

And now if you would know how Sir Ewaine prospered in that undertaking which he had assumed, I pray you to read further in this history and you shall hear how it befell with him.



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ir Ewaine poureth water on
the slab:



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Chapter Second

How Sir Ewaine undertook that adventure in which Sir Sagramore had failed, and how it sped with him thereafter.

Thus it was that Sir Ewaine departed upon that adventure whilst Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore were still asleep, and no one wist of his going saving only the groom. After he wended his way from that place until he had come to the woodlands, and he entered the woodlands and travelled therein for a long while, breaking his fast with the charcoal burners whom he found there at a curious place. About the middle of the morning he came to a high hill, and when he had climbed this hill he beheld before him a very strangely beautiful valley, and he beheld that in the midst of the valley there stood a wonderful castle, and he wist that this must be the castle of the Lady Vivien of which Sir Sagramore had aforetold of.

Sir Ewaine cometh to the castle of the Lady Vivien.

And Sir Ewaine was astonished at the wonderful appearance of that castle and the valley in which it stood. For this castle was bright and shining as though of polished stone, and the roofs thereof were of bright red tile variegated with dark green tiles and black tiles, laid in sundry figures and patterns very strange to behold. And the valley in which the castle stood was spread out with fair lawns and gardens and meadow-lands and plantations of comely trees. And everywhere there were flowers abloom in incredible quantities, and there were thousands of birds of bright plumage that sang in the trees throughout the valley, so that the multitudinous sounds of their singing came even to Sir Ewaine where he sat so far distant. And ever those birds flitted like bright sparks of color hither and thither through the foliage of the trees, and Sir Ewaine had never beheld their like before in all of his life. So because of the wonderfulness of all that he beheld, Sir Ewaine wist that this must be a land of faery and enchantment with which the Lady Vivien had surrounded her castle and herself and her court. So for a while Sir Ewaine sat there observing all these things, and after a while he set spurs to horse and rode down into that valley and toward the castle.[214]

Now when Sir Ewaine had come pretty near to the castle, he beheld two youths with golden hair, clad in garments of flame-colored satin, and he knew that these must be the two fair youths of whom Sir Sagramore had spoken. And he saw that those two youths were playing at ball under the walls of the castle just as Sir Sagramore had beheld them when he had visited that place.

These, when Sir Ewaine drew nigh, ceased their play, and he who was the chief of the twain came forward and greeted that noble knight with great courtesy, saying: "Sir Knight, you are very welcome to these parts where not many ever come. For she who is the lady of this castle ever takes pleasure in giving welcome to such as you who come thitherward. Now I pray you of your courtesy to tell me who you are and upon

what quest you are bound and what is your degree, for I would fain announce you with all dignity to the lady of the castle."

Quoth Sir Ewaine: "Fair youth, you are to know that I am a knight of King Arthur's court, and that I am a fellow of the Round Table. My name is Sir Ewaine, and I am King Uriens' son of Gore, my mother being Queen Morgana le Fay. As for your lady, I know very well who she is, and that she is none other than the Enchantress Vivien. Moreover, I know that she is not at all above devising mischief against me because I am a knight of King Arthur and of his Round Table. Yet I will that you bring me before this lady, for I would fain have speech with her."

Upon this, so boldly said by Sir Ewaine, those two fair youths were adoubt, wherefore they withdrew a little to one side and held consultation together. Then he who had before spoken to Sir Ewaine spake again, saying: "Messire, I trust you have it not in your mind to do any ill to the lady of this castle, for unless we are well assured upon that point we will not bring you to her."

"Rest ye easy," quoth Sir Ewaine; "I am a true knight, and mean no ill to any lady, be she evil or good. Only I would have speech with her as presently as may be."

Then the youth who was the speaker for the two said, "Sir, I will take you to her."

Sir Ewaine cometh to the Lady Vivien.

