
LE MORTE D'ARTHUR

KING ARTHUR AND HIS NOBLE KNIGHTS OF

THE ROUND TABLE

BY SIR THOMAS MALORY¹

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¹ Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur: Sir Thomas Malory's Book of King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*, Ed. Pollard, A. W. (1903). 2 vol. New York: Macmillan. Project Gutenberg.

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I. HOW Uther PENDRAGON SENT FOR THE DUKE OF CORNWALL AND IGRAINE HIS WIFE, AND OF THEIR DEPARTING SUDDENLY AGAIN.

IT befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time. And the duke was called the Duke of Tintagil. And so by means King Uther sent for this duke, charging him to bring his wife with him, for she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine.

So when the duke and his wife were come unto the king, by the means of great lords they were accorded both. The king liked and loved this lady well, and he made them great cheer out of measure, and desired to have lain by her. But she was a passing good woman, and would not assent unto the king. And then she told the duke her husband, and said, I suppose that we were sent for that I should be dishonoured; wherefore, husband, I counsel you, that we depart from hence suddenly, that we may ride all night unto our own castle. And in likewise as she said so they departed, that neither the king nor none of his council were ware of their departing. All so soon as King Uther knew of their departing so suddenly, he was wonderly³ wroth.⁴ Then he called to him his privy council, and told them of the sudden departing of the duke and his wife.

² Moran, Thomas. *Tintagel*. 1906. Oil on Canvas. *The Project Gutenberg EBook of In Unfamiliar England*, by Thomas Dowler Murphy. Web. 19 May 2014.

³ wonderfully

⁴ angry

Then they advised the king to send for the duke and his wife by a great charge; and if he will not come at your summons, then may ye do your best, then have ye cause to make mighty war upon him. So that was done, and the messengers had their answers; and that was this shortly, that neither he nor his wife would not come at him.

Then was the king wonderly wroth. And then the king sent him plain word again, and bade him be ready and stuff him and garnish him, for within forty days he would fetch him out of the biggest castle that he hath.

When the duke had this warning, anon he went and furnished and garnished two strong castles of his, of the which the one hight⁵ Tintagil, and the other castle hight Terrabil. So his wife Dame Igraine he put in the castle of Tintagil, and himself he put in the castle of Terrabil, the which had many issues and posterns out. Then in all haste came Uther with a great host, and laid a siege about the castle of Terrabil.

And there he pight many pavilions,⁶ and there was great war made on both parties, and much people slain. Then for pure anger and for great love of fair Igraine the king Uther fell sick. So came to the King Uther Sir Ulfius, a noble knight, and asked the king why he was sick. I shall tell thee, said the king, I am sick for anger and for love of fair Igraine, that I may not be whole. Well, my lord, said Sir Ulfius, I shall seek Merlin, and he shall do you remedy, that your heart shall be pleased. So Ulfius departed, and by adventure he met Merlin in a beggar's array, and there Merlin asked Ulfius whom he sought. And he said he had little ado⁷ to tell him. Well, said Merlin, I know whom thou seekest, for thou seekest Merlin; therefore seek no farther, for I am he; and if King Uther will well reward me, and be sworn unto me to fulfil my desire, that shall be his honour and profit more than mine; for I shall cause him to have all his desire. All this will I undertake, said Ulfius, that there shall be nothing reasonable but thou shalt have thy desire. Well, said Merlin, he shall have his intent and desire. And therefore, said Merlin, ride on your way, for I will not be long behind.

CHAPTER II. HOW Uther PENDRAGON MADE WAR ON THE DUKE OF CORNWALL, AND HOW BY THE MEAN OF MERLIN HE LAY BY THE DUCHESS AND GAT⁸ ARTHUR.

THEN Ulfius was glad, and rode on more than a pace till that he came to King Uther Pendragon, and told him he had met with Merlin. Where is he? said the king. Sir, said Ulfius, he will not dwell long. Therewithal Ulfius was ware where Merlin stood at the porch of the pavilion's door. And then Merlin was bound to come to the king. When King Uther saw him, he said he was welcome. Sir, said Merlin, I know all your heart every deal; so ye will be sworn unto me as ye be a true king anointed, to fulfil my

desire, ye shall have your desire. Then the king was sworn upon the Four Evangelists. Sir, said Merlin, this is my desire: the first night that ye shall lie by Igraine ye shall get a child on her, and when that is born, that it shall be delivered to me for to nourish there as I will have it; for it shall be your worship, and the child's avail, as mickle⁹ as the child is worth. I will well, said the king, as thou wilt have it. Now make you ready, said Merlin, this night ye shall lie with Igraine in the castle of Tintagil; and ye shall be

like the duke her husband, Ulfius shall be like Sir Brastias, a knight of the duke's, and I will be like a knight that hight Sir Jordanus, a knight of the duke's. But wait ye make not many questions with her nor her men, but say ye are diseased, and so hie¹⁰ you to bed, and rise not on the morn till I come to you, for the castle of Tintagil is but ten miles hence; so this was done as they devised. But the duke of Tintagil espied how the king rode from the siege of Terrabil, and therefore that night he issued out of the castle

⁵ called

⁶ pitched many tents

⁷ Business; matter

⁸ Begat; fathered

⁹ much

¹⁰ hurry

at a postern¹¹ for to have distressed the king's host. And so, through his own issue, the duke himself was slain or ever the king came at the castle of Tintagil.

So after the death of the duke, King Uther lay with Igraine more than three hours after his death, and begat on her that night Arthur, and on day came Merlin to the king, and bade him make him ready, and so he kissed the lady Igraine and departed in all haste. But when the lady heard tell of the duke her husband, and by all record he was dead or ever King Uther came to her, then she marvelled who that might be that lay with her in likeness of her lord; so she mourned privily¹² and held her peace. Then all the barons by one assent prayed the king of accord betwixt the lady Igraine and him; the king gave them leave, for fain would he have been accorded with her. So the king put all the trust in Ulfius to entreat between them, so by the entreaty at the last the king and she met together. Now will we do well, said Ulfius, our king is a lusty knight and wifeless, and my lady Igraine is a passing fair lady; it were great joy unto us all, an¹³ it might please the king to make her his queen. Unto that they all well accorded and moved it to the king. And anon, like a lusty knight, he assented thereto with good will, and so in all haste they were married in a morning with great mirth and joy.

And King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney then wedded Margawse that was Gawain's mother, and [King Nentres of the land of Garlot wedded Elaine](#). All this was done at the request of King Uther. And the third sister [Morgan le Fay](#) was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of necromancy. And after she was wedded to [King Uriens of the land of Gore](#), that was Sir [Ewain's le Blanchemain's](#) father.

CHAPTER III. OF THE BIRTH OF KING ARTHUR AND OF HIS NURTURE.

THEN Queen Igraine waxed daily greater and greater, so it befell after within half a year, as King Uther lay by his queen, he asked her, by the faith she owed to him, whose was the body; then she sore abashed to give answer. Dismay you not, said the king, but tell me the truth, and I shall love you the better, by the faith of my body. Sir, said she, I shall tell you the truth. The same night that my lord was dead, the hour of his death, as his knights record, there came into my castle of Tintagil a man like my lord in speech and in countenance, and two knights with him in likeness of his two knights Brastias and Jordanus, and so I went unto bed with him as I ought to do with my lord, and the same night, as I shall answer unto God, this child was begotten upon me. That is truth, said the king, as ye say; for it was I myself that came in the likeness, and therefore dismay you not, for I am father of the child; and there he told her all the cause, how it was by Merlin's counsel. Then the queen made great joy when she knew who was the father of her child.

Soon came [Merlin](#) unto the king, and said, Sir, ye must purvey you for the nourishing of your child. As thou wilt, said the king, be it. Well, said Merlin, I know a lord of yours in this land, that is a passing true man and a faithful, and he shall have the nourishing¹⁴ of your child, and his name is Sir Ector, and he is a lord of fair livelihood in many parts in England and Wales; and this lord, Sir Ector, let him be sent for, for to come and speak with you, and desire him yourself, as he loveth you, that he will put his own child to

nourishing to another woman, and that his wife nourish yours. And when the child is born let it be delivered to me at yonder privy postern unchristened. So like as Merlin devised it was done. And when Sir Ector was come he made fiance¹⁵ to the king for to nourish the child like as the king desired; and there the king granted Sir Ector great rewards. Then when the lady was delivered, the king commanded two knights and two ladies to take the child, bound in a cloth of gold, and that ye deliver him to what poor man ye meet at the postern gate of the

¹¹ Gate; door

¹² Privately

¹³ and

¹⁴ Fostering; it was a common practice of the time for noblemen to place their sons with famous or wealthy knights for fostering.

¹⁵ Affiance, promise

castle. So the child was delivered unto Merlin, and so he bare it forth unto Sir Ector, and made an holy man to christen him, and named him [Arthur](#); and so Sir Ector's wife nourished him with her own pap.

CHAPTER IV. OF THE DEATH OF KING UTHUR PENDRAGON.

THEN within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady. And in the meanwhile his enemies usurped upon him, and did a great battle upon his men, and slew many of his people. Sir, said Merlin, ye may not lie so as ye do, for ye must to the field though ye ride on an horse-litter: for ye shall never have the better of your enemies but if your person be there, and then shall ye have the victory. So it was done as Merlin had devised, and they carried the king forth in an horse-litter with a great host towards his

enemies. And at St. Albans there met with the king a great host of the North. And that day Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias did great deeds of arms, and King Uther's men overcame the Northern battle and slew many people, and put the remnant to flight. And then the king returned unto London, and made great joy of his victory. And then he fell passing sore sick, so that three days and three nights he was speechless: wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best. There is none other remedy, said Merlin, but God will have his will. But look ye all barons be before King Uther to-morn,¹⁶ and God and I shall make him to speak. So on the morn all the barons with Merlin came to-fore¹⁷ the king; then Merlin said aloud unto King Uther, Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days, of this realm with all the appurtenance? Then Uther Pendragon turned him, and said in hearing of them all, I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soul, and righteously and worshipfully that he claim the crown, upon forfeiture of my blessing; and therewith he yielded up the ghost, and then was he interred as longed to a king. Wherefore the queen, fair Igraine, made great sorrow, and all the barons.

CHAPTER V. HOW ARTHUR WAS CHOSEN KING, AND OF WONDERS AND MARVELS OF A SWORD TAKEN OUT OF A STONE BY THE SAID ARTHUR.

THEN stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened¹⁸ to have been king. Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he was come to be king of mankind, for to

show some miracle who should be rightwise king of this realm. So the Archbishop, by the advice of Merlin, sent for all the lords and gentlemen of arms that they should come by Christmas even unto London. And many of them made them clean of their life, that their prayer might be the more acceptable unto God. So in the greatest church of London, whether it were Paul's or not the French book¹⁹ maketh no mention, all the estates were long or day in the church for to pray. And when matins and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone; and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:—Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England. Then the people marvelled, and told it to the Archbishop. I command, said the Archbishop, that ye keep you within your church and pray unto God still, that no man touch the sword till the high mass be all done. So when all masses were done all the lords went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture some assayed,²⁰ such as would have been king. But none might stir the sword nor move it. He is not

¹⁶ Tomorrow

¹⁷ Before

¹⁸ Thought, believed

¹⁹ It is impossible to identify "the French book" as Malory used so many and diverse sources both French and English for his *Morte*.

²⁰ Attempted

here, said the Archbishop, that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. But this is my counsel, said the Archbishop, that we let purvey ten knights, men of good fame, and they to keep this sword. So it was ordained, and then there was made a cry, that every man should assay that would, for to win the sword. And upon New Year's Day the barons let make jousts and a tournament, that all knights that would joust or tourney there might play, and all this was ordained for to keep the lords together and the commons, for the Archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword.

So upon New Year's Day, when the service was done, the barons rode unto the field, some to joust and some to tourney, and so it happened that Sir Ector, that had great livelihood about London, rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay his son, and young Arthur that was his nourished²¹ brother; and Sir Kay was made knight at All Hallowmass²² afore. So as they rode to the jousts-ward, Sir Kay lost his sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young Arthur for to ride for his sword. I will well, said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword, and when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the jousting. Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself, I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day. So when he came to the churchyard, Sir Arthur alighted and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent, and found no knights there, for they were at the jousting. And so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode his way until he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword. And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he wist²³ well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father Sir Ector, and said: Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land. When Sir Ector beheld the sword, he returned again and came to the church, and there they alighted all three, and went into the church. And anon he made Sir Kay swear upon a book how he came to that sword. Sir, said Sir Kay, by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me. How gat ye this sword? said Sir Ector to Arthur. Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword, I found nobody at home to deliver me his sword; and so I thought my brother Sir Kay should not be swordless, and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain. Found ye any knights about this sword? said Sir Ector. Nay, said Arthur. Now, said Sir Ector to Arthur, I understand ye must be king of this land. Wherefore I, said Arthur, and for what cause? Sir, said Ector, for God will have it so; for there should never man have drawn out this sword, but he that shall be rightwise king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again. That is no mastery, said Arthur, and so he put it in the stone; wherewithal Sir Ector assayed to pull out the sword and failed.

CHAPTER XXV. HOW ARTHUR BY THE MEAN OF MERLIN GAT EXCALIBUR HIS SWORD OF THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

RIGHT SO the king and he departed, and went unto an hermit that was a good man and a great leech.²⁴ So the hermit searched all his wounds and gave him good salves; so the king was there three days, and then were his wounds well amended that he might ride and go, and so departed. And as they rode, Arthur said, I have no sword. No force,²⁵ said Merlin, hereby is a sword that shall be yours, an²⁶ I may. So they rode till they came to a lake, the which was a fair water and broad, and in the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite,²⁷ that held a fair sword in that hand. Lo! said Merlin, yonder is that sword that I spake of. With that they saw a damsel²⁸ going upon the lake. What damsel is that? said Arthur. That is the [Lady of the Lake](#), said Merlin; and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a place as any on earth, and richly beseen; and this damsel will come to you anon, and then speak ye fair to her that she will give you that sword. Anon withal came the damsel unto Arthur, and saluted him, and he her again. Damsel, said Arthur, what sword is that, that yonder

²¹ Foster; Kay and Arthur are foster-brothers.

²² All Saints' Day, Nov. 1

²³ Knew

²⁴ Physician

²⁵ Not necessarily

²⁶ If

²⁷ Heavy silk fabric.

