-hunger for Lancelot's blood returned to his heart, and he impatiently awaited the day when he could again take the field. But before this day arrived, news came from England that put a sudden end to the war; tidings of such threatening aspect that King Arthur was forced to return in all haste to his own realm.

CHAPTER V.

THE STING OF THE VIPER.

Disastrous, indeed, were the news from England. King Arthur had made the fatal mistake of placing a villain and dastard in charge of his realm, for Mordred had taken advantage of his absence to turn traitor, and seek to seize the crown and sceptre of England as his own.

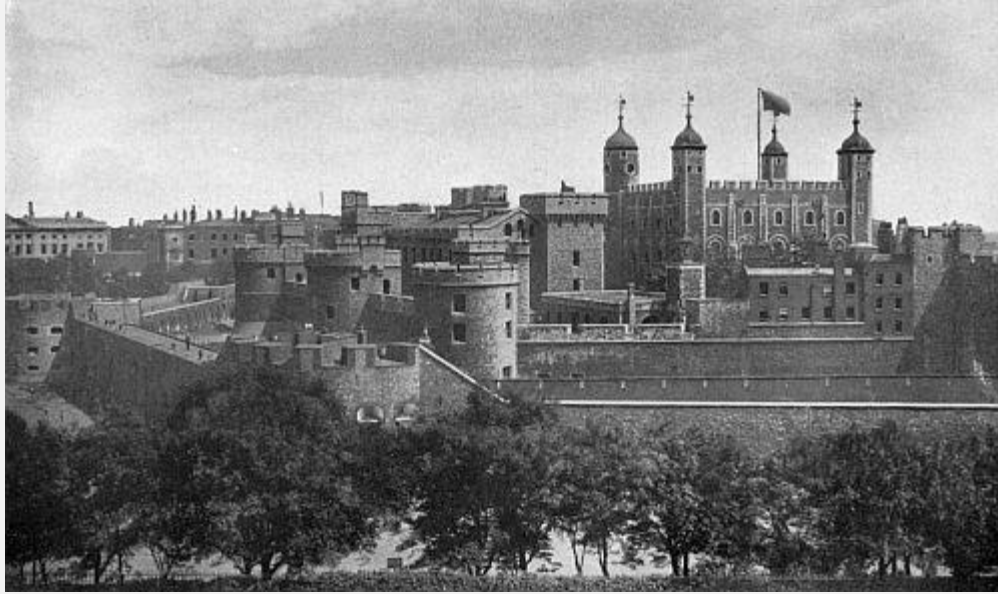
News moved but slowly from over seas in those days, and Mordred, with treasonable craft, had letters written as though they came from abroad,[Pg 324] which said that King Arthur had been slain in battle with Sir Lancelot.

Having spread this lie far and wide, he called the lords together to London in parliament, and so managed that they voted him king. Then he was crowned at Canterbury, and held a feast for fifteen days, after which he went to Winchester, where Guenever was, and publicly declared that he would wed his uncle's widow.

When word of this came to Guenever she grew heavy at heart, for she hated the traitor to her soul's depth. But she was in his power, and was forced to hide her secret hate. She therefore seemed to consent to his will, and desired permission to go to London, where she might buy all things that were necessary for the wedding. She spoke so fairly that he trusted her, and gave her leave to make the journey.

But no sooner had she reached London than she took possession of the Tower, and with all haste supplied it with provisions and garrisoned it with men, and so held it as a fortress, many knights holding with her against the usurper.

Mordred soon learned that he had been beguiled by the queen, and, moved to fury, he hastened to London, where he besieged the Tower, assailing it vigorously with great engines of war. But Guenever held out stoutly against him, and neither by fair speech nor foul could he induce her to trust herself into his hands again.



THE TOWER OF

LONDON.

There now came to Mordred the bishop of Canterbury, who said,—

"Sir, what would you do? Would you displease[Pg 325] God and shame knighthood by wedding the wife of your uncle, who has been to you as a father? Cease this vile purpose, I command you, or I shall curse you with book, and bell, and candle, and bring upon your head the vengeance of the church."

"Do your worst, sir priest," said Mordred, angrily. "I defy you."

"I shall do what I ought; be sure of that. You noise about that the lord Arthur is slain, no word of which I believe. You seek with a lie to make mischief in this land. Beware, lest your vile work recoil upon yourself."

"Peace, thou false priest," cried Mordred. "Chafe me no more, or I shall order that thy head be stricken off."