So forthwith that youth led the way into the enchanted castle and Sir Ewaine followed closely after him. And after they had come unto the castle and after Sir Ewaine had dismounted from his horse and after they had traversed various spaces, the youth brought Sir Ewaine to where the Lady Vivien was. And she was in her own fair bower with her eleven damsels gathered about her.[215]

The Lady Vivien giveth welcome to Sir Ewaine.

Now the news of the coming of Sir Ewaine had gone before him, so that when he came to the Lady Vivien she arose from her seat and went forward to meet him and received him with her face all wreathed with smiles. And she said: "Welcome! Welcome! Thrice welcome, Sir Ewaine! Now I pray you to let my attendants conduct you to a fair room where you may bathe and refresh yourself, for we would fain have you stay with us at this place for a day or two or three if so be you will favor us so greatly."

But Sir Ewaine neither smiled nor made acknowledgment of any sort; otherwise he spake with great sternness, saying: "Fair Lady, I know you well, and I know that you have no very good will toward us who are of King Arthur's court. I know that you continually devise mischief and enchantments against all who come near you, and I

well believe that could you do so without danger to yourself, you would this moment practise mischiefs against me. Nevertheless, I am not come hither to chide you because of your shortcomings, for though all those things are well known to me and to others, yet I leave it to God to judge you in His own wisdom and am not come hither to be myself your judge. What I have come for is this: not long since you sent my fellow, Sir Sagramore, upon an adventure that brought great shame upon him. Now I pray you that you will direct me to that same adventure so that I may undertake it, for, if so be I have that good fortune, I would fain punish that discourteous knight who so shamed my companion at arms."

Then the Lady Vivien laughed very high and shrill. "Sir," quoth she, "you are very brave for to undertake that adventure wherein so good a knight as Sir Sagramore failed so signally. Gladly will I direct you upon your way, and all that I ask in return is that when you have sped in that adventure, you will also return hither as did Sir Sagramore, so that I may bestow a white mule upon you as I bestowed one to him."

To this Sir Ewaine bowed his head very gravely and said: "Be it so. Show me the way to that adventure, and if I fail therein, then I will submit myself to you so that you may humiliate me as you humiliated Sir Sagramore."

Sir Ewaine entereth into the Adventure of the Fountain.

Then the Lady Vivien called to her that youth who had afore spoken to Sir Ewaine, and she bade him set Sir Ewaine upon the path that should lead him to that adventure he sought. And after that Sir Ewaine left the Lady Vivien without any further word and he took horse and departed thence. And that fair youth with the golden hair went before Sir Ewaine to the skirts of the forest that lay upon the other side of the valley from that side upon which[216] Sir Ewaine had entered it. Then the youth showed Sir Ewaine a certain path that led into the forest and he said: "Take that path, fair lord, and it will bring you to your adventure."

So Sir Ewaine took the path as the youth directed and he travelled upon it for an hour or two and by and by he came to an open place in the woodland. And in the midst of that open place there was a high mound of earth covered with fair green grass and many sheep browsed upon the slopes of the mound and coadjacent thereunto. And on the mound there sat the being of whom Sir Sagramore had spoken, and Sir Ewaine was amazed at his hideous aspect. For he was of giant stature and swarthy black, and his hair was red as brick. His mouth gaped wide like a cavern and the teeth within were sharp like the teeth of a wild beast.

To this creature Sir Ewaine spake, saying, "Sirrah, whither shall I go to find that Adventure of the Fountain?"

Upon this that giant being laughed like the pealing of thunder and he said: "Ho! little man, have you come also to that adventure? The day before yesterday one came hither and sped but ill, and so also, I doubt not, it will fare with you. Take you yonder path, and I believe you will come to that adventure all too soon for your own good."

Sir Ewaine cometh to the valley of the fountain.