²⁸ A young woman

the arm holdeth above the water? I would it were mine, for I have no sword. Sir Arthur, king, said the damsel, that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it. By my faith, said Arthur, I will give you what gift ye will ask. Well! said the damsel, go ye into yonder barge,²⁹ and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you, and I will ask my gift when I see my time. So Sir Arthur and Merlin alighted and tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the ship, and when they came to the sword that the hand held, Sir Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him, and the arm and the hand went under the water. And so [they] came unto the land and rode forth, and then Sir Arthur saw a rich pavilion. What signifieth yonder pavilion? It is the knight's pavilion, said Merlin, that ye fought with last, Sir Pellinore; but he is out, he is not there. He hath ado³⁰ with a knight of yours that hight³¹ Egglame, and they have foughten together, but at the last Egglame fled, and else he had been dead, and he hath chased him even to Caerleon,³² and we shall meet with him anon in the highway. That is well said, said Arthur, now have I a sword, now will I wage battle with him, and be avenged on him. Sir, you shall not so, said Merlin, for the knight is weary of fighting and chasing, so that ye shall have no worship to have ado with him; also he will not be lightly matched of one knight living, and therefore it is my counsel, let him pass, for he shall do you good service in short time, and his sons after his days. Also ye shall see that day in short space, you shall be right glad to give him your sister to wed. When I see him, I will do as ye advise, said Arthur. Then Sir Arthur looked on the sword, and liked it passing well. Whether liketh you better, said Merlin, the sword or the scabbard? Me liketh better the sword, said Arthur. Ye are more unwise, said Merlin, for the scabbard is worth ten of the swords, for whiles ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded; therefore keep well the scabbard always with you. So they rode unto Caerleon, and by the way they met with Sir Pellinore; but Merlin had done such a craft, that Pellinore saw not Arthur, and he passed by without any words. I marvel, said Arthur, that the knight would not speak. Sir, said Merlin, he saw you not, for an he had seen you, ye had not lightly departed. So they came unto Caerleon, whereof his knights were passing glad. And when they heard of his adventures, they marvelled that he would jeopard³³ his person so, alone. But all men of worship said it was merry to be under such a chieftain, that would put his person in adventure as other poor knights did.

CHAPTER XXVII. HOW ALL THE CHILDREN WERE SENT FOR THAT WERE BORN ON MAY-DAY, AND HOW MORDRED WAS SAVED.

THEN King Arthur let send for all the children born on May-day, begotten of lords and born of ladies; for Merlin told King Arthur that he that should destroy him should be born on May-day, wherefore he sent for them all, upon pain of death; and so there were found many lords' sons, and all were sent unto the king, and so was Mordred sent by King Lot's wife, and all were put in a ship to the sea, and some were four weeks old, and some less. And so by fortune the ship drave unto a castle, and was all to-riven,³⁴ and destroyed the most part, save that Mordred was cast up, and a good man found him, and nourished him till he was fourteen year old, and then he brought him to the court, as it rehearseth afterward, toward the end of the Death of Arthur. So many lords and barons of this realm were displeased, for their children were so lost, and many put the wite³⁵ on Merlin more than on Arthur; so what for dread and for love, they held their peace. But when the messenger came to King Rience, then was he wood out of measure, and purveyed him for a great host, as it rehearseth after in the book of [Balin le Savage, that followeth next after, how by adventure Balin gat the sword.](#)

BOOK II

²⁹ boat

³⁰ business

³¹ Is called

³² King Arthur's capital; location of the Round Table

³³ Endanger

³⁴ Torn apart

³⁵ blame

CHAPTER VII. HOW A DWARF REPROVED BALIN FOR THE DEATH OF LANCEOR, AND HOW KING MARK OF CORNWALL FOUND THEM, AND MADE A TOMB OVER THEM.

Now go we hence, said Balin, and well be we met. The meanwhile as they talked, there came a dwarf from the city of [Camelot](#)³⁶ on horseback, as much as he might; and found the dead bodies,³⁷ wherefore he made great dole, and pulled out his hair for sorrow, and said, Which of you knights have done this deed? Whereby askest thou it? said Balan.³⁸ For I would wit it, said the dwarf. It was I, said Balin, that slew this knight in my defence, for hither he came to chase me, and either I must slay him or he me; and this damsel slew herself for his love, which repenteth me,³⁹ and for her sake I shall owe all women the better love. Alas, said the dwarf, thou hast done great damage unto thyself, for this knight that is here dead was one of the most valiantest men that lived, and trust well, Balin, the kin of this knight will chase you through the world till they have slain you. As for that, said Balin, I fear not greatly, but I am right heavy that I have displeased my lord King Arthur, for the death of this knight. So as they talked together, there came a king of Cornwall riding, the which hight [King Mark](#). And when he saw these two bodies dead, and understood how they were dead, by the two knights above said, then made the king great sorrow for the true love that was betwixt them, and said, I will not depart till I have on this earth made a tomb, and there he pight his pavilions and sought through all the country to find a tomb, and in a church they found one was fair and rich, and then the king let put them both in the earth, and put the tomb upon them, and wrote the names of them both on the tomb. How here lieth Lanceor the king's son of Ireland, that at his own request was slain by the hands of Balin; and how his lady, Colombe, and paramour, slew herself with her love's sword for dole and sorrow.

CHAPTER VIII. HOW MERLIN PROPHESED THAT TWO THE BEST KNIGHTS OF THE WORLD SHOULD FIGHT THERE, WHICH WERE SIR LANCELOT AND SIR TRISTAN.

THE meanwhile as this was a-doing, in came Merlin to King Mark, and seeing all his doing, said, Here shall be in this same place the greatest battle betwixt two knights that was or ever shall be, and the truest lovers, and yet none of them shall slay other. And there Merlin wrote their names upon the tomb with letters of gold that should fight in that place, whose names were [Lancelot de Lake](#), and [Tristan](#). Thou art a marvellous man, said King Mark unto Merlin, that speakest of such marvels, thou art a boistous⁴⁰ man and an unlikely to tell of such deeds. What is thy name? said King Mark. At this time, said Merlin, I will not tell, but at that time when Sir Tristan is taken with his sovereign lady, then ye shall hear and know my name, and at that time ye shall hear tidings that shall not please you. Then said Merlin to Balin, Thou hast done thyself great hurt, because that thou savest not this lady that slew herself, that might have saved her an thou wouldest⁴¹. By the faith of my body, said Balin, I might not save her, for she slew herself suddenly. Me repenteth, said Merlin; because of the death of that lady thou shalt strike a stroke most dolorous that ever man struck, except the stroke of our Lord, for thou shalt hurt the truest knight and the man of most worship that now liveth, and through that stroke three kingdoms shall be in great poverty, misery and wretchedness twelve years, and the knight shall not be whole of that wound for many years.⁴² Then Merlin took his leave of Balin. And Balin said, If I wist it were sooth that ye say I should do such a perilous deed as that, I would slay myself to make thee a liar. Therewith Merlin vanished away suddenly. And then Balan and his brother took their leave of King Mark. First, said the king, tell me your name. Sir, said Balan, ye may see he beareth two swords, thereby ye may call him the Knight with the Two Swords. And so departed King Mark unto Camelot to King Arthur, and Balin took the way toward King

³⁶ Arthur moved from Caerleon (Caerleon) to Camelot after the previous Balin episode.

³⁷ Lanceor and Colombe, one of Arthur's knights and his lady; Balin had killed Lanceor, and Colombe committed suicide with Lanceor's sword.

³⁸ Balin's brother

³⁹ which repenteth me = which I regret

⁴⁰ Rude or vulgar

⁴¹ an thou wouldest = if you wanted to

⁴² Balin is destined to use the Holy Lance (Spear of Longinus which pierced Christ's side during the crucifixion) to wound the Grail King, Pellam. The "dolorous stroke" of the Holy Lance not only wounds Pellam but also plunges the Grail Castle and the surrounding lands into a wasteland. Thus, finding the Holy Grail becomes concomitant with healing the Grail King and releasing him from his constant pain.

Rience; and as they rode together they met with Merlin disguised, but they knew him not. Whither ride you? said Merlin. We have little to do, said the two knights, to tell thee. But what is thy name? said Balin. At this time, said Merlin, I will not tell it thee. It is evil seen, said the knights, that thou art a true man that thou wilt not tell thy name. As for that, said Merlin, be it as it be may, I can tell you wherefore ye ride this way, for to meet King Rience; but it will not avail you without ye have my counsel. Ah! said Balin, ye are Merlin; we will be ruled by your counsel. Come on, said Merlin, ye shall have great worship, and look that ye do knightly, for ye shall have great need. As for that, said Balin, dread you not, we will do what we may.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I. HOW KING ARTHUR TOOK A WIFE, AND WEDDED GUINEVERE, DAUGHTER TO LEODEGRANCE, KING OF THE LAND OF CAMELIARD, WITH WHOM HE HAD THE ROUND TABLE.

IN the beginning of Arthur, after he was chosen king by adventure and by grace; for the most part of the barons knew not that he was Uther Pendragon's son, but as Merlin made it openly known. But yet many kings and lords held great war against him for that cause, but well Arthur overcame them all, for the most part the days of his life he was ruled much by the counsel of Merlin. So it fell on a time King Arthur said unto Merlin, My barons will let me have no rest, but needs I must take a wife, and I will none take but by thy counsel and by thine advice. It is well done, said Merlin, that ye take a wife, for a man of your bounty and noblesse should not be without a wife. Now is there any that ye love more than another? Yea, said King Arthur, I love Guinevere the king's daughter, Leodegrance of the land of Cameliard, the which holdeth in his house the Table Round that ye told he had of my father Uther. And this damsel is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living, or yet that ever I could find. Sir, said Merlin, as of her beauty and fairness she is one of the fairest alive, but, an ye loved her not so well as ye do, I should find you a damsel of beauty *and of goodness* that should like you and please you, an your heart were not set; but there as a man's heart is set, he will be loathe to return. That is truth, said King Arthur. But Merlin warned the king covertly that Guinevere was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Lancelot should love her, and she him again; and so he turned his tale to the adventures of [Holy Grail](#).⁴³ Then Merlin desired of the king for to have men with him that should enquire of Guinevere, and so the king granted him, and Merlin went forth unto King Leodegrance of Cameliard, and told him of the desires of the king that he would have unto his wife Guinevere his daughter. That is to me, said King Leodegrance, the best tidings that ever I heard, that so worthy a king of prowess and noblesse will wed my daughter. And as for my lands, I will give him, wist I it might please him, but he hath lands enow,⁴⁴ him needeth none; but I shall send him a gift shall please him much more, for I shall give him the Table Round, the which Uther Pendragon gave me, and when it is full complete, there is an hundred knights and fifty. And as for an hundred good knights I have myself, but I faute⁴⁵ fifty, for so many have been slain in my days. And so Leodegrance delivered his daughter Guinevere unto Merlin, and the Table Round with the hundred knights, and so they rode freshly, with great royalty, what by water and what by land, till that they came nigh unto London.

CHAPTER II. HOW THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE WERE ORDAINED AND THEIR SIEGES⁴⁶ BLESSED BY THE BISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WHEN King Arthur heard of the coming of Guinevere and the hundred knights with the Table Round, then King Arthur made great joy for her coming, and that rich present, and said openly, This fair lady is passing welcome unto me, for I have loved her long, and therefore there is nothing so lief⁴⁷ to me. And

⁴³ The Holy Grail.

⁴⁴ enough

⁴⁵ fought

⁴⁶ Seats

⁴⁷ dear

these knights with [the Round Table](#) please me more than right great riches. And in all haste the king let ordain for the marriage and the coronation in the most honourable wise that could be devised. Now, Merlin, said King Arthur, go thou and espy me in all this land fifty knights which be of most prowess and worship. Within short time Merlin had found such knights that should fulfil twenty and eight knights, but no more he could find. Then the Bishop of Canterbury was fetched, and he blessed the sieges with great royalty and devotion, and there set the eight and twenty knights in their sieges. And when this was done Merlin said, Fair sirs, ye must all arise and come to King Arthur for to do him homage; he will have the better will to maintain you. And so they arose and did their homage, and when they were gone Merlin found in every sieges²² letters of gold that told the knights' names that had sitten therein. But two sieges were void. And so anon came young [Gawain](#) and asked the king a gift. Ask, said the king, and I shall grant it you. Sir, I ask that ye will make me knight that same day ye shall wed fair Guinevere . I will do it with a good will, said King Arthur, and do unto you all the worship that I may, for I must by reason ye are my nephew, my sister's son.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I. HOW MERLIN WAS ASSOTTED⁴⁸ AND DOTED ON ONE OF THE LADIES OF THE LAKE, AND HOW HE WAS SHUT IN A ROCK UNDER A STONE AND THERE DIED.



FIGURE 2 EDWARD BURNES-JONES, THE BEGUILING OF MERLIN, 1874⁴⁹

SO after these quests of Sir Gawain, Sir Tor, and King Pellinore, it fell so that Merlin fell in a dotage⁵⁰ on the damsel that King Pellinore brought to court, and she was one of the damsels of the lake, that hight Nimue. But

⁴⁸ Infatuated with

⁴⁹ Burnes-Jones,Edward. *The Beguiling of Merlin*. 1874. Oil on Canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Edward Burne-Jones [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 19 May 2014.