Finding that words were useless, the bishop departed, and, as he had threatened, laid the curse of the church on Mordred. Roused to rage by this, the usurper sought him to slay him, and he fled in all haste to Glastonbury, where he took refuge as a hermit in a chapel. But well he knew that war was at hand, and that the rightful king would soon strike for the throne.

Despite the anathema of the church, Mordred continued his efforts to get Guenever into his power; but she held firmly to the Tower, repelling all his assaults, and declaring openly that she would rather kill herself than marry such a wretch. Soon afterwards he was forced to raise the siege, for word came to him by secret messengers that Arthur

had heard of his treason, and was coming home with his whole host to revenge himself on the usurper of his crown.

[Pg 326]When Mordred heard this he made strenuous efforts to gather a large army, and many lords joined him with their people, saying that with Arthur there had been nothing but war and strife, but that with Mordred they hoped for peace and a quiet life. Thus was evil said of the good King Arthur when he was away from the land, and that by many who owed to him their honors and estates. Mordred was thus quickly able to draw with a great host to Dover, where he had heard that Arthur would land, for he hoped to defeat and slay him before he could get firm footing on England's soil.

Not long had he been there when a great fleet of ships, galleys, and carracks appeared upon the sea, bearing the king's army back to their native realm. On the beach stood Mordred's host, drawn up to prevent the landing of the king's army. As the boats came to the shore, laden with noble men-of-arms, a fierce struggle ensued, in which many a knight was slain, while full many a bold baron was laid low on both sides. But so courageous was the king, and so fierce the onset of his knights, that the opposing host could not hinder the landing of his army. And when they had gained a footing on the land, they set on Mordred with such fury that he and all his host were driven back and forced to fly, leaving Arthur master of the field.

After the battle, the king ordered that the dead should be buried and the wounded cared for. Among the latter Sir Gawaine was found lying in a great boat, where he had been felled with a deadly wound in the bitter strife. On hearing this direful news,[Pg 327] Arthur hastened to him and took him in his arms, with great show of grief and pain.

"In you and in Lancelot I had my highest joy," moaned the king. "Now I have lost you both, and all my earthly happiness is gone."

"My death is at hand," said Gawaine, "and I owe it all to my own hate and bitterness for I am smitten on the old wound that Lancelot gave me, and feel that I must die. Had he but been with you this unhappy war would never have begun. Of all this I am the cause, and have but received my deserts. Therefore I pray you, dear uncle, let me have paper, pen, and ink, that I may write to Sir Lancelot with my own hand."

These were brought him, and Gawaine wrote a moving and tender letter to Lancelot, blaming himself severely for his hardness of heart.

In this wise it ran,—

"Unto Sir Lancelot, flower of all noble knights, I, Sir Gawaine, son of King Lot of Orkney, and sister's son unto the noble King Arthur, send greeting; and also these sad tidings, that on the tenth day of May I was smitten on the old wound which you gave me at Benwick, and thus through this wound have I come to my death. And I would have all the world know that I, Sir Gawaine, Knight of the Round Table, have met with

death not through your ill-will, but from my own seeking; therefore I beseech you to come in all haste to this realm, to which you have heretofore done such honor. I earnestly pray you, Sir Lancelot, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, make no tarrying, but come over the sea in all haste, that[Pg 328] thou mayest with thy noble knights rescue that royal king who made thee knight, for he is hard bested with a false traitor, my own half-brother, Sir Mordred, who has had himself crowned king, and would have wedded Queen Guenever had she not taken refuge in the Tower of London. We put him to flight on our landing, on the tenth day of May, but he still holds against us with a great host. Therefore, I pray you to come, for I am within two hours of my death; and I beg that you will visit my tomb, and pray some prayer, more or less, for my soul."

When Sir Gawaine had finished this letter he wept bitter tears of sorrow and remorse, and Arthur wept beside him till they both swooned, the one from grief, the other from pain. When they recovered, the king had the rites of the church administered to the dying knight, who then prayed him to send in haste for Lancelot, and to cherish him above all other knights, as his best friend and ally.

Afterwards, at the hour of noon, Gawaine yielded up his spirit. And the king had him interred in Dover castle, where men to this day may see his skull, with the wound thereon that Lancelot gave him in battle.

Word was now brought to King Arthur that Mordred had pitched a new camp on Barham Down. Thither in all haste he led his army, and there a second great battle was fought, with much loss on both sides. But at the end Arthur's party stood best, and Mordred fled, with all his host, to Canterbury.