So Sir Ewaine took the path that that being directed, and so entering the woodlands again he rode for a long while through the thick forests. Then after a while he came to a hill and he ascended the hill, and when he had reached the top thereof he found that the forest ceased and that the open country lay spread out before him and he beheld a fair and level valley lying beneath the hill. And he beheld that the valley was very fertile with many fields and plantations of fair trees. And Sir Ewaine beheld in that valley a lake and a fountain that flowed into the lake and a tree that overshadowed the fountain, and he wist that this was the place where Sir Sagramore had met with that adventure aforetold of. So straightway he rode down into that valley and toward that place where was the enchanted fountain overshadowed by the tree. And when he reached that place he beheld the slab of stone and the silver bowl chained to the slab by a silver chain just as Sir Sagramore had beheld those things.

Sir Ewaine casteth water upon the slab.

Then Sir Ewaine took the silver bowl into his hand and he dipped up water therein from the fountain, and he flung the water upon the marble slab as Sir Sagramore had done.

Then straightway it befell as it had with Sir Sagramore, for first the earth began to tremble and to quake and then the sky began to thunder, and then there arose a great cloud that overspread the sky, so^[217] that it became all black like unto night time, although it was still the middle of the day. Then there came the great wind, the like of which Sir Ewaine had never before known in all his life, for it blew with such strength of fury that he was afraid it would blow him away from that place. Then there fell such a deluge of rain that he feared he would be drowned therewith. And whilst the rain fell in that wise he heard a multitude of voices in lamentation as though a great way off, just as Sir Sagramore had heard these voices.

Anon the rain ceased and the clouds passed away, and the sun came forth and shone with wonderful warmth and brightness, and thereupon a great flock of small birds came flying to that tree and perched in the branches thereof so that the tree was entirely filled with the multitude of feathered creatures gathered there. And that

multitude of birds began to sing in such a wise, that when Sir Ewaine listened to that singing he wist not whether he were in paradise or upon earth, so sweet and piercing was the melody of their singing. And all these things befell with Sir Ewaine as they had befallen aforetime with Sir Sagramore.

Now, whilst Sir Ewaine stood listening in that wise, all bewitched by the singing of those birds, he was aware of one who came riding very rapidly toward him across the plain. And as that rider drew nigh unto Sir Ewaine, he beheld that he was a knight clad all in black armor and seated upon a great charger which was entirely black and which was hung with trappings as black as any raven. And the knight bore a shield which was altogether black and without any device whatsoever. And he was of a very terrible appearance, being huge of form and violent and fierce in his advance.

This black knight, when he had come close to that place where Sir Ewaine awaited him, cried out in a great voice: "Sir Knight, why didst thou come hither to meddle with my fountain? Know thou that thou hast brought a great deluge upon all this land so that thou hast wrought great damage to us who are the people thereof. But now thou shalt pay very dearly for the injury thou hast done. Prepare thyself straightway for battle!"

Unto this Sir Ewaine made reply: "Sir Knight, I wist not that in throwing water upon yonder slab I was doing injury to thee or to any one. Nevertheless, I am ready to meet thee in battle as thou dost make demand." Therewith Sir Ewaine dressed his shield and his spear and took his station in the meadow near the fountain and beside the lake, and put himself in such array for defence as he was able.

Sir Ewaine doeth battle with the Knight of the Fountain.

So when they both had prepared themselves in all ways they let go their horses the one against the other, in very violent assault, rushing together[218] like a whirlwind. And so they met together in the midst of the course with an uproar as of thunder; the one smiting against the other with such violence that the spear of each was burst all into pieces unto the very truncheon thereof. And in that assault both knights would assuredly have been overthrown excepting for the wonderful address of each. For each drave spur into steed and shouted aloud so that each charger recovered his feet and fell not. Then each knight threw away the truncheon of his spear and each drew his sword and straightway fell to battle with might and main. And in that combat each knight gave the other many sore buffets and, for a long while, no one could have told how that encounter was like to go.