⁵⁰ fell in a dotage = fell in love

Merlin would let her have no rest, but always he would be with her. And ever she made Merlin good cheer till she had learned of him all manner thing that she desired; and he was assotted upon her, that he might not be from her. So on a time he told King Arthur that he should not dure⁵¹ long, but for all his crafts he should be put in the earth quick. And so he told the king many things that should befall, but always he warned the king to keep well his sword and the scabbard, for he told him how the sword and the scabbard should be stolen by a woman from him that he most trusted. Also he told King Arthur that he should miss him,—Yet had ye liefer⁵² than all your lands to have me again. Ah, said the king, since ye know of your adventure, purvey for it, and put away by your crafts that misadventure. Nay, said Merlin, it will not be; so he departed from the king. And within a while the Damsel of the Lake departed, and Merlin went with her evermore wheresomever⁵³ she went. And ofttimes⁵⁴ Merlin would have had her privily away by his subtle crafts; then she made him to swear that he should never do none enchantment upon her if he would have his will. And so he sware; so she and Merlin went over the sea unto the land of Benwick, whereas King Ban was king that had great war against King Claudas, and there Merlin spake with King Ban's wife, a fair lady and a good, and her name was Elaine,⁵⁵ and there he saw young Lancelot. There the queen made great sorrow for the mortal war that King Claudas made on her lord and on her lands. Take none heaviness, said Merlin, for this same child within this twenty year shall revenge you on King Claudas, that all Christendom shall speak of it; and this same child shall be the most man of worship of the world, and his first name is Galahad, that know I well, said Merlin, and since ye have confirmed him Lancelot. That is truth, said the queen, his first name was Galahad. O Merlin, said the queen, shall I live to see my son such a man of prowess? Yea, lady, on my peril ye shall see it, and live many winters after. And so, soon after, the lady and Merlin departed, and by the way Merlin showed her many wonders, and came into Cornwall. And always Merlin lay about the lady to have her maidenhood, and she was ever passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him, for she was afraid of him because he was a devil's son, and she could not beskift⁵⁶ him by no mean. And so on a time it happed that Merlin showed to her in a rock whereas was a great wonder, and wrought by enchantment, that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there; but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft he could do. And so she departed and left Merlin.

CHAPTER XXI. HOW KING PELLEAS SUFFERED HIMSELF TO BE TAKEN PRISONER BECAUSE HE WOULD HAVE A SIGHT OF HIS LADY, AND HOW SIR GAWAIN PROMISED HIM TO GET TO HIM THE LOVE OF HIS LADY.

AND so he⁵⁷ chose her⁵⁸ for his sovereign lady, and never to love other but her, but she was so proud that she had scorn of him, and said that she would never love him though he would die for her. Wherefore all ladies and gentlewomen had scorn of her that she was so proud, for there were fairer than she, and there was none that was there but an Sir Pelleas would have proffered them love, they would have loved him for his noble prowess. And so this knight promised the Lady Ettard to follow her into this country, and never to leave her till she loved him. And thus he is here the most part nigh her, and lodged by a priory, and every week she sendeth knights to fight with him. And when he hath put them to the worse, then will he suffer them wilfully to take him prisoner, because he would have a sight of this lady. And always she doth him great despite, for sometime she maketh her knights to tie him to his horse's tail, and some to bind him under the horse's belly; thus in the most shamefullest ways that she can think he is brought to her. And all she doth it for to cause him to leave this country, and to leave his loving; but all this cannot make him to leave, for an he would have fought on foot he might have had the better of the ten knights as well on foot as on horseback. Alas, said Sir Gawain, it is great pity of him; and after this night I will seek him to-morrow, in this forest, to do him all the help I can. So on the morn Sir Gawain

⁵¹ live

⁵² rather

⁵³ Wherever

⁵⁴ frequently

⁵⁵ Elaine of Benoit: mother of Lancelot

⁵⁶ Shrug off

⁵⁷ King Pelleas

⁵⁸ Lady Ettard

took his leave of his host Sir Carados, and rode into the forest; and at the last he met with Sir Pelleas, making great moan out of measure, so each of them saluted other, and asked him why he made such sorrow. And as it is above rehearsed,⁵⁹ Sir Pelleas told Sir Gawain: But always I suffer her knights to fare so with me as ye saw yesterday, in trust at the last to win her love, for she knoweth well all her knights should not lightly win me, an me list to fight with them to the uttermost. Wherefore an I loved her not so sore, I had liefer die an hundred times, an I might die so oft, rather than I would suffer that despite; but I trust she will have pity upon me at the last, for love causeth many a good knight to suffer to have his intent, but alas I am unfortunate. And therewith he made so great dole and sorrow that unneth⁶⁰ he might hold him on horseback.

Now, said Sir Gawain, leave your mourning and I shall promise you by the faith of my body to do all that lieth in my power to get you the love of your lady, and thereto I will plight you my troth. Ah, said Sir Pelleas, of what court are ye? tell me, I pray you, my good friend. And then Sir Gawain said, I am of the court of King Arthur, and his sister's son, and King Lot of Orkney was my father, and my name is Sir Gawain. And then he said, My name is Sir Pelleas, born in the Isles, and of many isles I am lord, and never have I loved lady nor damsel till now in an unhappy time; and, sir knight, since ye are so nigh cousin unto King Arthur, and a king's son, therefore betray me not but help me, for I may never come by her but by some good knight, for she is in a strong castle here, fast by within this four mile, and over all this country she is lady of. And so I may never come to her presence, but as I suffer her knights to take me, and but if I did so that I might have a sight of her, I had been dead long or this time; and yet fair word had I never of her, but when I am brought to-fore her she rebuketh me in the foulest manner. And then they take my horse and harness and put me out of the gates, and she will not suffer me to eat nor drink; and always I offer me to be her prisoner, but that she will not suffer me, for I would desire no more, what pains so ever I had, so that I might have a sight of her daily. Well, said Sir Gawain, all this shall I amend an ye will do as I shall devise: I will have your horse and your armour, and so will I ride unto her castle and tell her that I have slain you, and so shall I come within her to cause her to cherish me, and then shall I do my true part that ye shall not fail to have the love of her.

CHAPTER XXII. HOW SIR GAWAIN CAME TO THE LADY ETTARD, AND HOW SIR PELLEAS FOUND THEM SLEEPING.

AND therewith Sir Gawain plight his troth unto Sir Pelleas to be true and faithful unto him; so each one plight their troth to other, and so they changed horses and harness, and Sir Gawain departed, and came to the castle whereas stood the pavilions of this lady without the gate. And as soon as Ettard had espied Sir Gawain she fled in toward the castle. Sir Gawain spake on high, and bade her abide, for he was not Sir Pelleas; I am another knight that have slain Sir Pelleas. Do off your helm, said the Lady Ettard, that I may see your visage. And so when she saw that it was not Sir Pelleas, she bade him alight and led him unto her castle, and asked him faithfully whether he had slain Sir Pelleas. And he said her yea, and told her his name was Sir Gawain of the court of King Arthur, and his sister's son. Truly, said she, that is great pity, for he was a passing good knight of his body, but of all men alive I hated him most, for I could never be quit of him; and for ye have slain him I shall be your woman, and to do anything that might please you. So she made Sir Gawain good cheer. Then Sir Gawain said that he loved a lady and by no means she would love him. She is to blame, said Ettard, an she will not love you, for ye that be so well born a man, and such a man of prowess, there is no lady in the world too good for you. Will ye, said Sir Gawain, promise me to do all that ye may, by the faith of your body, to get me the love of my lady? Yea, sir, said she, and that I promise you by the faith of my body. Now, said Sir Gawain, it is yourself that I love so well, therefore I pray you hold your promise. I may not choose, said the Lady Ettard, but if I should be forsworn; and so she granted him to fulfil all his desire.

So it was then in the month of May that she and Sir Gawain went out of the castle and supped in a pavilion, and there was made a bed, and there Sir Gawain and the Lady Ettard went to bed together, and in another pavilion she laid her damsels, and in the third pavilion she laid part of her knights, for then she had no dread of Sir Pelleas. And there Sir Gawain lay with her in that pavilion two days and two nights. And on the third

⁵⁹ recited

⁶⁰ With difficulty

day, in the morning early, Sir Pelleas armed him, for he had never slept since Sir Gawain departed from him; for Sir Gawain had promised him by the faith of his body, to come to him unto his pavilion by that priory within the space of a day and a night. Then Sir Pelleas mounted upon horseback, and came to the pavilions that stood without the castle, and found in the first pavilion three knights in three beds, and three squires lying at their feet. Then went he to the second pavilion and found four gentlewomen lying in four beds. And then he yede⁶¹ to the third pavilion and found Sir Gawain lying in bed with his Lady Ettard, and either clipping⁶² other in arms, and when he saw that his heart well-nigh brast⁶³ for sorrow, and said: Alas! that ever a knight should be found so false; and then he took his horse and might not abide no longer for pure sorrow. And when he had ridden nigh half a mile he turned again and thought to slay them both; and when he saw them both so lie sleeping fast, unnethe he might hold him on horseback for sorrow, and said thus to himself, Though this knight be never so false, I will never slay him sleeping, for I will never destroy the high order of knighthood; and therewith he departed again. And or he had ridden half a mile he returned again, and thought then to slay them both, making the greatest sorrow that ever man made. And when he came to the pavilions, he tied his horse unto a tree, and pulled out his sword naked in his hand, and went to them thereas they lay, and yet he thought it were shame to slay them sleeping, and laid the naked sword overthwart both their throats, and so took his horse and rode his way.

And when Sir Pelleas came to his pavilions he told his knights and his squires how he had sped, and said thus to them, For your true and good service ye have done me I shall give you all my goods, for I will go unto my bed and never arise until I am dead. And when that I am dead I charge you that ye take the heart out of my body and bear it her betwixt two silver dishes, and tell her how I saw her lie with the false knight Sir Gawain. Right so Sir Pelleas unarmed himself, and went unto his bed making marvellous dole and sorrow.

When Sir Gawain and Ettard awoke of their sleep, and found the naked sword overthwart their throats, then she knew well it was Sir Pelleas' sword. Alas! said she to Sir Gawain, ye have betrayed me and Sir Pelleas both, for ye told me ye had slain him, and now I know well it is not so, he is alive. And if Sir Pelleas had been as uncourteous to you as ye have been to him ye had been a dead knight; but ye have deceived me and betrayed me falsely, that all ladies and damsels may beware by you and me. And therewith Sir Gawain made him ready, and went into the forest.

So it happed then that the Damsel of the Lake, Nimue,⁶⁴ met with a knight of Sir Pelleas, that went on his foot in the forest making great dole, and she asked him the cause. And so the woeful knight told her how his master and lord was betrayed through a knight and lady, and how he will never arise out of his bed till he be dead. Bring me to him, said she anon, and I will warrant his life he shall not die for love, and she that hath caused him so to love, she shall be in as evil plight as he is or it be long to, for it is no joy of such a proud lady that will have no mercy of such a valiant knight. Anon that knight brought her unto him, and when she saw him lie in his bed, she thought she saw never so likely a knight; and therewith she threw an enchantment upon him, and he fell asleep. And therewhile she rode unto the Lady Ettard, and charged no man to awake him till she came again. So within two hours she brought the Lady Ettard thither, and both ladies found him asleep: Lo, said the Damsel of the Lake, ye ought to be ashamed for to murder such a knight. And therewith she threw such an enchantment upon her that she loved him sore, that well-nigh she was out of her mind. O Lord Jesu, said the Lady Ettard, how is it befallen unto me that I love now him that I have most hated of any man alive? That is the righteous judgment of God, said the damsel. And then anon Sir Pelleas awaked and looked upon Ettard; and when he saw her he knew her, and then he hated her more than any woman alive, and said: Away, traitress, come never in my sight. And when she heard him say so, she wept and made great sorrow out of measure.

⁶¹ went

⁶² embracing

⁶³ burst

⁶⁴ She who Merlin loved

CHAPTER XXIII. HOW SIR PELLEAS LOVED NO MORE ETTARD BY MEANS OF THE DAMSEL OF THE LAKE, WHOM HE LOVED EVER AFTER.

SIR KNIGHT PELLEAS, said the Damsel of the Lake, take your horse and come forth with me out of this country, and ye shall love a lady that shall love you. I will well, said Sir Pelleas, for this Lady Ettard hath done me great despite and shame, and there he told her the beginning and ending, and how he had purposed never to have arisen till that he had been dead. And now such grace God hath sent me, that I hate her as much as ever I loved her, thanked be our Lord Jesus! Thank me, said the Damsel of the Lake. Anon Sir Pelleas armed him, and took his horse, and commanded his men to bring after his pavilion s and his stuff where the Damsel of the Lake would assign. So the Lady Ettard died for sorrow, and the Damsel of the Lake rejoiced Sir Pelleas, and loved together during their life days.

BOOK VIII



FIGURE 3 TRISTAN BATTLEING 14 KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE, 12TH C.⁶⁵

CHAPTER XIII. HOW SIR TRISTAN AND KING MARK HURTED EACH OTHER FOR THE LOVE OF A KNIGHT'S WIFE.

SO Sir Tristan departed, and took the sea, and with good wind he arrived up at Tintagil in Cornwall; and when King Mark was whole in his prosperity there came tidings that Sir Tristan was arrived, and whole of his wounds: thereof was King Mark passing glad, and so were all the barons; and when he saw his time he rode unto his father, King Meliodas, and there he had all the cheer that the king and the queen could make him. And then largely King Meliodas and his queen departed of their lands and goods to Sir Tristan.

⁶⁵ *Tristan Battling 14 Knights of the Round Table*. 12th c. Illuminated Manuscript. British Library, London. *Le Tristan en Prose*. Web. 21 May 2014.

Then by the license of King Meliodas, his father, he returned again unto the court of King Mark, and there he lived in great joy long time, until at the last there befell a jealousy and an unkindness betwixt King Mark and Sir Tristan, for they loved both one lady. And she was an earl's wife that hight Sir Segwarides. And this lady loved Sir Tristan passingly⁶⁶ well. And he loved her again, for she was a passing fair lady, and that espied Sir Tristan well. Then King Mark understood that and was jealous, for King Mark loved her passingly well.

So it fell upon a day this lady sent a dwarf unto Sir Tristan, and bade him, as he loved her, that he would be with her the night next following. Also she charged you that ye come not to her but if ye be well armed, for her lover was called a good knight. Sir Tristan answered to the dwarf: Recommend me unto my lady, and tell her I will not fail but I will be with her the term that she hath set me. And with this answer the dwarf departed. And King Mark espied that the dwarf was with Sir Tristan upon message from Segwarides' wife; then King Mark sent for the dwarf, and when he was come he made the dwarf by force to tell him all, why and wherefore that he came on message from Sir Tristan. Now, said King Mark, go where thou wilt, and upon pain of death that thou say no word that thou spakest with me; so the dwarf departed from the king.

And that same night that the steven⁶⁷ was set betwixt Segwarides' wife and Sir Tristan, King Mark armed him, and made him ready, and took two knights of his counsel with him; and so he rode afore for to abide by the way for to wait upon Sir Tristan. And as Sir Tristan came riding upon his way with his spear in his hand, King Mark came hurtling upon him with his two knights suddenly. And all three smote him with their spears, and King Mark hurt Sir Tristan on the breast right sore. And then Sir Tristan feutred⁶⁸ his spear, and smote his uncle, King Mark, so sore, that he rashed⁶⁹ him to the earth, and bruised him that he lay still in a swoon, and long it was or ever he might wield himself. And then he ran to the one knight, and eft to the other, and smote them to the cold earth, that they lay still. And therewithal Sir Tristan rode forth sore wounded to the lady, and found her abiding him at a postern.⁷⁰

CHAPTER XIV. HOW SIR TRISTAN LAY WITH THE LADY, AND HOW HER HUSBAND FOUGHT WITH SIR TRISTAN.