[Pg 329]This second victory changed the feeling of the country, and many people who had held aloof joined the king's army, saying that Mordred was a traitor and usurper. When the dead had been buried and the wounded cared for, Arthur marched with his host to the sea-shore, westward towards Salisbury. Here a challenge passed between him and Mordred, in which they agreed to meet on a down beside Salisbury, on the day after Trinity Sunday, and there fight out their quarrel.

Mordred now made haste to recruit his army, raising many men about London, for the people of that section of the country held largely with him, and particularly those who were friendly to Lancelot. When the time fixed came near, the two armies drew together and camped on Salisbury Down.

And so the days passed till came the night of Trinity Sunday, when the king dreamed a strange dream, for it seemed to him that he sat in a chair that was fastened to a wheel, and was covered with the richest cloth of gold that could be made. But far beneath him he beheld a hideous black pool, in which were all manner of serpents, and vile worms,

foul and horrible. Suddenly the wheel seemed to turn, and he fell among the serpents, which seized upon his limbs.

Awakening in fright, he loudly cried, "Help!" and knights and squires came crowding in alarm into his chamber; but he was so amazed that he knew not where he was nor what he said.

Then he fell again into a half slumber, in which Gawaine seemed to come to him attended by a number of fair ladies.

[Pg 330]"Fair nephew," asked the king, "who are these ladies?"

"They are those for whom I did battle during my life," answered Gawaine. "God has sent them and me to warn you of your coming death, for if you fight with Mordred to-morrow as you have agreed, you will both be slain, and most of your people. Therefore I am here to warn you not to fight to-morrow, but to treat with the traitor, and make him large and fair promises, so as to gain a month's delay. Within that time Lancelot and his knights will come, and Mordred the usurper cannot hold against you both."

This said, Gawaine and the ladies vanished. Then Arthur waked, and sent messengers in haste to bring his lords and bishops to council. When they had come he told them his dream, and they counselled him by all means to be guided by it. Lucan the butler, and his brother Sir Bevidere, with two bishops, were therefore sent to treat with Mordred, and make him large promises for a month's truce.

The commissioners sought Mordred's camp and held a long conference with him. At the end he agreed to meet King Arthur on the plain between the hosts, each to bring but fourteen persons with him, and there consult on the treaty.

"I am glad that this is accomplished," said the king, when word of the compact was brought him.

But when he was ready to start for the place of conference, with the fourteen chosen men, he said to his knights,—

"Be wary and watchful, for I trust not Mordred.[Pg 331] If you see any sword drawn, come fiercely forward, and slay the villain and his guard."

Mordred gave the same warning to his lords, for he had equal mistrust of Arthur, whom he feared and doubted.

The two leaders, with their chosen followers, now advanced and met between the hosts. But by a fatal chance, as the king and his opponent were in consultation, an adder came from a heath bush and stung a knight on the foot. Feeling the wound he drew his sword in thoughtless haste to kill the venomous serpent. But the instant the hosts on both sides saw that sword flash in the air all was uproar and tumult. On both sides trumpets and

horns were blown, harness rattled and clanked, and the flash of spear-heads and sword-blades gleamed in the sunlight, while like two mighty waves of war the great hosts broke from their stations and rushed together across the plain.

Then Arthur sprang to his horse, exclaiming, "Alas! this unhappy day!" and rode to his party; and Mordred did likewise.

No hand nor voice could stay the advancing hosts, and in a moment there began the most doleful battle ever seen in Christian land. For there was rushing and riding, foining and striking, and deadly clamor, and fearful strife. Many a grim word was there spoken, and many a deadly stroke dealt. Many times King Arthur rode through Mordred's host, and knightly were the deeds of his hands. And Mordred fought with knightly valor and zeal.

Thus went on the deadly fray all day long, without pause or stint, till noble knights lay like[Pg 332] fallen leaves upon the bloody ground. And when nightfall was at hand they still fought with desperate valor, though by that time full a hundred thousand men lay dead upon the down.

Then the heart of Arthur grew full of warlike fury, to see so many of his people slain. And when the sun was near its setting, he leaned upon his crimson sword, and looked about him with eyes that seemed to weep blood. For of all his mighty host of knights but two remained alive, Sir Lucan the butler, and his brother Sir Bevidere; and both of these were sorely wounded.