But at last Sir Ewaine waxed very furious with the opposition of that other knight, wherefore he arose in his stirrups and lashed at that black knight such a buffet that nor guard nor shield nor helm could withstand the stroke. For under that blow the black Knight of the Fountain reeled in his saddle as though he would fall from his horse. Then he drooped his shield and hung his head full low and caught at the horn of his saddle as though to stay himself from falling. Herewith Sir Ewaine lashed another buffet at him, and with that blow the sword of Sir Ewaine pierced through the helmet of the black knight and deep into his brain pan and with that stroke the black knight received his mortal hurt.

Then Sir Ewaine, perceiving that the black knight was so sorely hurt, repented him of what he had done in the heat of his battle and stayed his hand, though all too late. And he cried out: "Sir Knight, I fear me that I have given thee a very woeful hurt. I repent me of that, so yield thou thyself to me, and forthwith I will look to thy wound and will give thee such ease as I may."

The Knight of the Fountain fleeth from Sir Ewaine.

But to this the black Knight of the Fountain made no reply. Otherwise he immediately wheeled his horse about, and set spurs to flank, and drove away with all speed from that place. And so rapidly did he race away from the field of battle that he appeared to fly, as it were, like to the shadow of a bird across the plain.

Sir Ewaine pursueth the Black Knight.

At first Sir Ewaine was altogether amazed at the suddenness of the flight of the Black Knight, but presently he awoke and set spurs to his horse and sped away in pursuit as fast as he could race his horse forward. And ever Sir Ewaine pursued the Black Knight in that wise and called upon him to stay, and ever the Black Knight fled all the more rapidly away as though he heard not[219] the voice of Sir Ewaine. And ever though he strove, Sir Ewaine could not reach the Black Knight in his flight.

Thus they sped as swift as the wind across the plain, the Black Knight fleeing and Sir Ewaine pursuing, and by and by Sir Ewaine was aware that they were approaching a walled town and a very tall and noble castle with many high towers, and steep roofs that overlooked the houses of the town. And Sir Ewaine perceived that many people were running hither and thither about the castle as though in great disturbance, and that many people were upon the walls of the town, watching the Black Knight and him as they drew nigh. And ever the knight rode toward the gate of the town and of the castle, speeding like the wind, and ever Sir Ewaine pursued him without being able to

overtake him. So, in a little while, the Black Knight reached the drawbridge of the gate and he thundered across the drawbridge and Sir Ewaine thundered after him.

Now as the knight had approached the gateway of the town the portcullis had been lifted for to admit him, and so he rode through the gateway with all speed. But when Sir Ewaine would have followed, the portcullis was let fall for to keep him without.

Sir Ewaine is caught within the portcullis of the town.

Yet so great was the fury of Sir Ewaine's chase and so closely did he follow the Black Knight in pursuit that he was within the portcullis as it fell. And the portcullis fell upon the horse of Sir Ewaine and smote him just behind the saddle and cut him in twain, so that the half of the horse fell within the portcullis and the other half of the horse fell without the castle. And so violent was the blow of the falling of the portcullis, and so sudden the fall of the horse, that Sir Ewaine was flung down to the ground with so dreadful and terrible a shock that he lay in a swoon as though he had been killed.

So as Sir Ewaine lay there, there came a number of those who were in attendance at that part of the castle. These looked in through a wicket of iron and beheld Sir Ewaine where he lay in that swoon in the space between the portcullis and the inner gate. So when they beheld him lying thus with the half of his dead horse, they said: "Behold! yonder is the man who wounded our champion and who pursued him hither. Let him lie where he is until that our champion tells us what we shall do unto him. For lo! he is a prisoner here and cannot escape from our hands, and so we have it in our power to do with him whatsoever we please."

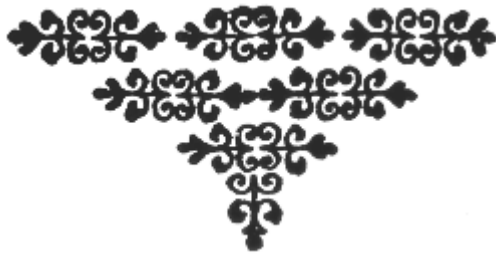
Thus they said, not knowing that even at that time their champion was lying very nigh to death because of the wound he had received at the hands of Sir Ewaine.