AND there she welcomed him fair, and either halsed⁷¹ other in arms, and so she let put up his horse in the best wise, and then she unarmed him. And so they supped lightly, and went to bed with great joy and pleasaunce; and so in his raging⁷² he took no keep of his green wound that King Mark had given him. And so Sir Tristan be-bled both the over sheet and the nether, and pillows, and head sheet.

And within a while there came one afore, that warned her that her lord was near-hand within a bow-draught. So she made Sir Tristan to arise, and so he armed him, and took his horse, and so departed. By then was come Segwarides, her lord, and when he found her bed troubled and broken, and went near and beheld it by candle light, then he saw that there had lain a wounded knight. Ah, false traitress, then he said, why hast thou betrayed me? And therewithal he swang out a sword, and said: But if⁷³ thou tell me who hath been here, here thou shalt die. Ah, my lord, mercy, said the lady, and held up her hands, saying: Slay me not, and I shall tell you all who hath been here. Tell anon, said Segwarides, to me all the truth. Anon for dread she said: Here was Sir Tristan with me, and by the way as he came to me ward, he was sore wounded. Ah, false traitress, said Segwarides, where is he become?⁷⁴ Sir, she said, he is armed, and departed on horseback, not yet hence half a mile. Ye say well, said Segwarides.

⁶⁶ exceedingly

⁶⁷ appointment

⁶⁸ Unsheathed, unfettered

⁶⁹ Made him fall headlong

⁷⁰ gate

⁷¹ embraced

⁷² passion

⁷³ unless

⁷⁴ Where has he gone?

Then he armed him lightly, and gat his horse, and rode after Sir Tristan that rode straightway unto Tintagil. And within a while he overtook Sir Tristan, and then he bade him, Turn, false traitor knight. And Sir Tristan anon turned him against him. And therewithal Segwarides smote Sir Tristan with a spear that it all to-brast; and then he swang out his sword and smote fast at Sir Tristan. Sir knight, said Sir Tristan, I counsel you that ye smite no more, howbeit for the wrongs that I have done you I will forbear you as long as I may. Nay, said Segwarides, that shall not be, for either thou shalt die or I. Then Sir Tristan drew out his sword, and hurtled his horse unto him fiercely, and through the waist of the body he smote Sir Segwarides that he fell to the earth in a swoon. And so Sir Tristan departed and left him there. And so he rode unto Tintagil and took his lodging secretly, for he would not be known that he was hurt. Also Sir Segwarides' men rode after their master, whom they found lying in the field sore wounded, and brought him home on his shield, and there he lay long or that he were whole, but at the last he recovered. Also King Mark would not be aknownd of that Sir Tristan and he had met that night. And as for Sir Tristan, he knew not that King Mark had met with him. And so the king askance came to Sir Tristan, to comfort him as he lay sick in his bed. But as long as King Mark lived he loved never Sir Tristan after that; though there was fair speech, love was there none. And thus it passed many weeks and days, and all was forgiven and forgotten; for Sir Segwarides durst not have ado with Sir Tristan, because of his noble prowess, and also because he was nephew unto King Mark; therefore he let it overslip: for he that hath a privy hurt is loath to have a shame outward.

CHAPTER XXIV. HOW SIR TRISTAN DEMANDED LA BEALE ISOLDE FOR KING MARK,
AND HOW SIR TRISTAN AND ISOLDE DRANK THE LOVE DRINK.



FIGURE 4 JOHN WILLIAM WATERHOUSE, TRISTAN AND ISOLDE WITH THE POTION, 1916⁷⁵

THEN upon a day King Anguish asked Sir Tristan why he asked not his boon, for whatsoever he had promised him he should have it without fail. Sir, said Sir Tristan, now is it time; this is all that I will desire, that ye will give me La Beale Isolde, your daughter, not for myself, but for mine uncle, King Mark, that shall have her to wife, for so have I promised him. Alas, said the king, I had liefer than all the land that I have ye would wed her yourself. Sir, an I did then I were shamed for ever in this world, and false of my promise. Therefore, said Sir I Tristan, I pray you hold your promise that ye promised me; for this is my desire, that ye will give me La Beale Isolde to go

⁷⁵ Waterhouse, John William. *Tristan and Isolde with the Potion*. 1916. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection. *John William Waterhouse* [Public domain], via *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 20 May 2014.

with me into Cornwall for to be wedded to King Mark, mine uncle. As for that, said King Anguish, ye shall have her with you to do with her what it please you; that is for to say if that ye list to wed her yourself, that is me liefest, and if ye will give her unto King Mark, your uncle, that is in your choice.

So, to make short conclusion, La Beale Isolde was made ready to go with Sir Tristan, and Dame Bragwaine went with her for her chief gentlewoman, with many other. Then the queen, Isolde's mother, gave to her and Dame Bragwaine, her daughter's gentlewoman, and unto Gouvernail, a drink, and charged them that what day King Mark should wed, that same day they should give him that drink, so that King Mark should drink to La Beale Isolde, and then, said the queen, I undertake either shall love other the days of their life. So this drink was given unto Dame Bragwaine, and unto Gouvernail.

And then anon Sir Tristan took the sea, and La Beale Isolde; and when they were in their cabin, it happed so that they were thirsty, and they saw a little flasket of gold stand by them, and it seemed by the colour and the taste that it was noble wine. Then Sir Tristan took the flasket in his hand, and said, Madam Isolde, here is the best drink that ever ye drank, that Dame Bragwaine, your maiden, and Gouvernail, my servant, have kept for themselves. Then they laughed and made good cheer, and either drank to other freely, and they thought never drink that ever they drank to other was so sweet nor so good. But by that their drink was in their bodies, they loved either other so well that never their love departed for weal neither for woe. And thus it happed the love first betwixt Sir Tristan and La Beale Isolde, the which love never departed the days of their life.

So then they sailed till by fortune they came nigh a castle that hight Pluere, and thereby arrived for to repose them, weening to them to have had good harbourage. But anon as Sir Tristan was within the castle they were taken prisoners; for the custom of the castle was such; who that rode by that castle and brought any lady, he must needs fight with the lord, that hight Breunor. And if it were so that Breunor won the field, then should the knight stranger and his lady be put to death, what that ever they were; and if it were so that the strange knight won the field of Sir Breunor, then should he die and his lady both. This custom was used many winters, for it was called the Castle Pluere, that is to say the Weeping Castle.

CHAPTER XXVII. HOW SIR GALAHAD FOUGHT WITH SIR TRISTAN, AND HOW SIR TRISTAN YIELDED HIM AND PROMISED TO FELLOWSHIP WITH LANCELOT.

THEN came Sir Galahad, and the King with the Hundred Knights⁷⁶ with him; and this Sir Galahad proffered to fight with Sir Tristan hand for hand. And so they made them ready to go unto battle on horseback with great courage. Then Sir Galahad and Sir Tristan met together so hard that either bare other down, horse and all, to the earth. And then they avoided their horses as noble knights, and dressed their shields, and drew their swords with ire and rancour, and they lashed together many sad strokes, and one while striking, another while foining,⁷⁷ tracing and traversing as noble knights; thus they fought long, near half a day, and either were sore wounded. At the last Sir Tristan waxed light and big, and doubled his strokes, and drove Sir Galahad aback on the one side and on the other, so that he was like to have been slain.

With that came the King with the Hundred Knights, and all that fellowship went fiercely upon Sir Tristan. When Sir Tristan saw them coming upon him, then he wist well he might not endure. Then as a wise knight of war, he said to Sir Galahad, the haut⁷⁸ prince: Sir, ye show to me no knighthood, for to suffer all your men to have ado with me all at once; and as meseemeth ye be a noble knight of your hands it is great shame to you. So God me help, said Sir Galahad, there is none other way but thou must yield thee to me, other else to die, said Sir Galahad to Sir Tristan. I will rather yield me to you than die for that is more for the might of your men than of your

⁷⁶ One of several kings who opposed King Arthur

⁷⁷ thrusting

⁷⁸ high

hands. And therewithal Sir Tristan took his own sword by the point, and put the pommel in the hand of Sir Galahad.

Therewithal came the King with the Hundred Knights, and hard began to assail Sir Tristan. Let be, said Sir Galahad, be ye not so hardy to touch him, for I have given this knight his life. That is your shame, said the King with the Hundred Knights; hath he not slain your father and your mother? As for that, said Sir Galahad, I may not wite him greatly, for my father had him in prison, and enforced him to do battle with him; and my father had such a custom that was a shameful custom, that what knight came there to ask harbour his lady must needs die but if she were fairer than my mother; and if my father overcame that knight he must needs die. This was a shameful custom and usage, a knight for his harbour-asking to have such harbourage. And for this custom I would never draw about him. So God me help, said the King, this was a shameful custom. Truly, said Sir Galahad, so seemed me; and meseemed it had been great pity that this knight should have been slain, for I dare say he is the noblest man that beareth life, but if it were Sir Lancelot du Lake. Now, fair knight, said Sir Galahad, I require thee tell me thy name, and of whence thou art, and whither thou wilt. Sir, he said, my name is Sir Tristan de Liones, and from King Mark of Cornwall I was sent on message unto King Anguish of Ireland, for to fetch his daughter to be his wife, and here she is ready to go with me into Cornwall, and her name is La Beale Isolde . And, Sir Tristan, said Sir Galahad, the haut prince, well be ye found in these marches, and so ye will promise me to go unto Sir Lancelot du Lake, and accompany with him, ye shall go where ye will, and your fair lady with you; and I shall promise you never in all my days shall such customs be used in this castle as have been used. Sir, said Sir Tristan, now I let you wit, so God me help, I weened ye had been Sir Lancelot du Lake when I saw you first, and therefore I dread you the more; and sir, I promise you, said Sir Tristan, as soon as I may I will see Sir Lancelot and in fellowship me with him; for of all the knights of the world I most desire his fellowship.

BOOK XI

CHAPTER I. HOW SIR LANCELOT RODE ON HIS ADVENTURE, AND HOW HE HOLP A DOLOROUS LADY FROM HER PAIN, AND HOW THAT HE FOUGHT WITH A DRAGON.

NOW leave we Sir Tristan de Liones, and speak we of Sir Lancelot du Lake, and of Sir Galahad,⁷⁹ Sir Lancelot's son, how he was gotten, and in what manner, as the book of French rehearseth. Afore the time that Sir Galahad was gotten or born, there came in an hermit unto King Arthur upon Whitsunday,⁸⁰ as the knights sat at the Table Round. And when the hermit saw the Siege Perilous,⁸¹ he asked the king and all the knights why that siege was void. Sir Arthur and all the knights answered: There shall never none sit in that siege but one, but if he be destroyed. Then said the hermit: Wot⁸² ye what is he? Nay, said Arthur and all the knights, we wot not who is he that shall sit therein. Then wot I, said the hermit, for he that shall sit there is unborn and ungotten, and this same year he shall be gotten that shall sit there in that Siege Perilous, and he shall win the Holy Grail.⁸³ When this hermit had made this mention he departed from the court of King Arthur.

And then after this feast Sir Lancelot rode on his adventure, till on a time by adventure he passed over the pont⁸⁴ of Corbin; and there he saw the fairest tower that ever he saw, and there-under was a fair town full of people; and all the people, men and women, cried at once: Welcome, Sir Lancelot du Lake, the flower of all knighthood, for by thee all we shall be holpen out of danger. What mean ye, said Sir Lancelot, that ye cry so upon me? Ah, fair knight, said they all, here is within this tower a dolorous lady that hath been there in pains many winters and days, for ever she boileth in scalding water; and but late, said all the people, Sir Gawain was here and he might

⁷⁹ This is necessarily a different Galahad than the one previously mentioned.

⁸⁰ Pentecost

⁸¹ The Perilous Seat: reserved for the knight who finds the Holy Grail, Sir Galahad.

⁸² know

⁸³ The Holy Grail

⁸⁴ bridge

not help her, and so he left her in pain. So may I, said Sir Lancelot, leave her in pain as well as Sir Gawain did. Nay, said the people, we know well that it is Sir Lancelot that shall deliver her. Well, said Lancelot, then shew me what I shall do. Then they brought Sir Lancelot into the tower; and when he came to the chamber thereas this lady was, the doors of iron unlocked and unbolted. And so Sir Lancelot went into the chamber that was as hot as any stew. And there Sir Lancelot took the fairest lady by the hand that ever he saw, and she was naked as a needle; and by enchantment Queen Morgan le Fay and the Queen of Northgalis had put her there in that pains, because she was called the fairest lady of that country; and there she had been five years, and never might she be delivered out of her great pains unto the time the best knight of the world had taken her by the hand. Then the people brought her clothes. And when she was arrayed,⁸⁵ Sir Lancelot thought she was the fairest lady of the world, but if it were Queen Guinevere.⁸⁶ Then this lady said to Sir Lancelot: Sir, if it please you will ye go with me hereby into a chapel that we may give loving and thanking unto God? Madam, said Sir Lancelot, come on with me, I will go with you.

So when they came there and gave thankings to God all the people, both learned and lewd, gave thankings unto God and him, and said: Sir knight, since ye have delivered this lady, ye shall deliver us from a serpent⁸⁷ there is here in a tomb. Then Sir Lancelot took his shield and said: Bring me thither, and what I may do unto the pleasure of God and you I will do. So when Sir Lancelot came thither he saw written upon the tomb letters of gold that said thus: Here shall come a leopard of king's blood, and he shall slay this serpent, and this leopard shall engender a lion in this foreign country, the which lion shall pass all other knights.⁸⁸ So then Sir Lancelot lift up the tomb, and there came out an horrible and a fiendly⁸⁹ dragon, spitting fire out of his mouth. Then Sir Lancelot drew his sword and fought with the dragon long, and at the last with great pain Sir Lancelot slew that dragon. Therewithal came King Pelles, the good and noble knight, and saluted Sir Lancelot, and he him again. Fair knight, said the king, what is your name? I require you of your knighthood tell me!