"God's mercy!" cried the king, "where are all my noble knights? Alas! that I have lived to see this doleful day! Now, indeed, am I come to my end. But would to God I knew where to find that traitor, Mordred, who has caused all this mischief."

As he spoke, his eyes fell on Mordred, who stood leaning upon his sword amid a great heap of slain, for his host had been slaughtered to a man.

"Give me my spear," cried Arthur, wrathfully, to Sir Lucan. "Yonder stands the traitor who has wrought this dire woe."

"Let him be," said Lucan. "He is unhappy enough. Remember, my good lord, your last night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawaine told you. For God's sake make an end of this fray. Blessed be God, we have won the field; for here are three of us alive, while Mordred stands alone among his dead. If you leave off now, the wicked day of destiny will pass and life remain to you. Your time for revenge will come hereafter."

"Betide me life, betide me death," cried the king,[Pg 333] "this fray must end here. Now that I see him yonder alone, he shall never escape my hands. One or both of us shall die."

"Then God speed the just cause," said Bevidere.

With no word more Arthur took his spear in both hands, and ran furiously at Mordred, crying,—

"Traitor, now has thy day of death come!"

When Mordred heard him, he raised his dripping sword and ran to meet the king. Thus they met in mid-field, and King Arthur smote Mordred under the shield, the spear piercing his body more than a fathom.

Mordred felt that he had his death-wound, but with a last impulse of fury in his felon soul he thrust himself, with all his strength, up to the bur of King Arthur's spear. Then wielding his sword with both hands, he struck the king so dread a blow on the side of the head that the trenchant blade cut through the helmet and deep into the skull.

With this last and fatal stroke Mordred fell stark dead to the ground. And Arthur sank in a swoon to the earth, where he lay like one dead.

Thus sadly and direfully ended that dreadful war, with which came to a close the flower of the days of chivalry, and the glorious and never-to-be equalled fellowship of the Round Table, with all the mighty deeds of prowess and marvels of adventure that to it belonged. For of those noble knights, except Sir Lancelot and his kindred, only two lived, Sir Lucan the butler, and Sir Bevidere his brother, and of these two Sir Lucan was wounded unto death; and with them the illustrious King Arthur, whose chivalrous soul had so long sustained [Pg 334] this noble order of knighthood, lay bleeding piteously upon that direful field of blood.

Sir Lucan and Bevidere, with bitter tears of sorrow, lifted their helpless king between them, and with great labor led him from that place of slaughter till they reached a small chapel near the sea-shore. Here, as the night drew on, the sound of many voices came to them, as if the dead had risen and were astir on the blood-stained field.

"What noise is this, Sir Lucan?" said the king. "Go, gentle friend, and tell me what it means."

Lucan went, and by the moonlight saw a throng of pillagers, who robbed the dead bodies of money and jewels, killing for their riches those knights who were not quite dead. When he brought this news back to Arthur, the king's sad heart came near to breaking.

"Alas! Lancelot," he said, "how have I missed you this day. Alas! that I ever turned against you, for had you been here this fatal end could never have been, nor those noble warriors left to be the prey of the wolves and jackals of the battle-field. So sorely have I erred and sadly have I been repaid for my error. But now, alas, it is too late for regret

or amendment, for the fellowship of the Round Table is at an end, and Arthur the king shall reign no more."

[Pg 335]

CHAPTER VI.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

When morning dawned, after that day of fate, Lucan and Bevidere took up the king between them, and sought to bear him to the sea-shore, as he bade them do. But in the lifting the king swooned, and Lucan fell prostrate, the blood gushing anew from his wound.

Arthur lay long like one dead, and when he came to himself again he saw Lucan lifeless at his feet, with foam upon his lips, and the ground around him deeply stained with his blood.

"Alas! this is a heavy sight to see," he said. "He sought to help me when he stood most in need of help. He would not complain though his heart broke, and has given his life for mine. May Jesus have mercy on his soul."

Bevidere stood beside him, weeping bitterly for the death of his brother.

"Weep and mourn no more," said the king. "It will not now avail. Could I live, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore. But my time goeth fast, and there is that to do for which but few moments remain."

Then he closed his eyes for a time, like one who sees visions; and when he looked again there was that in his face which Bevidere could not fathom and his eyes were deep with meaning unrevealed.

"Now, my lord Bevidere," said the king, "the end is at hand. Take thou my good sword Excalibur,[Pg 336] and go with it to yonder water-side. When thou comest there, I charge thee throw it as far as thou canst into the water; then come again and tell me what thing thou seest."