So these went away from that place, leaving Sir Ewaine lying as though[220] dead in the swoon that his violent fall had caused him. But after a while life came back to him and he opened his eyes and gazed about him, and after that he made shift to arise, though with great pain. Then he beheld that he was a prisoner at that place, and that he lay with the half of his dead horse betwixt the portcullis and the inner gate of the castle so that he could neither get into the castle nor out but was there a prisoner like to a creature caught in a trap.

Then Sir Ewaine went to the wicket of the inner gate and he looked forth through the iron bars of the wicket for to see what sort of a place it was into which he had come. And he beheld that within the gate was the street of the town. And he perceived that the street was very steep and that it was cobbled with stones. And he beheld that the houses of the town that stood upon either side of the street were built either of brick

or else of stone, and that they were fair and tall with overhanging gables and with shining windows of glass and roofs of bright red tiles. And he beheld that there were many booths and stores with fair fabrics and merchandise displayed for sale. And he saw that there were many people in the street but that all they were moving in one direction as though in great agitation. And as he stood, so gazing, he was aware of a great sound of lamentation that arose from all parts of the town, wherefore he thought that maybe the knight whom he had chased thither must now be lying nigh to death. At that he was much grieved, for not only was that a very noble and valorous knight, but his death would certes put Sir Ewaine himself into great jeopardy as soon as the people of the castle should come to deal with him in that place where he was now a prisoner.

And now followeth the history of the further adventures of Sir Ewaine as it is told in the books of chivalry that relate to these happenings, so I pray you to read that which followeth if that other which hath gone before hath been pleasing to you.



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The Damsel Elose giveth a ring
to Sir Ewaine :



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Chapter Third

*How a damsel, hight Elose, who was in service with the Lady Lesolie of the Fountain,
brought succor to Sir Ewaine in his captivity.*

So Sir Ewaine stood gazing out of the wicket of the gate as aforetold; and he wist not what to do to save his life; for he knew he could do naught but wait there until those who had to deal with him might come to slay him.

Now, as he stood thuswise in great trouble of spirit, he was aware of a damsel who came thitherward. And as that damsel approached, Sir Ewaine perceived that she was very comely of appearance, and that she had yellow curling hair and it seemed to Sir Ewaine that he had hardly ever beheld a damsel more fair than she who approached his place of captivity.

This damsel came close to the wicket where Sir Ewaine stood, and she gazed upon his face and her own face was pitiful and kind, and neither angry nor scornful. Then Sir Ewaine, beholding that her face was kind, said to her: "Damsel, why do you come to gaze thus upon a poor captive who is waiting for his death?"

The Damsel of the Fountain pitieth Sir Ewaine.

To this the damsel made reply: "Alas, Sir Knight, I come hither because I take great pity that a noble champion such as you appear to be should be in so sad a case as this. For certes the people of this castle will come to slay you in a very little while."

"Damsel," said Sir Ewaine, "thy pity is a great comfort to me, but it would be a still greater comfort if thou couldst help me to escape from this place."

To this the damsel made no reply. But presently she said: "Tell me, Sir Knight, why did you do so grievous a hurt to our knight-champion who was the defender of this land against those who would meddle with the fountain to bring a deluge upon our land. Wit you that because of the woeful buffets you gave him he lieth so near to death that he is like to die in a few hours." [224]

"Damsel," said Sir Ewaine, "to tell you the very truth, I meant not to bring an injury upon this land, neither did I mean to visit so grievous a hurt as I did upon that good worthy knight your champion. But first I entered upon this adventure because a fellow of mine failed in it and because I deemed that it behooved me to redeem with mine own hand the honor he had lost to your champion. As for the hurts which he suffered at my hand—wit you that when a knight fights in battle with another knight, as I fought of late with your champion, that one knoweth not how hard he smites until the mischief is done. So it was with me, and when I smote I smote in the heat and the passion of battle. Then, when I perceived that I had hurt him so sorely I pursued your knight with intent to help him whom I had so sadly hurt. But ever your knight-champion fled away from me, so that at last I pursued him in anger; wherefore I rushed into this place without thinking, and so am caught here a helpless prisoner."