CHAPTER II. HOW SIR LANCELOT CAME TO PELLER, AND OF THE HOLY GRAIL, AND OF ELAINE, KING PELLER'S DAUGHTER.

SIR, said Lancelot, wit you well my name is Sir Lancelot du Lake. And my name is, said the king, Pelles, king of the foreign country, and cousin nigh unto Joseph of Armathe.⁹⁰ And then either of them made much of other, and so they went into the castle to take their repast. And anon there came in a dove at a window, and in her mouth there seemed a little censer of gold. And herewithal there was such a savour as all the spicery of the world had been there. And forthwithal there was upon the table all manner of meats and drinks that they could think upon. So came in a damsel passing fair and young, and she bare a vessel of gold betwixt her hands; and thereto the king kneeled devoutly, and said his prayers, and so did all that were there. O Jesu, said Sir Lancelot, what may this mean? This is, said the king, the richest thing that any man hath living. And when this thing goeth about, the Round Table shall be broken; and wit thou well, said the king, this is the Holy Grail that ye have here seen. So the king and Sir Lancelot led their life the most part of that day. And fain would King Pelles have found the mean to have had Sir Lancelot to have lain by his daughter, fair Elaine. And for this intent: the king knew well that Sir Lancelot should get a child upon his daughter, the which should be named Sir Galahad the good knight, by whom all the foreign country should be brought out of danger, and by him the Holy Grail should be achieved. Then came forth a lady that hight Dame Brisen, and she said unto the king: Sir, wit ye well Sir Lancelot loveth no lady in the world but all only Queen Guinevere; and therefore work ye by counsel, and I shall make him to lie with your daughter, and he shall not wit but that he lieth with Queen Guinevere. O fair lady, Dame Brisen, said the king, hope ye to

⁸⁵ dressed

⁸⁶ Except for Guinevere

⁸⁷ dragon

⁸⁸ The leopard is Lancelot; the lion is Galahad; Lancelot was tricked into fathering Galahad on Elaine.

⁸⁹ Fiendish; evil

⁹⁰ Pelles is a descendant of Joseph of Arimathea, who legend says brought the Holy Grail (the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper) to Europe.

bring this about? Sir, said she, upon pain of my life let me deal; for this Brisen was one of the greatest enchantresses that was at that time in the world living. Then anon by Dame Brisen's wit she made one to come to Sir Lancelot that he knew well. And this man brought him a ring from Queen Guinevere like as it had come from her, and such one as she was wont for the most part to wear; and when Sir Lancelot saw that token wit ye well he was never so fain. Where is my lady? said Sir Lancelot. In the Castle of Case, said the messenger, but five mile hence. Then Sir Lancelot thought to be there the same night. And then this Brisen by the commandment of King Pelles let send Elaine to this castle with twenty-five knights unto the Castle of Case. Then Sir Lancelot against night rode unto that castle, and there anon he was received worshipfully with such people, to his seeming, as were about Queen Guinevere secret. So when Sir Lancelot was alighted, he asked where the queen was. So Dame Brisen said she was in her bed; and then the people were avoided, and Sir Lancelot was led unto his chamber. And then Dame Brisen brought Sir Lancelot a cup full of wine; and anon as he had drunken that wine he was so assotted and mad that he might make no delay, but withouten any let he went to bed; and he weened that maiden Elaine had been Queen Guinevere. Wit you well that Sir Lancelot was glad, and so was that lady Elaine that she had gotten Sir Lancelot in her arms. For well she knew that same night should be gotten upon her Galahad that should prove the best knight of the world; and so they lay together until underne of the morn; and all the windows and holes of that chamber were stopped that no manner of day might be seen. And then Sir Lancelot remembered him, and he arose up and went to the window.

CHAPTER III. HOW SIR LANCELOT WAS DISPLEASED WHEN HE KNEW THAT HE HAD LAIN BY DAME ELAINE, AND HOW SHE WAS DELIVERED OF GALAHAD.

AND anon as he had unshut the window the enchantment was gone; then he knew himself that he had done amiss. Alas, he said, that I have lived so long; now I am shamed. So then he gat his sword in his hand and said: Thou traitress, what art thou that I have lain by all this night? thou shalt die right here of my hands. Then this fair lady Elaine skipped out of her bed all naked, and kneeled down afore Sir Lancelot, and said: Fair courteous knight, come of king's blood, I require you have mercy upon me, and as thou art renowned the most noble knight of the world, slay me not, for I have in my womb him by thee that shall be the most noblest knight of the world. Ah, false traitress, said Sir Lancelot, why hast thou betrayed me? anon tell me what thou art. Sir, she said, I am Elaine, the daughter of King Pelles. Well, said Sir Lancelot, I will forgive you this deed; and therewith he took her up in his arms, and kissed her, for she was as fair a lady, and thereto lusty and young, and as wise, as any was that time living. So God me help, said Sir Lancelot, I may not wite this to you;⁹¹ but her that made this enchantment upon me as between you and me, an I may find her, that same Lady Brisen, she shall lose her head for witchcrafts, for there was never knight deceived so as I am this night. Then she said: My lord Sir Lancelot, I beseech you see me as soon as ye may, for I have obeyed me unto the prophecy that my father told me. And by his commandment to fulfil this prophecy I have given the greatest riches and the fairest flower that ever I had, and that is my maidenhood that I shall never have again; and therefore, gentle knight, owe me your good will. And so Sir Lancelot arrayed him and was armed, and took his leave mildly at that young lady Elaine; and so he departed, and rode till he came to the Castle of Corbin, where her father was.

And as fast as her time came she was delivered of a fair child, and they christened him Galahad; and wit ye well that child was well kept and well nourished, and he was named Galahad because Sir Lancelot was so named at the fountain stone; and after that the Lady of the Lake confirmed him Sir Lancelot du Lake. Then after this lady was delivered and churched, there came a knight unto her, his name was Sir Bromel la Pleche, the which was a great lord; and he had loved that lady long, and he evermore desired her to wed her; and so by no mean she could put him off, till on a day she said to Sir Bromel: Wit⁹² thou well, sir knight, I will not love you, for my love is set upon the best knight of the world. Who is he? said Sir Bromel. Sir, she said, it is Sir Lancelot du Lake that I love and none other, and therefore woo me no longer. Ye say well, said Sir Bromel, and sithen ye have told me so much, ye shall have but little joy of Sir Lancelot, for I shall slay him wheresomever I meet him. Sir, said the Lady Elaine, do to him no treason. Wit ye well, my lady, said Bromel, and I promise you this twelvemonth I shall keep

⁹¹ Blame this on you

⁹² know

the pont⁹³ of Corbin for Sir Lancelot's sake, that he shall neither come nor go unto you, but I shall meet with him.

BOOK XX.

CHAPTER I. HOW SIR AGRAVAINE AND SIR MORDRED WERE BUSY UPON SIR GAWAIN FOR TO DISCLOSE THE LOVE BETWEEN SIR LANCELOT AND QUEEN GUINEVERE

IN May when every lusty heart flourisheth and burgeoneth, for as the season is lusty to behold and comfortable, so man and woman rejoyce and gladden of summer coming with his fresh flowers: for winter with his rough winds and blasts causeth a lusty man and woman to cower and sit fast by the fire. So in this season, as in the month of May, it befell a great anger and unhap⁹⁴ that stinted not till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain; and all was long upon two unhappy knights the which were named Agravaine and Sir Mordred,⁹⁵ that were brethren⁹⁶ unto Sir Gawain. For this Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred had ever a privy hate unto the queen Dame Guinevere and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot.

So it mishapped, Sir Gawain and all his brethren were in King Arthur's chamber; and then Sir Agravaine said thus openly, and not in no counsel, that many knights might hear it: I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Lancelot lieth daily and nightly by the queen, and all we know it so; and it is shamefully suffered of us all, that we all should suffer so noble a king as King Arthur is so to be shamed. Then spake Sir Gawain, and said: Brother Sir Agravaine, I pray you and charge you move no such matters no more afore me, for wit you well, said Sir Gawain, I will not be of your counsel. So God me help, said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, we will not be knowing, brother Agravaine, of your deeds. Then will I, said Sir Mordred. I lieve well that, said Sir Gawain, for ever unto all unhappiness, brother Sir Mordred, thereto will ye grant; and I would that ye left all this, and made you not so busy, for I know, said Sir Gawain, what will fall of it. Fall of it what fall may, said Sir Agravaine, I will disclose it to the king. Not by my counsel, said Sir Gawain, for an there rise war and wrack betwixt Sir Lancelot and us, wit you well

brother, there will many kings and great lords hold with Sir Lancelot. Also, brother Sir Agravaine, said Sir Gawain, ye must remember how oftentimes Sir Lancelot hath rescued the king and the queen; and the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root had not Sir Lancelot been better than we, and that hath he proved himself full oft. And as for my part, said Sir Gawain, I will never be against Sir Lancelot for one day's deed, when he rescued me from King Carados of the Dolorous Tower, and slew him, and saved my life. Also, brother Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, in like wise Sir Lancelot rescued you both, and threescore and two, from Sir Turquin. Methinketh brother, such kind deeds and kindness should be remembered. Do as ye list, said Sir Agravaine, for I will lain it no longer. With these words came to them King Arthur. Now brother, stint your noise, said Sir Gawain. We will not, said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred. Will ye so? said Sir Gawain; then God speed you, for I will not hear your tales nor be of your counsel. No more will I, said Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, for we will never say evil by that man; for because, said Sir Gareth, Sir Lancelot made me knight, by no manner owe I to say ill of him: and therewithal they three departed, making great dole. Alas, said Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth, now is this realm wholly mischieved,⁹⁷ and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparpled:⁹⁸ so they departed.

⁹³ bridge

⁹⁴ mischance

⁹⁵ Arthur's son

⁹⁶ Gawain, Mordred, and Agravaine are the sons of King Lot; Gawain and Agravaine are Arthur's nephews (by Arthur's sister Morgause); Mordred is Arthur's son by Morgause

⁹⁷ Thrown into conflict

⁹⁸ scattered

CHAPTER II. HOW SIR AGRAVAINE DISCLOSED THEIR LOVE TO KING ARTHUR, AND HOW KING ARTHUR GAVE THEM LICENCE TO TAKE HIM

AND then Sir Arthur asked them what noise they made. My lord, said Agravaine, I shall tell you that I may keep no longer. Here is I, and my brother Sir Mordred, brake unto my brothers Sir Gawain, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Gareth, how this we know all, that Sir Lancelot holdeth your queen, and hath done long; and we be your sister's sons, and we may suffer it no longer, and all we wot that ye should be above Sir Lancelot; and ye are the king that made him knight, and therefore we will prove it, that he is a traitor to your person. If it be so, said Sir Arthur, wit you well he is none other, but I would be loath to begin such a thing but I might have proofs upon it; for Sir Lancelot is an hardy knight, and all ye know he is the best knight among us all; and but if he be taken with the deed, he will fight with him that bringeth up the noise, and I know no knight that is able to match him. Therefore an it be sooth as ye say, I would he were taken with the deed. For as the French book saith, the king was full loath thereto, that any noise should be upon Sir Lancelot and his queen; for the king had a deeming,⁹⁹ but he would not hear of it, for Sir Lancelot had done so much for him and the queen so many times, that wit ye well the king loved him passingly well. My lord, said Sir Agravaine, ye shall ride to-morn a-hunting, and doubt ye not Sir Lancelot will not go with you. Then when it draweth toward night, ye may send the queen word that ye will lie out all that night, and so may ye send for your cooks, and then upon pain of death we shall take him that night with the queen, and outhere¹⁰⁰ we shall bring him to you dead or quick.¹⁰¹ I will well, said the king; then I counsel you, said the king, take with you sure fellowship. Sir, said Agravaine, my brother, Sir Mordred, and I, will take with us twelve knights of the Round Table. Beware, said King Arthur, for I warn you ye shall find him wight.¹⁰² Let us deal, said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred.

So on the morn King Arthur rode a-hunting, and sent word to the queen that he would be out all that night. Then Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred gat to them twelve knights, and hid themselves in a chamber in the Castle of Carlisle, and these were their names: Sir Colgrevance, Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Gingaline, Sir Meliot de Logris, Sir Petipase of Winchelsea, Sir Galleron of Galway, Sir Melion of the Mountain, Sir Astamore, Sir Gromore Somir Joure, Sir Curselaine, Sir Florence, Sir Lovel. So these twelve knights were with Sir Mordred and Sir Agravaine, and all they were of Scotland, outhere of Sir Gawain's kin, either well-willers¹⁰³ to his brethren.

So when the night came, Sir Lancelot told Sir Bors how he would go that night and speak with the queen. Sir, said Sir Bors, ye shall not go this night by my counsel. Why? said Sir Lancelot. Sir, said Sir Bors, I dread me ever of Sir Agravaine, that waiteth you daily to do you shame and us all; and never gave my heart against no going, that ever ye went to the queen, so much as now; for I mistrust that the king is out this night from the queen because peradventure he hath lain some watch for you and the queen, and therefore I dread me sore of treason. Have ye no dread, said Sir Lancelot, for I shall go and come again, and make no tarrying. Sir, said Sir Bors, that me repenteth, for I dread me sore that your going out this night shall wrath us all.¹⁰⁴ Fair nephew, said Sir Lancelot, I marvel much why ye say thus, sithen the queen hath sent for me; and wit ye well I will not be so much a coward, but she shall understand I will see her good grace. God speed you well, said Sir Bors, and send you sound and safe again.

⁹⁹ Belief

¹⁰⁰ either

¹⁰¹ alive

¹⁰² strong

¹⁰³ Well-wishers; friends

¹⁰⁴ destroy us all

CHAPTER III. HOW SIR LANCELOT WAS ESPIED IN THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER, AND HOW SIR AGRAVAINE AND SIR MORDRED CAME WITH TWELVE KNIGHTS TO SLAY HIM

SO Sir Lancelot departed, and took his sword under his arm, and so in his mantle that noble knight put himself in great jeopardy; and so he passed till he came to the queen's chamber, and then Sir Lancelot was lightly put into the chamber. And then, as the French book saith, the queen and Lancelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof make no mention, for love that time was not as is now-a-days. But thus as they were together, there came Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, with twelve knights with them of the Round Table, and they said with crying voice: Traitor-knight, Sir Lancelot du Lake, now art thou taken. And thus they cried with a loud voice, that all the court might hear it; and they all fourteen were armed at all points as they should fight in a battle.