"Trust me, my lord and king, your command shall be obeyed," said Bevidere.

So he took the sword and departed to the water-side. But as his eyes fell upon the noble weapon, whose pommel and haft were all of precious stones, a feeling of greed came upon him and he said to himself,—

"If I throw this rich sword into the water, no good can come of it, but only harm and loss. Had I not better keep it for myself?"

Moved by this thought, he hid Excalibur under a tree, and returned to the king, whom he told that he had thrown the sword into the water.

"What saw you there?" asked the king.

"Sir, I saw nothing but the rippling waves."

"Then you speak untruly," said the king. "You have not thrown the sword as I bade you. Go again, and obey my command, as you are to me dear and true. Spare not, but throw it in afar."

Bevidere thereupon went again, and took the sword in his hand. But the rich jewels so glittered in the sun that his greed came back more strongly than before, and he deemed it a sin to throw into the sea that noble blade. So he hid the sword again, and returned to the king with his former tale.

"What sawest thou there?" asked the king.

"Sir, I saw nothing but the waves that broke on the beach, and heard only the roar of the surf."

"Ah, traitor! false and untrue art thou!" cried[Pg 337] the king. "Thou hast betrayed me twice. Who would have thought that thou, whom I held dear, and who art named a noble knight, would betray his king for the jewels of a sword? Go again, for thy long delay puts me in a great jeopardy of my life. If now you do not as I have bidden, beware of me hereafter, for dead or alive I will have revenge upon you. Would you, Sir Bevidere, for a shining blade, bring death and ruin to your king?"

Then Bevidere, heart-full of shame, hastened away, and took the sword, turning his eyes manfully away from its jewelled hilt. Binding the girdle around it, with all the might of his arm he hurled the blade far out over the waves.

Then came a marvel. For as he followed the sword with his eyes, he saw a hand and arm rise above the waves to meet the blade. The hand caught it by the hilt, and brandished it thrice in the air, and then vanished with it into the water.

Bevidere, much wondering, hurried back to the king, and told him what he had seen.

"Now, Sir Bevidere, you have done as I bade you," said Arthur. "But much precious time have you lost. Help me hence, in God's name, for I fear that I have tarried over-long."

Then Bevidere took the king on his back and bore him to the water-side, and lo! there he saw another strange thing.

For close by the shore lay a little barge, which he had not seen before, and in it sat many fair ladies, among whom were three queens, who wore black hoods, and wept with bitter sorrow when they saw King Arthur.

[Pg 338]"Now help me into the barge," said the king.

This Sir Bevidere did as gently as he could. And the three queens received the dying monarch with deep mourning, and had him laid between them, with his head on the lap of her who sat in the centre.

"Alas! dear brother, why have you tarried so long from me?" said this queen. "Much harm I fear from this sad wound."

And so they rowed from the land, while Bevidere stood on the shore sadly watching the barge go from him.

"Ah, my lord Arthur," he cried, "what shall become of me, now that you go from me and leave me here alone among my enemies?"

"Comfort thyself," said the king, "and do what thou mayest, for in me can no man henceforth put his trust. I go into the vale of Avilion, to a happy summer island far over the sea, where I shall be healed of my grievous wound. But when I shall come again no voice may tell. Mayhap I shall never come, but dwell forever in that sunny vale. If you never hear more of me, pray for my soul."

Then again the queens and the ladies wept and moaned, and the barge moved swiftly over the long waves and afar to sea, while Bevidere stood and watched it till it became a black speck on the waters. Then it vanished and was seen no more, and the lonely watcher cast himself upon the beach, weeping like one who has lost all life's happiness.

But when night came near he turned and went wearily away, heavy with the weight of death that lay upon his soul, for he alone remained of yesterday's mighty hosts. All that night he journeyed through a great forest, and in the morning he found himself between two hoary cliffs, with a chapel and a hermitage in the glen that lay between.

In this hermitage he found the holy man who had been archbishop of Canterbury, and who had come hither to escape Mordred's rage. With him Bevidere stayed till he was cured of his wounds, and afterwards he put on poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly in fasting and prayers.

But as for the three queens who went with Arthur to the island of Avilion, the chronicles say that they were Morgan le Fay his sister, the queen of Northgalis, and the queen of the Waste Lands. And with them was Nimue, the lady of the lake. All were skilled in magic, but whither they bore King Arthur, or where lies the magical isle of Avilion, or

if he shall come again, all this no man can say. These are of the secrets that time alone can tell, and we only know that his coming is not yet.