Then the damsel said, "Sir Knight, I pray you tell me what is your name and your degree?" To the which Sir Ewaine made reply: "My name is Sir Ewaine and I am King Uriens' son of Gore, and my mother is Queen Morgana, surnamed Le Fay."

Now when the damsel heard this announcement of the name and the degree of Sir Ewaine, she made great admiration, crying out: "Is it then possible that so famous a knight as thou art, and one so renowned in all the world both of chivalry and of common history, shouldst be caught a prisoner in this wise?" And she regarded Sir Ewaine through the aperture of the gate with very great wonder, and by and by she regarded him with still greater pity. Then after a little, she said: "Sir Knight Ewaine, I take great sorrow that so worthy a knight as thou art shouldst suffer harm. Now I am of a great mind for to help thee if thou wilt do my bidding in all things that I shall ordain for thee to do. For if I release thee from thy captivity, there are several things I would have thee do upon my commandment."

"Lady," said Sir Ewaine, "I believe that you mean me well, and I believe that you would not lay any command upon me that would be contrary to my knightly honor or my integrity as a right knight of royal blood to fulfill." And the damsel said: "Take no thought that I intend ill faith against thee, Sir Ewaine, for instead I am of a mind to be thy friend in this affair if so be thou wilt put thy trust in me."

Then Sir Ewaine said: "Lady, I yield myself to your will, and if you will set me free from this captivity I will do whatsoever you ordain for me to perform. But tell me, how mean ye for to bring me forth from this peril unless you may get the keys of this gate from the porter thereof?"[225]

The damsel giveth succor to Sir Ewaine.

"Sir," said the damsel, "I cannot get those keys but I have another way than that to set you free. For wit you that though locks and bars be strong, yet the power of enchantment is still stronger than they." With this the damsel drew from her bosom a locket that hung there by a chain of gold, and she opened the locket and she brought forth therefrom a ring set with a clear red stone like to a pure ruby—bright—shining and very brilliant. And she said, "See you this ring?" and Sir Ewaine said, "Yea." "Well, Messire," said she, "this is a very wonderful ring, for it hath had many potent spells set upon it by the magician Merlin, who gave it in days gone by to my father, King Magnus of Leograns. So my father gave it to me and it is the most precious thing of all my possessions. For the property of this ring is of such a sort that if you turn the stone inward upon your hand so as to hide it within your palm, then you shall become invisible; and if you turn the stone out upon your hand again, then you shall become visible as you were before. Take this ring, Sir Ewaine, and when you have made

yourself invisible by means of it, then you shall escape from your enemies. After you have so escaped, come you to the garden of this castle and I will be there. Do you come and lay your hand upon my shoulder, and then I will know you are there. After that I will then conduct you to a certain apartment where you shall be privily lodged until this present danger hath passed."

Therewith speaking, the damsel gave the ring to Sir Ewaine and he took it, giving her thanks beyond measure for her kindness to him. And immediately he set the ring upon his finger and turned the stone inward so as to hide it in his palm. Then lo! as soon as he had done that he became immediately invisible to the eyes.

Then the damsel Elose fled away from that place, lest those who would come to slay Sir Ewaine should find her there talking to him.

So, shortly after she had gone, there came a great party of armed men with intent to slay Sir Ewaine, and some of these were armed and all bore swords and guisarms. These came to the gate and flung it open, and rushed into the space between it and the portcullis with a great tumult, for they expected to find Sir Ewaine there and to slay him. But lo! he was gone and they beheld nothing there but the half of his dead horse and the saddle and the bridle and the trappings thereof. For there was neither sight nor sign of him anywhere to be seen.