Alas said Queen Guinevere; now are we mischieved¹⁰⁵ both, Madam, said Sir Lancelot, is there here any armour within your chamber, that I might cover my poor body withal? An if there be any give it me, and I shall soon stint their malice, by the grace of God. Truly, said the queen, I have none armour, shield, sword, nor spear; wherefore I dread me sore our long love is come to a mischievous end, for I hear by their noise there be many noble knights, and well I wot they be surely armed, and against them ye may make no resistance. Wherefore ye are likely to be slain, and then shall I be brent.¹⁰⁶ For an ye might escape them, said the queen, I would not doubt but that ye would rescue me in what danger that ever I stood in. Alas, said Sir Lancelot, in all my life thus was I never bestead,¹⁰⁷ that I should be thus shamefully slain for lack of mine armour.

But ever in one Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred cried: Traitor-knight, come out of the queen's chamber, for wit thou well thou art so beset that thou shalt not escape.

O Jesu mercy, said Sir Lancelot, this shameful cry and noise I may not suffer, for better were death at once than thus to endure this pain. Then he took the queen in his arms, and kissed her, and said: Most noble Christian queen, I beseech you as ye have been ever my special good lady, and I at all times your true poor knight unto my power, and as I never failed you in right nor in wrong sithen¹⁰⁸ the first day King Arthur made me knight, that ye will pray for my soul if that I here be slain; for well I am assured that Sir Bors, my nephew, and all the remnant of my kin, with Sir Lavaine and Sir Urre, that they will not fail you to rescue you from the fire;¹⁰⁹ and therefore, mine own lady, recomfort yourself, whatsoever come of me, that ye go with Sir Bors, my nephew, and Sir Urre, and they all will do you all the pleasure that they can or may, that ye shall live like a queen upon my lands. Nay, Lancelot, said the queen, wit thou well I will never live after thy days, but an thou be slain I will take my death as meekly for Jesu Christ's sake as ever did any Christian queen. Well, madam, said Lancelot, sith it is so that the day is come that our love must depart, wit you well I shall sell my life as dear as I may; and a thousandfold, said Sir Lancelot, I am more heavier for you than for myself. And now I had liefer than to be lord of all Christendom, that I had sure armour upon me, that men might speak of my deeds or ever I were slain. Truly, said the queen, I would an it might please God that they would take me and slay me, and suffer you to escape. That shall never be, said Sir Lancelot, God defend me from such a shame, but Jesu be Thou my shield and mine armour!

CHAPTER IV. HOW SIR LANCELOT SLEW SIR COLGREVANCE, AND ARMED HIM IN HIS HARNESS, AND AFTER SLEW SIR AGRAVAINE, AND TWELVE OF HIS FELLOWS

AND therewith Sir Lancelot wrapped his mantle about his arm well and surely; and by then they had gotten a great form out of the hall, and therewithal they rashed at the door. Fair lords, said Sir Lancelot, leave your noise and your rashing, and I shall set open this door, and then may ye do with me what it liketh you. Come off then,

¹⁰⁵ hurt

¹⁰⁶ Burnt; she anticipates being burned at the stake

¹⁰⁷ defeated

¹⁰⁸ since

¹⁰⁹ That is rescue her from execution at the stake

said they all, and do it, for it availeth thee not to strive against us all; and therefore let us into this chamber, and we shall save thy life until thou come to King Arthur.

Then Lancelot unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open a little, so that but one man might come in at once; and so there came striding a good knight, a much man and large, and his name was Colgrevice of Gore, and he with a sword struck at Sir Lancelot mightily; and Sir Lancelot put aside the stroke, and gave him such a buffet upon the helmet, that he fell grovelling dead within the chamber door. And then Sir Lancelot with great might drew that dead knight within the chamber door; and Sir Lancelot with help of the queen and her ladies was lightly armed in Sir Colgrevice's armour.

And ever stood Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred crying: Traitor-knight, come out of the queen's chamber. Leave your noise, said Sir Lancelot unto Sir Agravaine, for wit you well, Sir Agravaine, ye shall not prison me this night; and therefore an ye do by my counsel, go ye all from this chamber door, and make not such crying and such manner of slander as ye do; for I promise you by my knighthood, an ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall as to-morn appear afore you all before the king, and then let it be seen which of you all, outhere else ye all, that will accuse me of treason; and there I shall answer you as a knight should, that hither I came to the queen for no manner of mal engin,¹¹⁰ and that will I prove and make it good upon you with my hands.

Fie on thee, traitor, said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, we will have thee maugre¹¹¹ thy head, and slay thee if we list; for we let thee wit we have the choice of King Arthur to save thee or to slay thee.

Ah sirs, said Sir Lancelot, is there none other grace with you? Then keep yourself. So then Sir Lancelot set all open the chamber door, and mightily and knightly he strode in amongst them; and anon at the first buffet he slew Sir Agravaine. And twelve of his fellows after, within a little while after, he laid them cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve that might stand Sir Lancelot one buffet. Also Sir Lancelot wounded Sir Mordred, and he fled with all his might.

And then Sir Lancelot returned again unto the queen, and said: Madam, now wit you well all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe; and therefore, madam, an it like you that I may have you with me, I shall save you from all manner adventures dangerous. That is not best, said the queen; meseemeth now ye have done so much harm, it will be best ye hold you still with this. And if ye see that as to-morn they will put me unto the death, then may ye rescue me as ye think best. I will well, said Sir Lancelot, for have ye no doubt, while I am living I shall rescue you. And then he kissed her, and either gave other a ring; and so there he left the queen, and went until his lodging.

CHAPTER VII. HOW SIR MORDRED RODE HASTILY TO THE KING, TO TELL HIM OF THE AFFRAY AND DEATH OF SIR AGRAVAINE AND THE OTHER KNIGHTS

NOW turn we again unto Sir Mordred, that when he was escaped from the noble knight, Sir Lancelot, he anon gat his horse and mounted upon him, and rode unto King Arthur, sore wounded and smitten, and all for-bled;¹¹² and there he told the king all how it was, and how they were all slain save himself all only.

Jesu mercy, how may this be? said the king; took ye him in the queen's chamber? Yea, so God me help, said Sir Mordred, there we found him unarmed, and there he slew Colgrevice, and armed him in his armour; and all this he told the king from the beginning to the ending. Jesu mercy, said the king, he is a marvellous knight of prowess. Alas, me sore repenteth, said the king, that ever Sir Lancelot should be against me. Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken for ever, for with him will many a noble knight hold; and now it is fallen so, said the king, that I may not with my worship, but the queen must suffer the death.

¹¹⁰ Ill device; bad behavior

¹¹¹ despite

¹¹² Bleeding copiously

So then there was made great ordinance in this heat, that the queen must be judged to the death. And the law was such in those days that whatsoever they were, of what estate or degree, if they were found guilty of treason, there should be none other remedy but death; and outhere the men or the taking with the deed should be causer of their hasty judgment. And right so was it ordained for Queen Guinevere, because Sir Mordred was escaped sore wounded, and the death of thirteen knights of the Round Table. These proofs and experiences caused King Arthur to command the queen to the fire there to be burnt.¹¹³

Then spake Sir Gawain, and said: My lord Arthur, I would counsel you not to be over-hasty, but that ye would put it in respite, this judgment of my lady the queen, for many causes. One it is, though it were so that Sir Lancelot were found in the queen's chamber, yet it might be so that he came thither for none evil; for ye know my lord, said Sir Gawain, that the queen is much beholden unto Sir Lancelot, more than unto any other knight, for oftentimes he hath saved her life, and done battle for her when all the court refused the queen; and peradventure she sent for him for goodness and for none evil, to reward him for his good deeds that he had done to her in times past. And peradventure my lady, the queen, sent for him to that intent that Sir Lancelot should come to her good grace privily and secretly, weening¹¹⁴ to her that it was best so to do, in eschewing and dreading of slander; for oftentimes we do many things that we ween it be for the best, and yet peradventure it turneth to the worst. For I dare say, said Sir Gawain, my lady, your queen, is to you both good and true; and as for Sir Lancelot, said Sir Gawain, I dare say he will make it good upon any knight living that will put upon himself villainy or shame, and in like wise he will make good for my lady, Dame Guinevere.

That I believe well, said King Arthur, but I will not that way with Sir Lancelot, for he trusteth so much upon his hands and his might that he doubteth no man; and therefore for my queen he shall never fight more, for she shall have the law. And if I may get Sir Lancelot, wit you well he shall have a shameful death.

Jesu defend, said Sir Gawain, that I may never see it.

Why say ye so? said King Arthur; forsooth ye have no cause to love Sir Lancelot, for this night last past he slew your brother, Sir Agravaire, a full good knight, and almost he had slain your other brother, Sir Mordred, and also there he slew thirteen noble knights; and also, Sir Gawain, remember you he slew two sons of yours, Sir Florence and Sir Lovel.

My lord, said Sir Gawain, of all this I have knowledge, of whose deaths I repent me sore; but insomuch I gave them warning, and told my brethren and my sons aforehand what would fall in the end, insomuch they would not do by my counsel, I will not meddle me thereof, nor revenge me nothing of their deaths; for I told them it was no boot to strive with Sir Lancelot. Howbeit I am sorry of the death of my brethren and of my sons, for they are the causers of their own death; for oftentimes I warned my brother Sir Agravaire, and I told him the perils the which be now fallen.

CHAPTER VIII. HOW SIR LANCELOT AND HIS KINSMEN RESCUED THE QUEEN FROM THE FIRE, AND HOW HE SLEW MANY KNIGHTS

THEN said the noble King Arthur to Sir Gawain: Dear nephew, I pray you make you ready in your best armour, with your brethren, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to bring my queen to the fire, there to have her judgment and receive the death.

Nay, my most noble lord, said Sir Gawain, that will I never do; for wit you well I will never be in that place where so noble a queen as is my lady, Dame Guinevere, shall take a shameful end. For wit you well, said Sir Gawain, my heart will never serve me to see her die; and it shall never be said that ever I was of your counsel of her death.

¹¹³ burnt

¹¹⁴ thinking

Then said the king to Sir Gawain : Suffer your brothers Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth to be there.

My lord, said Sir Gawain , wit you well they will be loath to be there present, because of many adventures the which be like there to fall, but they are young and full unable to say you nay.

Then spake Sir Gaheris, and the good knight Sir Gareth, unto Sir Arthur: Sir, ye may well command us to be there, but wit you well it shall be sore against our will; but an we be there by your strait commandment ye shall plainly hold us there excused: we will be there in peaceable wise, and bear none harness of war upon us.

In the name of God, said the king, then make you ready, for she shall soon have her judgment anon.

Alas, said Sir Gawain, that ever I should endure to see this woeful day. So Sir Gawain turned him and wept heartily, and so he went into his chamber; and then the queen was led forth without Carlisle, and there she was despoiled into her smock. And so then her ghostly father was brought to her, to be shriven of her misdeeds.¹¹⁵ Then was there weeping, and wailing, and wringing of hands, of many lords and ladies, but there were but few in comparison that would bear any armour for to strength the death of the queen.

Then was there one that Sir Lancelot had sent unto that place for to espy what time the queen should go unto her death; and anon as he saw the queen despoiled into her smock, and so shriven, then he gave Sir Lancelot warning. Then was there but spurring and plucking up of horses, and right so they came to the fire. And who that stood against them, there were they slain; there might none withstand Sir Lancelot, so all that bare arms and withstood them, there were they slain, full many a noble knight. For there was slain Sir Belliance le Orgulous, Sir Segwarides, Sir Griflet, Sir Brandiles, Sir Aglovale, Sir Tor; Sir Gauter, Sir Gillimer, Sir Reynolds' three brethren; Sir Damas, Sir Priamus, Sir Kay the Stranger, Sir Driant, Sir Lambegus, Sir Herminde; Sir Pertilope, Sir Perimones, two brethren that were called the Green Knight and the Red Knight.

And so in this rushing and hurling, as Sir Lancelot thrang here and there, it mishapped him to slay Gaheris and Sir Gareth, the noble knight, for they were unarmed and unaware. For as the French book saith, Sir Lancelot smote Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris upon the brain-pans, wherethrough they were slain in the field; howbeit in very truth Sir Lancelot saw them not, and so were they found dead among the thickest of the press.

Then when Sir Lancelot had thus done, and slain and put to flight all that would withstand him, then he rode straight unto Dame Guinevere, and made a kirtle and a gown to be cast upon her; and then he made her to be set behind him, and prayed her to be of good cheer. Wit you well the queen was glad that she was escaped from the death. And then she thanked God and Sir Lancelot; and so he rode his way with the queen, as the French book saith, unto Joyous Gard,¹¹⁶ and there he kept her as a noble knight should do; and many great lords and some kings sent Sir Lancelot many good knights, and many noble knights drew unto Sir Lancelot. When this was known openly, that King Arthur and Sir Lancelot were at debate, many knights were glad of their debate, and many were full heavy of their debate.

CHAPTER IX. OF THE SORROW AND LAMENTATION OF KING ARTHUR FOR THE DEATH OF HIS NEPHEWS AND OTHER GOOD KNIGHTS, AND ALSO FOR THE QUEEN, HIS WIFE

SO turn we again unto King Arthur, that when it was told him how and in what manner of wise the queen was taken away from the fire, and when he heard of the death of his noble knights, and in especial of Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth's death, then the king swooned for pure sorrow. And when he awoke of his swoon, then he said: Alas, that ever I bare crown upon my head! for now have I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king together. Alas, my good knights be slain away from me: now within these two days I have lost forty knights, and also the noble fellowship of Sir Lancelot and his blood, for now I may never hold them

¹¹⁵ She took confession

¹¹⁶ Lancelot's castle

together no more with my worship. Alas that ever this war began. Now fair fellows, said the king, I charge you that no man tell Sir Gawain of the death of his two brethren; for I am sure, said the king, when Sir Gawain heareth tell that Sir Gareth is dead he will go nigh out of his mind. Mercy Jesu, said the king, why slew he Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, for I dare say as for Sir Gareth he loved Sir Lancelot above all men earthly.

That is truth, said some knights, but they were slain in the hurtling¹¹⁷ as Sir Lancelot thrang¹¹⁸ in the thick of the press; and as they were unarmed he smote them and wist not whom that he smote, and so unhappily they were slain.