[Pg 339]

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH OF LANCELOT AND GUENEVER.

When word was brought to Lancelot du Lake that Mordred had usurped the throne of England, had besieged Guenever in the Tower of London, and had sought to prevent Arthur from landing[Pg 340] at Dover, his soul was moved to wrath and sorrow. And still more was he moved by the letter of Sir Gawaine, with its pitiful self-reproach and earnest wistfulness.

"Is it a time for mourning?" said Sir Bors to Lancelot. "My counsel is that you cross at once to England, visit Gawaine's tomb, as he requests, and then revenge my lord Arthur and my lady Guenever on this base traitor, Mordred."

"It is well advised," said Lancelot. "To England we must go in all haste."

Then ships and galleys were made ready with the greatest despatch, for Lancelot and his host to pass over to England. And in good time he landed at Dover, having with him seven kings and a mighty host of men.

But when he asked the people of Dover the news of the country, his heart was filled with dismay to hear of the great battle on Salisbury Downs, where a hundred thousand men had died in a day, and of the death of Arthur the king.

"Alas!" said Lancelot, "this is the heaviest tidings that ever mortal ears heard. Would that I had been advised in good time. Nothing now remains to do. I have come too late. Fair sirs, I pray you to show me the tomb of Sir Gawaine."

Then they brought him into the castle of Dover, and showed him the tomb. Lancelot fell on his knees before it, and wept, and prayed heartily for the soul of him that lay within. And that night he made a funeral feast, to which all who came had flesh, fish, wine, and ale, and every man and woman was given twelve pence. With his own hand he[Pg 341] dealt them money in a mourning gown; and ever he wept, and prayed for the soul of Sir Gawaine.

In the morning, all the priests and clerks of the country round gathered, at his request, and sang a requiem mass before the tomb. And Lancelot offered a hundred pounds, and each of the seven kings forty pounds, and a thousand knights offered one pound each, this going on from morning till night. And Lancelot lay two nights on the tomb in prayer and weeping.

On the third day he called about him the kings, dukes, earls, barons, and knights of his train, and said to them,—

"My fair lords, I thank you all for coming into this country with me; but we have come too late, and that I shall mourn while I live. But since it is so, I shall myself ride and seek my lady Queen Guenever, for men say that she has fled from London, and become a nun, and that she lives in deep penance, and in fasting, prayers, and almsgiving, and is sick almost unto death. Therefore, I pray you, await me here, and if I come not again within fifteen days, then take ship and return to your own country."

"Is it wise for you to ride in this realm?" said Sir Bors. "Few friends will you find here now."

"Be that as it may," said Lancelot, "I shall go on my journey. Keep you still here, for no man nor child shall go with me."

No boot was it to strive with him, and he departed and rode westerly, on a seven or eight days' journey, asking of all people as he went. At last he came to the nunnery where was Queen[Pg 342] Guenever, who saw him as she walked in the cloister, and swooned away, so that her ladies had work enough to keep her from falling. When she could speak, she said,—

"Ye marvel why I am so held. Truly, it is for the sight of yonder knight. Bid him come hither, I pray you."

And when Sir Lancelot had come, she said to him with sweet and sad visage,—

"Sir Lancelot, through our love has all this happened, and through it my noble lord has come to his death. As for me, I am in a way to get my soul's health. Therefore, I pray you heartily, for all the love that ever was between us, that you see me no more in the visage; but turn to thy kingdom again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack. So well have I loved you that my heart will not serve me to see you, for through you and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed. Therefore, Sir Lancelot, go to thy realm, and take there a wife, and live with her in joy and bliss; and I beseech you heartily to pray to God for me, that I may amend my mis-living."

"Nay, madam, I shall never take a wife," said Lancelot. "Never shall I be false to you; but the same lot you have chosen that shall I choose."

"If you will do so, I pray that you may," said the queen. "Yet I cannot believe but that you will turn to the world again."

"Madam," he earnestly replied, "in the quest of the Sangreal I would have forsaken the world but for the service of your lord. If I had done so then with all my heart, I had passed all the knights[Pg 343] on the quest except Galahad, my son. And had I now found you disposed to earthly joys, I would have begged you to come into my realm. But since I find you turned to heavenly hopes, I, too, shall take to penance, and pray while my life lasts, if I can find any hermit, either gray or white, who will receive me. Wherefore, madam, I pray you kiss me, and never more shall my lips touch woman's."