At that they were all amazed beyond measure to find their prisoner gone, for they wist not how he could have escaped from that place. So they raised a great tumult and some cried out to hurry hither and others[226] to hurry thither, and in the tumult and confusion Sir Ewaine passed out from their midst and none of them were aware of his going.

Sir Ewaine escapeth from the gateway.

After that Sir Ewaine went away from that place and into the town within the walls. And he came to the castle of the town and no one saw him in his going. And he entered the castle and the people of the castle saw him not.

How Sir Ewaine entereth the garden of the castle.

So, invisible to all, Sir Ewaine went to the privy garden of the castle, and he perceived that that was a very pleasant place, with many shady trees and with plats of flowers and with fountains and long straight walks where the lady of the castle might take her pleasure when she chose to be out of doors. And Sir Ewaine entered that garden and he perceived that there were several damsels therein and that all they were very sorrowful and downcast because that the knight-champion of that place had been

slain, and several of them wept. But amongst these damsels was the damsel Elose, and she alone of all who were there was cheerful and bore a smiling countenance.

Then Sir Ewaine went to her and laid his hand upon her shoulder as she had bidden him to do, and thereupon she knew that he was there though she could not see him. So straightway she arose and went forth from out of the garden and Sir Ewaine followed her.

After that the damsel led Sir Ewaine to a certain part of the castle and up a long flight of steps and so brought him to an apartment that was immediately beneath the eaves of a certain part of the tower of the castle.

And Sir Ewaine beheld that here was a large and noble apartment hung with woven hangings representing pictures of battle and of court, and he beheld that the floor was spread with finely woven fabrics of divers sorts. And he saw that there were several large windows that overlooked the streets of the town and a fair prospect beyond. And the breeze blew into those windows very softly and pleasantly, and great flocks of pigeons flew about in the air with noisy and clapping flight, and numbers of other pigeons strutted on the tiles of the roof and bridled and cooed to each other in the red sunlight of the waning day. So this was a very pleasant place in which to dwell. And the damsel said to Sir Ewaine, "Here shall you abide until my further purpose is ripe."

The damsel serveth Sir Ewaine.

Then the damsel Elose brought an ewer full of tepid water and she poured the water into a basin, and the ewer and the basin were both of them of silver. And the damsel held the basin and Sir Ewaine bathed his hands and his face, and after that she gave him a large napkin of fine white linen and he dried his hands and his face[227] thereon. So, when he was thus refreshed she brought him food and drink, and Sir Ewaine ate and drank with much appetite and was greatly uplifted in spirit. And by that time the evening was come.

Now all this while Sir Ewaine was greatly astonished that the damsel should be so kind to him, wherefore he said, "Damsel, why art thou so kind to me?" To this she made reply: "Messire, I have a purpose in all this, that by and by and in good season I will unfold to thee."

Then Sir Ewaine said to her: "I pray you, fair damsel, tell me now the mystery of that fountain and of the knight who guarded it? For I am very curious to know why there came that quaking of the earth and that thundering and rain when I cast water upon the slab beside the fountain."

"Sir," said Elose, "I will tell you that mystery." And so she did, as followeth:

The damsel telleth Sir Ewaine of the enchantment of the fountain.

"You are to know," quoth she, "that sometime ago there was appointed a joust at a place not very distant from this. And to that joust there went the lady of this castle who is hight the Lady Lesolie. Thither also went the Lady Vivien, of whom thou either knowest or hast heard tell, for she is one of the greatest and most mischievous enchantresses in all of the world.

"At that jousting there was one knight who distinguished himself above all others, and he was Sir Sagron surnamed Cœur de Fer. For that noble knight won the battle of the joust, overthrowing all who came against him without once suffering defeat himself. So to him was awarded the prize of battle, which prize was a fillet of gold. This fillet the victor had the right to bestow upon the lady whom he deemed the fairest of all who were there.