The death of them, said Arthur, will cause the greatest mortal war that ever was; I am sure, wist Sir Gawain that Sir Gareth were slain, I should never have rest of him till I had destroyed Sir Lancelot's kin and himself both, outhere else he to destroy me. And therefore, said the king, wit you well my heart was never so heavy as it is now, and much more I am sorrier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enow, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company. And now I dare say, said King Arthur, there was never Christian king held such a fellowship together; and alas that ever Sir Lancelot and I should be at debate. Ah Agravaine, Agravaine, said the king, Jesu forgive it thy soul, for thine evil will, that thou and thy brother Sir Mordred hadst unto Sir Lancelot, hath caused all this sorrow: and ever among these complaints the king wept and swooned.

Then there came one unto Sir Gawain, and told him how the queen was led away with Sir Lancelot, and nigh a twenty-four knights slain. O Jesu defend my brethren, said Sir Gawain, for full well wist I that Sir Lancelot would rescue her, outhere else he would die in that field; and to say the truth he had not been a man of worship had he not rescued the queen that day, insomuch she should have been brent for his sake. And as in that, said Sir Gawain, he hath done but knightly, and as I would have done myself an I had stood in like case. But where are my brethren? said Sir Gawain, I marvel I hear not of them.

Truly, said that man, Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris be slain.

Jesu defend, said Sir Gawain, for all the world I would not that they were slain, and in especial my good brother, Sir Gareth.

Sir, said the man, he is slain, and that is great pity.

Who slew him? said Sir Gawain.

Sir, said the man, Lancelot slew them both.

That may I not believe, said Sir Gawain, that ever he slew my brother, Sir Gareth; for I dare say my brother Gareth loved him better than me, and all his brethren, and the king both. Also I dare say, an Sir Lancelot had desired my brother Sir Gareth, with him he would have been with him against the king and us all, and therefore I may never believe that Sir Lancelot slew my brother.

Sir, said this man, it is noised that he slew him.

¹¹⁷ The confused madness of battle

¹¹⁸ pushed

CHAPTER X. HOW KING ARTHUR AT THE REQUEST OF SIR GAWAIN CONCLUDED TO MAKE WAR AGAINST SIR LANCELOT, AND LAID SIEGE TO HIS CASTLE CALLED JOYOUS GARD

ALAS, said Sir Gawain, now is my joy gone. And then he fell down and swooned, and long he lay there as he had been dead. And then, when he arose of his swoon, he cried out sorrowfully, and said: Alas! And right so Sir Gawain ran to the king, crying and weeping: O King Arthur, mine uncle, my good brother Sir Gareth is slain, and so is my brother Sir Gaheris, the which were two noble knights. Then the king wept, and he both; and so they fell a-swooning. And when they were revived then spake Sir Gawain: Sir, I will go see my brother, Sir Gareth.

Ye may not see him, said the king, for I caused him to be interred, and Sir Gaheris both; for I well understood that ye would make over-much sorrow, and the sight of Sir Gareth should have caused your double sorrow.

Alas, my lord, said Sir Gawain, how slew he my brother, Sir Gareth? Mine own good lord I pray you tell me.

Truly, said the king, I shall tell you how it is told me, Sir Lancelot slew him and Sir Gaheris both.

Alas, said Sir Gawain, they bare none arms against him, neither of them both. I wot not how it was, said the king, but as it is said, Sir Lancelot slew them both in the thickest of the press and knew them not; and therefore let us shape a remedy for to revenge their deaths. My king, my lord, and mine uncle, said Sir Gawain, wit you well now I shall make you a promise that I shall hold by my knighthood, that from this day I shall never fail Sir Lancelot until the one of us have slain the other. And therefore I require you, my lord and king, dress you to the war, for wit you well I will

be revenged upon Sir Lancelot; and therefore, as ye will have my service and my love, now haste you thereto, and assay your friends. For I promise unto God, said Sir Gawain, for the death of my brother, Sir Gareth, I shall seek Sir Lancelot throughout seven kings' realms, but I shall slay him or else he shall slay me.

Ye shall not need to seek him so far, said the king, for as I hear say, Sir Lancelot will abide me and you in the Joyous Gard; and much people draweth unto him, as I hear say.

That may I believe, said Sir Gawain; but my lord, he said, assay¹¹⁹ your friends, and I will assay mine.

It shall be done, said the king, and as I suppose I shall be big enough to draw him out of the biggest tower of his castle. So then the king sent letters and writs throughout all England, both in the length and the breadth, for to assummon all his knights. And so unto Arthur drew many knights, dukes, and earls, so that he had a great host. And when they were assembled, the king informed them how Sir Lancelot had bereft him his queen. Then the king and all his host made them ready to lay siege about Sir Lancelot, where he lay within Joyous Gard. Thereof heard Sir Lancelot, and purveyed him of many good knights, for with him held many knights; and some for his own sake, and some for the queen's sake. Thus they were on both parties well furnished and garnished of all manner of thing that longed to the war. But King Arthur's host was so big that Sir Lancelot would not abide him in the field, for he was full loath to do battle against the king; but Sir Lancelot drew him to his strong castle with all manner of victual, and as many noble men as he might suffice within the town and the castle. Then came King Arthur with Sir Gawain with an huge host, and laid a siege all about Joyous Gard, both at the town and at the castle, and there they made strong war on both parties. But in no wise Sir Lancelot would ride out, nor go out of his castle, of long time; neither he would none of his good knights to issue out, neither none of the town nor of the castle, until fifteen weeks were past.

¹¹⁹ Test; try; in other words, see if they will help

CHAPTER XI. OF THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN KING ARTHUR AND SIR LANCELOT, AND HOW KING ARTHUR REPROVED HIM.

THEN it befell upon a day in harvest time, Sir Lancelot looked over the walls, and spake on high unto King Arthur and Sir Gawain: My lords both, wit ye well all is in vain that ye make at this siege, for here win ye no worship but maugre¹²⁰ and dishonour; for an it list me to come myself out and my good knights, I should full soon make an end of this war.

Come forth, said Arthur unto Lancelot, an thou durst, and I promise thee I shall meet thee in midst of the field.

God defend me, said Sir Lancelot, that ever I should encounter with the most noble king that made me knight.

Fie upon thy fair language, said the king, for wit you well and trust it, I am thy mortal foe, and ever will to my death day; for thou hast slain my good knights, and full noble men of my blood, that I shall never recover again. Also thou hast lain by my queen, and holden her many winters, and sithen like a traitor taken her from me by force.

My most noble lord and king, said Sir Lancelot, ye may say what ye will, for ye wot well with yourself will I not strive; but thereas ye say I have slain your good knights, I wot well that I have done so, and that me sore repenteth; but I was enforced to do battle with them in saving of my life, or else I must have suffered them to have slain me. And as for my lady, Queen Guinevere, except your person of your highness, and my lord Sir Gawain, there is no knight under heaven that dare make it good upon me, that ever I was a traitor unto your person. And where it please you to say that I have holden my lady your queen years and winters, unto that I shall ever make a large answer, and prove it upon any knight that beareth the life, except your person and Sir Gawain, that my lady, Queen Guinevere, is a true lady unto your person as any is living unto her lord, and that will I make good with my hands. Howbeit it hath liked her good grace to have me in chierie,¹²¹ and to cherish me more than any other knight; and unto my power I again have deserved her love, for oftentimes, my lord, ye have consented that she should be brent and destroyed, in your heat, and then it fortuneth me to do battle for her, and or I departed from

her adversary they confessed their untruth, and she full worshipfully excused. And at such times, my lord Arthur, said Sir Lancelot, ye loved me, and thanked me when I saved your queen from the fire; and then ye promised me for ever to be my good lord; and now methinketh ye reward me full ill for my good service. And my good lord, meseemeth I had lost a great part of my worship in my knighthood an I had suffered my lady, your queen, to have been brent, and insomuch she should have been brent for my sake. For sithen I have done battles for your queen in other quarrels than in mine own, meseemeth now I had more right to do battle for her in right quarrel. And therefore my good and gracious lord, said Sir Lancelot, take your queen unto your good grace, for she is both fair, true, and good.

Fie on thee, false recreant knight, said Sir Gawain; I let thee wit my lord, mine uncle, King Arthur, shall have his queen and thee, maugre thy visage, and slay you both whether it please him.

It may well be, said Sir Lancelot, but wit you well, my lord Sir Gawain, an me list to come out of this castle ye should win me and the queen more harder than ever ye won a strong battle.

Fie on thy proud words, said Sir Gawain; as for my lady, the queen, I will never say of her shame. But thou, false and recreant¹²² knight, said Sir Gawain, what cause hadst thou to slay my good brother Sir Gareth, that loved thee more than all my kin? Alas thou madest him knight thine own hands; why slew thou him that loved thee so well?

¹²⁰ shame

¹²¹ Dearness, fondness

¹²² cowardly

For to excuse me, said Sir Lancelot, it helpeth me not, but by Jesu, and by the faith that I owe to the high order of knighthood, I should with as good will have slain my nephew, Sir Bors de Ganis, at that time. But alas that ever I was so unhappy, said Lancelot, that I had not seen Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris.

Thou liest, recreant knight, said Sir Gawain, thou slewest him in despite of me; and therefore, wit thou well I shall make war to thee, and all the while that I may live.

That me repenteth, said Sir Lancelot; for well I understand it helpeth not to seek none accordment¹²³ while ye, Sir Gawain, are so mischievously set. And if ye were not, I would not doubt to have the good grace of my lord Arthur.

I believe it well, false recreant knight, said Sir Gawain; for thou hast many long days overled me and us all, and destroyed many of our good knights.

Ye say as it pleaseth you, said Sir Lancelot; and yet may it never be said on me, and openly proved, that ever I by forecast of treason slew no good knight, as my lord, Sir Gawain, ye have done; and so did I never, but in my defence that I was driven thereto, in saving of my life.

CHAPTER XV. OF THE DELIVERANCE OF THE QUEEN TO THE KING BY SIR LANCELOT, AND WHAT LANGUAGE SIR GAWAIN HAD TO SIR LANCELOT

MY most redoubted¹²⁴ king, ye shall understand, by the Pope's commandment¹²⁵ and yours, I have brought to you my lady the queen, as right requireth; and if there be any knight, of whatsoever degree that he be, except your person, that will say or dare say but that she is true and clean to you, I here myself, Sir Lancelot du Lake, will make it good upon his body, that she is a true lady unto you; but liars ye have listened, and that hath caused debate betwixt you and me. For time hath been, my lord Arthur, that ye have been greatly pleased with me when I did battle for my lady, your queen; and full well ye know, my most noble king, that she hath been put to great wrong or this time; and sithen it pleased you at many times that I should fight for her, meseemeth, my good lord, I had more cause to rescue her from the fire, insomuch she should have been brent for my sake. For they that told you those tales were liars, and so it fell upon them; for by likelihood had not the might of God been with me, I might never have endured fourteen knights, and they armed and afore purposed, and I unarmed and not purposed. For I was sent for unto my lady your queen, I wot not for what cause; but I was not so soon within the chamber door, but anon Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred called me traitor and recreant knight.

They called thee right, said Sir Gawain.

My lord Sir Gawain, said Sir Lancelot, in their quarrel they proved themselves not in the right.

Well, well, Sir Lancelot, said the king, I have given thee no cause to do to me as thou hast done, for I have worshipped thee and thine more than any of all my knights.

My good lord, said Sir Lancelot, so ye be not displeased, ye shall understand I and mine have done you oft better service than any other knights have done, in many divers places; and where ye have been full hard bestead divers times, I have myself rescued you from many dangers; and ever unto my power I was glad to please you, and my lord Sir Gawain; both in jousts, and tournaments, and in battles set, both on horseback and on foot, I have often rescued you, and my lord Sir Gawain, and many mo of your knights in many divers places. For now I will make avaunt,¹²⁶ said Sir Lancelot, I will that ye all wit that yet I found never no manner of knight but that I was

¹²³ Agreement; truce

¹²⁴ Dreaded; formidable

¹²⁵ The Pope had sent a Bull (decree) demanding Lancelot hand over Guinevere and Arthur and Lancelot be at peace.

¹²⁶ boast

overhard for him, an I had done my utterance, thanked be God; howbeit I have been matched with good knights, as Sir Tristan and Sir Lamorak, but ever I had a favour unto them and a deeming what they were. And I take God to record, said Sir Lancelot, I never was wroth nor greatly heavy with no good knight an I saw him busy about to win worship; and glad I was ever when I found any knight that might endure me on horseback and on foot: howbeit Sir Carados of the Dolorous Tower was a full noble knight and a passing strong man, and that wot ye, my lord Sir Gawain; for he might well be called a noble knight when he by fine force pulled you out of your saddle, and bound you overthwart afore him to his saddle bow; and there, my lord Sir Gawain, I rescued you, and slew him afore your sight. Also I found his brother, Sir Turquin, in likewise leading Sir Gaheris, your brother, bounden afore him; and there I rescued your brother and slew that Turquin, and delivered three-score-and-four of my lord Arthur's knights out of his prison. And now I dare say, said Sir Lancelot, I met never with so strong knights, nor so well fighting, as was Sir Carados and Sir Turquin, for I fought with them to the uttermost. And therefore, said Sir Lancelot unto Sir Gawain, meseemeth ye ought of right to remember this; for, an I might have your good will, I would trust to God to have my lord Arthur's good grace.

BOOK XXI.

CHAPTER I. HOW SIR MORDRED PRESUMED AND TOOK ON HIM TO BE KING OF ENGLAND, AND WOULD HAVE MARRIED THE QUEEN, HIS FATHER'S WIFE

AS Sir Mordred was ruler of all England, he did do make letters as though that they came from beyond the sea, and the letters specified that King Arthur was slain in battle with Sir Lancelot. Wherefore Sir Mordred made a parliament, and called the lords together, and there he made them to choose him king; and so was he crowned at Canterbury, and held a feast there fifteen days; and afterward he drew him unto Winchester, and there he took the Queen Guinevere, and said plainly that he would wed her which was his uncle's wife and his father's wife.¹²⁷

And so he made ready for the feast, and a day prefixed that they should be wedded; wherefore Queen Guinevere was passing heavy. But she durst not discover her heart, but spake fair, and agreed to Sir Mordred's will. Then she desired of Sir Mordred for to go to London, to buy all manner of things that longed unto the wedding. And because of her fair speech Sir Mordred trusted her well enough, and gave her leave to go. And so when she came to London she took the Tower of London, and suddenly in all haste possible she stuffed it with all manner of victual, and well garnished it with men, and so kept it.