"Nay," said the queen, "that shall I never do. But take you my blessing, and leave me."

Then they parted. But hard of heart would he have been who had not wept to see their grief; for there was lamentation as deep as though they had been wounded with spears. The ladies bore the queen to her chamber, and Lancelot took his horse and rode all that day and all that night in a forest, weeping.

At last he became aware of a hermitage and a chapel that stood between two cliffs, and then he heard a little bell ring to mass, so he rode thither and alighted, and heard mass.

He that sang mass was the archbishop of Canterbury, and with him was Sir Bevidere. After the mass they conversed together, and when Bevidere had told all his lamentable tale, Lancelot's heart almost broke with sorrow. He flung his arms abroad, crying,—

"Alas! who may trust this world?"

Then he kneeled, and prayed the bishop to shrive and absolve him, beseeching that he might accept him as his brother in the faith. To this the bishop gladly consented, and he put a religious habit on[Pg 344] Lancelot, who served God there night and day with prayers and fastings.

Meanwhile the army remained at Dover. But Lionel with fifteen lords rode to London to seek Lancelot. There he was assailed by Mordred's friends, and slain with many of his lords. Then Sir Bors bade the kings, with their followers, to return to France. But he, with others of Lancelot's kindred, set out to ride over all England in search of their lost leader.

At length Bors came by chance to the chapel where Lancelot was. As he rode by he heard the sound of a little bell that rang to mass, and thereupon alighted and entered the chapel. But when he saw Lancelot and Bevidere in hermits' clothing his surprise was great, and he prayed for the privilege to put on the same suit. Afterwards other knights joined them, so that there were seven in all.

There they remained in penance for six years, and afterwards Sir Lancelot took the habit of a priest, and for a twelvemonth he sang mass. But at length came a night when he had a vision that bade him to seek Almesbury, where he would find Guenever dead. Thrice that night was the vision repeated, and Lancelot rose before day and told the hermit of what he had dreamed.

"It is from God," said the hermit. "See that you make ready, and disobey not the warning."

So, in the early morn, Lancelot and his fellows set out on foot from Glastonbury to Almesbury, which is little more than thirty miles. But they were two days on the road, for they were weak and feeble with long penance. And when they[Pg 345] reached the nunnery they found that Guenever had died but half an hour before.

The ladies told Lancelot that the queen had said,—

"Hither cometh Lancelot as fast as he may to fetch my corpse. But I beseech Almighty God that I may never behold him again with my mortal eyes."

This, said the ladies, was her prayer for two days, till she died. When Lancelot looked upon her dead face he wept not greatly, but sighed. And he said all the service for the dead himself, and in the morning he sang mass.

Then was the corpse placed in a horse-bier, and so taken to Glastonbury with a hundred torches ever burning about it, and Lancelot and his fellows on foot beside it, singing and reading many a holy orison, and burning frankincense about the corpse.

When the chapel had been reached, and services said by the hermit archbishop, the queen's corpse was wrapped in cired cloth of Raines, thirty-fold, and afterwards was put in a web of lead, and then in a coffin of marble.

But when the corpse of her whom he had so long loved was put in the earth, Lancelot swooned with grief, and lay long like one dead, till the hermit came and aroused him, and said,—

"You are to blame for such unmeasured grief. You displease God thereby."



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THE OLD KITCHEN OF GLASTONBURY ABBEY.

"I trust not," Lancelot replied, "for my sorrow is too deep ever to cease. When I remember how greatly I am to blame for the death of this noble King Arthur and Queen Guenever, my heart sinks[Pg 346] within me, and I feel that I shall never know a moment's joy again."

Thereafter he sickened and pined away, for the bishop nor any of his fellows could make him eat nor drink but very little, but day and night he prayed, and wasted away, and ever lay grovelling on the tomb of the queen.

So, within six weeks afterwards, Lancelot fell sick and lay in his bed. Then he sent for the bishop and all his fellows, and said with sad voice: "Sir Bishop, I pray you give me all the rites that belong to a Christian man, for my end is at hand."

"This is but heaviness of your blood," replied the bishop. "You shall be well amended, I hope, through God's grace, by to-morrow morning."

"In heaven, mayhap, but not on earth," said Lancelot. "So give me the rites of the church, and after my death, I beg you to take my body to Joyous Gard, for there I have vowed that I would be buried."

When they had heard this, and saw that he was indeed near his end, there was such weeping and wringing of hands among his fellows that they could hardly help the bishop in the holy offices of the church. But that night, after the midnight hour, as the bishop lay asleep, he fell into such a hearty laugh of joy that they all came to him in haste, and asked him what ailed him.

"Why did you wake me?" he cried. "I was never in my life so happy and merry."

"Wherefore?" asked Sir Bors.

"Truly, here was Sir Lancelot with me, with more angels than I ever saw men together; and[Pg 347] I saw the angels bear him to heaven, and the gates of heaven opened to him."

"This is but the vexation of a dream," said Sir Bors. "Lancelot may yet mend."

"Go to his bed," said the hermit, "and you shall find if my dream has meaning."

This they hastened to do, and there lay Lancelot dead, but with a smile on his lips, and the sweetest savor about him they ever had known.

Great was the grief that followed, for never earthly man was mourned as was Lancelot. In the morning, after the bishop had made a requiem mass, he and his fellows put the corpse of the noble knight into the same horse-bier that had borne Guenever, and the queen's corpse with it, and they were taken together to Joyous Gard, with such state and ceremony as befitted those of royal blood.

And there all the services of the church were sung and read, while the face of Lancelot lay open for people to see; for such was then the custom of the land. When the services were over they were buried in one tomb, for so great had been their love during life that all men said they should not be divided in death.

During these events, Sir Constantine, the noble son of Sir Cador of Cornwall, had been chosen king of England in Arthur's place, and a worthy monarch he proved, ruling the realm worshipfully and long.

After Lancelot's death the new king sent for the bishop of Canterbury, and restored him to his archbishopric; but Sir Bevidere remained a hermit at Glastonbury to his life's end.

King Constantine also desired the kindred of[Pg 348] Lancelot to remain in his realm; but this they would not do, but returned to their own country. Four of them, Sir Bors, Sir Hector, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleoberis, went to the Holy Land, where they fought long and stoutly against the Saracens. And there they died upon a Good Friday, for God's sake.

And so ends the book of the life and death of King Arthur and his noble Knights of the Round Table, who were an hundred and fifty when they were all together. Let us pray that God was merciful to them all.

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes:

1. Minor punctuation errors have been corrected as follows;

Pg. 12 - Added missing punctuation "?" (might champion?)

Pg. 188 - Added missing punctuation "." (and he did all.)

Pg. 270 - Added missing endquote ("This I say,")

Pg. 316 - Removed extra enquote (what will you do?)

2. Spelling corrections based upon correct spelling of the word elsewhere in the text:

Pg. 39 - "grevious" to "grievous" (4) (grievous cry that)

Pg. 50 - "you" to "your" ("Knight, hold your hand.")

Pg. 83 - "Dinaden" to "Dinadan" (92) (Gareth and Dinadan also)

Pg. 94 - "seaside" to "sea-side" (8) (castle by the sea-side,)

Pg. 127 - "law" to "lay" (as he lay there asleep)

Pg. 143 - "Badgemagus" to "Bagdemagus" (11) (said Bagdemagus)

Pg. 159 - "Percival" to "Percivale" (94) (Percivale had returned)

Pg. 166 - "dressel" to "dressed" (old man dressed in a)

Pg. 189 - "this" to "his" (to his surprise and joy)

Pg. 202 - "Nacien" to "Nancien" (3) (once by Nancien)

Pg. 220 - "seem" to "seen" (and seen what you highly)

Pg. 238 - "befel" to "befell" (5) (it befell that Nimue)

Pg. 281 - "Turquin" to "Turquine" (2) (by Sir Turquine?)

Pg. 289 - "Tristam's" to "Tristram's" (313) (and Tristram's sake)

Pg. 298 - "wil" to "will" (361) (if you will receive)

Pg. 299 - "dishoner" to "dishonor" (12) (naught to her dishonor.)

3. Words where both versions appear in this text and have been retained.

"threescore" (2) and "three-score"

"King Astlabor" (p. 87) and "King Astlobar" (p. 90)

4. Known English Archaic words used in this text:

"emprise" (prowess/daring)

"guerdon" (reward)

"halidom" (a thing considered holy)

"leman" (sweetheart)

"lief" (dear)

"woful" (3) (now woeful)

"villanous" (6) and villany (3) (now var. of villian* (10))

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