Then when Sir Mordred wist and understood how he was beguiled, he was passing wroth out of measure. And a short tale for to make, he went and laid a mighty siege about the Tower of London, and made many great assaults thereat, and threw many great engines unto them, and shot great guns. But all might not prevail Sir Mordred, for Queen Guinevere would never for fair speech nor for foul, would never trust to come in his hands again.

Then came the Bishop of Canterbury, the which was a noble clerk and an holy man, and thus he said to Sir Mordred: Sir, what will ye do? will ye first displease God and sithen shame yourself, and all knighthood? Is not King Arthur your uncle, no farther but your mother's brother, and on her himself King Arthur begat you upon his own sister, therefore how may you wed your father's wife?

Sir, said the noble clerk, leave this opinion or I shall curse you with [book and bell and candle](#).¹²⁸

Do thou thy worst, said Sir Mordred, wit thou well I shall defy thee.

Sir, said the Bishop, and wit you well I shall not fear me to do that me ought to do. Also where ye noise where my lord Arthur is slain, and that is not so, and therefore ye will make a foul work in this land.

¹²⁷ Arthur is both father and uncle to Mordred

¹²⁸ Excommunication

Peace, thou false priest, said Sir Mordred, for an thou chafe me any more I shall make strike off thy head.

So the Bishop departed and did the cursing in the most orgulist¹²⁹ wise that might be done.

And then Sir Mordred sought the Bishop of Canterbury, for to have slain him. Then the Bishop fled, and took part of his goods with him, and went nigh unto Glastonbury; and there he was as priest hermit in a chapel, and lived in poverty and in holy prayers, for well he understood that mischievous war was at hand.

Then Sir Mordred sought on Queen Guinevere by letters and sonds,¹³⁰ and by fair means and foul means, for to have her to come out of the Tower of London; but all this availed not, for she answered him shortly, openly and privily, that she had liefer slay herself than to be married with him.

Then came word to Sir Mordred that King Arthur had araised the siege for Sir Lancelot, and he was coming homeward with a great host, to be avenged upon Sir Mordred; wherefore Sir Mordred made write writs to all the barony of this land, and much people drew to him. For then was the common voice among them that with Arthur was none other life but war and strife, and with Sir Mordred was great joy and bliss. Thus was Sir Arthur depraved, and evil said of. And many there were that King Arthur had made up of nought, and given them lands, might not then say him a good word. Lo ye all Englishmen, see ye not what a mischief here was! for he that was the most king and knight of the world, and most loved the fellowship of noble knights, and by him they were all upholden, now might not these Englishmen hold them content with him. Lo thus was the old custom and usage of this land; and also men say that we of this land have not yet lost nor forgotten that custom and usage. Alas, this is a great default of us Englishmen, for there may no thing please us no term. And so fared the people at that time, they were better pleased with Sir Mordred than they were with King Arthur; and much people drew unto Sir Mordred, and said they would abide with him for better and for worse. And so Sir Mordred drew with a great host

to Dover, for there he heard say that Sir Arthur would arrive, and so he thought to beat his own father from his lands; and the most part of all England held with Sir Mordred, the people were so new-fangle.¹³¹

CHAPTER II. HOW AFTER THAT KING ARTHUR HAD TIDINGS, HE RETURNED AND CAME TO DOVER, WHERE SIR MORDRED MET HIM TO LET HIS LANDING; AND OF THE DEATH OF SIR GAWAIN

AND so as Sir Mordred was at Dover with his host, there came King Arthur with a great navy of ships, and galleys, and carracks. And there was Sir Mordred ready awaiting upon his landing, to let his own father to land upon the land that he was king over. Then there was launching of great boats and small, and full of noble men of arms; and there was much slaughter of gentle knights, and many a full bold baron was laid full low, on both parties. But King Arthur was so courageous that there might no manner of knights let him to land, and his knights fiercely followed him; and so they landed maugre¹³² Sir Mordred and all his power, and put Sir Mordred aback, that he fled and all his people.

So when this battle was done, King Arthur let bury his people that were dead. And then was noble Sir Gawain found in a great boat, lying more than half dead. When Sir Arthur wist that Sir Gawain was laid so low; he went unto him; and there the king made sorrow out of measure, and took Sir Gawain in his arms, and thrice he there swooned. And then when he awaked, he said: Alas, Sir Gawain, my sister's son, here now thou liest; the man in the world that I loved most; and now is my joy gone, for now, my nephew Sir Gawain, I will discover me unto your person: in Sir Lancelot and you I most had my joy, and mine affiance, and now have I lost my joy of you both; wherefore all mine earthly joy is gone from me.

¹²⁹ Haughtiest

¹³⁰ messages

¹³¹ fickle

¹³² despite

Mine uncle King Arthur, said Sir Gawain, wit you well my death-day is come, and all is through mine own hastiness and wilfulness; for I am smitten upon the old wound the which Sir Lancelot gave me, on the which I feel well I must die; and had Sir Lancelot been with you as he was, this unhappy war had never begun; and of all this am I causer, for Sir Lancelot and his blood, through their prowess, held all your cankered enemies in subjection and daunger. And now, said Sir Gawain, ye shall miss Sir Lancelot. But alas, I would not accord with him, and therefore, said Sir Gawain, I pray you, fair uncle, that I may have paper, pen, and ink, that I may write to Sir Lancelot a cedle¹³³ with mine own hands.

And then when paper and ink was brought, then Gawain was set up weakly by King Arthur, for he was shriven a little to-fore; and then he wrote thus, as the French book maketh mention: Unto Sir Lancelot, flower of all noble knights that ever I heard of or saw by my days, I, Sir Gawain, King Lot's son of Orkney, sister's son unto the noble King Arthur, send thee greeting, and let thee have knowledge that the tenth day of May I was smitten upon the old wound that thou gavest me afore the city of Benwick, and through the same wound that thou gavest me I am come to my death-day. And I will that all the world wit, that I, Sir Gawain, knight of the Table Round, sought my death, and not through thy deserving, but it was mine own seeking; wherefore I beseech thee, Sir Lancelot, to return again unto this realm, and see my tomb, and pray some prayer more or less for my soul. And this same day that I wrote this cedle, I was hurt to the death in the same wound, the which I had of thy hand, Sir Lancelot; for of a more nobler man might I not be slain. Also Sir Lancelot, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, make no tarrying, but come over the sea in all haste, that thou mayst with thy noble knights rescue that noble king that made thee knight, that is my lord Arthur; for he is full straitly bestead with a false traitor, that is my half-brother, Sir Mordred; and he hath let crown him king, and would have wedded my lady Queen Guinevere, and so had he done had she not put herself in the Tower of London. And so the tenth day of May last past, my lord Arthur and we all landed upon them at Dover; and there we put that false traitor, Sir Mordred, to flight, and there it misfortuned me to be stricken upon thy stroke. And at the date of this letter was written, but two hours and a half afore my death, written with mine own hand, and so subscribed with part of my heart's blood. And I require thee, most famous knight of the world, that thou wilt see my tomb.

And then Sir Gawain wept, and King Arthur wept; and then they swooned both. And when they awaked both, the king made Sir Gawain to receive his Saviour. And then Sir Gawain prayed the king for to send for Sir Lancelot, and to cherish him above all other knights. And so at the hour of noon Sir Gawain yielded up the spirit; and then the king let inter him in a chapel within Dover Castle; and there yet all men may see the skull of him, and the same wound is seen that Sir Lancelot gave him in battle. Then was it told the king that Sir Mordred had pight¹³⁴ a new field upon Barham Down. And upon the morn the king rode thither to him, and there was a great battle betwixt them, and much people was slain on both parties; but at the last Sir Arthur's party stood best, and Sir Mordred and his party fled unto Canterbury.

CHAPTER IV. HOW BY MISADVENTURE OF AN ADDER THE BATTLE BEGAN, WHERE MORDRED WAS SLAIN, AND ARTHUR HURT TO THE DEATH

THEN were they condescended that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and everych of them should bring fourteen persons; and they came with this word unto Arthur.

Then said Arthur: I am glad that this is done: and so he went into the field. And when Arthur should depart, he warned all his host that an they see any sword drawn: Look ye come on fiercely, and slay that traitor, Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him.

¹³³ Note, letter

¹³⁴ pitched

In like wise Sir Mordred warned his host that: An ye see any sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you standeth; for in no wise I will not trust for this treaty, for I know well my father will be avenged on me.

And so they met as their appointment was, and so they were agreed and accorded thoroughly; and wine was fetched, and they drank. Right soon came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on the foot. And when the knight felt him stung, he looked down and saw the adder, and then he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beams, trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together.

And King Arthur took his horse, and said: Alas this unhappy day! and so rode to his party. And Sir Mordred in like wise. And never was there seen a more dolefuller battle in no Christian land; for there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle of Sir Mordred many times, and did full nobly as a noble king should, and at all times he fainted never; and Sir Mordred that day put him in devoir, and in great peril. And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid to the cold earth; and ever they fought still till it was near night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down.

Then was Arthur wood¹³⁵ wroth out of measure, when he saw his people so slain from him. Then the king looked about him, and then was he ware, of all his host and of all his good knights, were left no more alive but two knights; that one was Sir Lucan the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and they were full sore wounded.

Jesu mercy, said the king, where are all my noble knights become? Alas that ever I should see this doleful day, for now, said Arthur, I am come to mine end. But would to God that I wist where were that traitor Sir Mordred, that hath caused all this mischief.

Then was King Arthur ware where Sir Mordred leaned upon his sword among a great heap of dead men. Now give me my spear, said Arthur unto Sir Lucan, for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought.

Sir, let him be, said Sir Lucan, for he is unhappy; and if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. Good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawain told you this night, yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. Therefore, for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this, for blessed be God ye have won the field, for here we be three alive, and with Sir Mordred is none alive; and if ye leave off now this wicked day of destiny is past.

Tide me death, betide me life, saith the king, now I see him yonder alone he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better avail shall I never have him.

God speed you well, said Sir Bedivere.

Then the king gat his spear in both his hands, and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying: Traitor, now is thy death-day come. And when Sir Mordred heard Sir Arthur, he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand. And there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin of his spear, throughout the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the bur of King Arthur's spear. And right so he smote his father Arthur, with his sword holden in both his hands, on the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain-pan, and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth; and the noble Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth, and there he swooned ofttimes.

¹³⁵ insanely

And Sir Lucan the Butler and Sir Bedivere oftentimes heaved him up. And so weakly they led him betwixt them both, to a little chapel not far from the seaside. And when the king was there he thought him well eased. Then heard they people cry in the field.

Now go thou, Sir Lucan, said the king, and do me to wit what betokens that noise in the field.

So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he yede,¹³⁶ he saw and hearkened by the moonlight, how that pillers¹³⁷ and robbers were come into the field, to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches, and beads, of many a good ring, and of many a rich jewel; and who that were not dead all out, there they slew them for their harness and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the king as soon as he might, and told him all what he had heard and seen.

Therefore by my rede,¹³⁸ said Sir Lucan, it is best that we bring you to some town.

I would it were so, said the king.

¹³⁶ ran

¹³⁷ pillagers

¹³⁸ Counsel, advise

CHAPTER V. HOW KING ARTHUR COMMANDED TO CAST HIS SWORD EXCALIBUR INTO THE WATER, AND HOW HE WAS DELIVERED TO LADIES IN A BARGE



FIGURE 5 EDWARD BURNE-JONES, THE LAST SLEEP OF ARTHUR, 1898¹³⁹

BUT I may not stand, mine head works so. Ah Sir Lancelot, said King Arthur, this day have I sore missed thee: alas, that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawain me warned in my dream.

Then Sir Lucan took up the king the one part, and Sir Bedivere the other part, and in the lifting the king swooned; and Sir Lucan fell in a swoon with the lift, that the part of his guts fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight's heart brast. And when the king awoke, he beheld Sir Lucan, how he lay foaming at the mouth, and part of his guts lay at his feet.

Alas, said the king, this is to me a full heavy sight, to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have holpen me, that had more need of help than I. Alas, he would not complain him, his heart was so set to help me: now Jesu have mercy upon his soul!

Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother.

Leave this mourning and weeping, said the king, for all this will not avail me, for wit thou well an I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore; but my time hieth fast, said the king. Therefore, said Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when

¹³⁹ Burne-Jones, Edward. *The Last Sleep of Arthur*. 1898. Ponce Museum of Art, Ponce, Puerto Rico. *Edward Burne-Jones [Public domain]*, via *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 20 May 2014.

thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again and tell me what thou there seest.

My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all of precious stones; and then he said to himself: If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword in the water.

What saw thou there? said the king.

Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds.

That is untruly said of thee, said the king, therefore go thou lightly again, and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in.

Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment.

What saw thou there? said the king.

Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and waves wan.

Ah, traitor untrue, said King Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that, thou that hast been to me so lief and dear? and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead.

Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and an hand above the water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water.

So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw.

Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long.

Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

Now put me into the barge, said the king.

And so he did softly; and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head.

And then that queen said: Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? alas, this wound on your head hath caught over-much cold. And so then they rowed from the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him.

Then Sir Bedivere cried: Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?

Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayst, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of [Avalon](#) to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul.

But ever the queens and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest; and so he went all that night, and in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar, of a chapel and an hermitage.

CHAPTER VII. OF THE OPINION OF SOME MEN OF THE DEATH OF KING ARTHUR; AND HOW QUEEN GUINEVERE MADE HER A NUN IN ALMESBURY

YET some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say: here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: Hic jacet Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus.¹⁴⁰

Thus leave I here Sir Bedivere with the hermit, that dwelled that time in a chapel beside Glastonbury, and there was his hermitage. And so they lived in their prayers, and fastings, and great abstinence.

And when Queen Guinevere understood that King Arthur was slain, and all the noble knights, Sir Mordred and all the remnant, then the queen stole away, and five ladies with her, and so she went to Almesbury; and there she let make herself a nun, and ware white clothes and black, and great penance she took, as ever did sinful lady in this land, and never creature could make her merry; but lived in fasting, prayers, and alms-deeds, that all manner of people marvelled how virtuously she was changed.

¹⁴⁰ Here lies Arthur the once and future king