"Now the Lady Vivien thought that she would be chosen by whomsoever won that prize, for that day she had put on all the enchantments of beauty that she possessed. Nevertheless, and in spite of these charms, Sir Sagron bestowed the prize of beauty, not upon the Lady Vivien, but upon the Lady Lesolie, who is the countess of this castle where we are.

"Now when the Lady Vivien saw that she was passed over by Sir Sagron, she took great affront with Lady Lesolie who had been chosen, and vowed vengeance upon her.

"So afterward by her enchantments she had that slab of stone laid by the fountain and she ordained that whensoever any one should cast the water of the fountain upon the slab then there would come a great deluge to this land. Thereafter she established herself not very far distant from this valley of the fountain, and whenever a knight cometh by her castle, that knight she sets upon the adventure of the fountain.[228]

Of Sir Sagron of the Fountain.

"Meantime Sir Sagron had offered himself as champion of the fountain, undertaking to defend it if the Lady Lesolie would upon her part consent to wed him and make him lord of this domain. To this the lady was constrained to say yea. So it was ordained that if Sir Sagron would defend the fountain without fail or default for the space of a year and a day, after that time she would give herself and all her domain to him as the lord thereof. So Sir Sagron hath ever since defended the fountain with great honor until to-day, when you overcame him in battle, and pursued him hither wounded unto

death. Had he defended a fortnight longer, he had won his suit with the Lady Lesolie and would have been lord of this land. But now he will to-morrow awake in Paradise.

"This, Sir Ewaine, is the story of the mystery of the fountain, and now I tell thee I know not who will defend it unless haply it is thou who wilt do so."

"Fair damsel," quoth Sir Ewaine, "how may I look to defend the fountain who will immediately be slain if it be known that I am here?"

To this the damsel laughed and said: "Sir Ewaine, all that may come about if fortune be with me in these matters I am about to undertake."

Now by this time the darkness being come, the damsel lit two tapers of perfumed wax, and thereafter she conducted Sir Ewaine into another apartment. There he beheld a couch, very soft and comfortable and spread with a coverlet of crimson satin. And the damsel Eloise said: "Sir Ewaine, doubtless thou art weary. If that be so, here thou mayst rest thyself and be at ease." And therewith she set down the candles of wax upon a table and quitted the room and Sir Ewaine was left alone.

And Sir Ewaine was very weary, wherefore he laid aside his armor and disrobed himself and laid himself down upon that fair soft bed with great joy of comfort. And straightway thereafter he fell asleep as though he were a little weary child.

Now about the twelfth hour of the night and whilst Sir Ewaine lay thus asleep, he became aware of a great disturbance—the sound of weeping and a great outcry of lamentation that filled the entire silence of the night.

Sir Ewaine beholdeth the funeral at night.

Anon came the damsel Eloise, and she said: "Sir Ewaine, the knight Sir Sagron is dead whom thou wounded yesterday, and now they are bearing him to the church. Come and see!" So Sir Ewaine arose quickly and covered himself with a cloak, and he went with the damsel to a certain window that overlooked a street of the town. From that window and beneath him he beheld a great concourse of people that filled the entire street. Many of those were clad in armor of proof and others bare torches so that the entire night was aflame with the light thereof. And there were many women who rode[229] upon horseback beside the armed knights. And all of this great assembly of people were crying out in lamentation so that it was as though all the hollow beneath the space of heaven were full of the voice of their sorrow. With this lamentation of many voices were mingled the sound of trumpets and the chaunting of priests and acolytes who recited the services for the dead. In the midst of all the press there was a bier, and over the bier there had been spread a veil of white linen and upon the bier

there lay stretched the knight-champion of that place with his hands crossed upon his sword. All about the bier were many people carrying long candles of wax, and these also added their lamentation to the voices of those others who lamented.

Then when Sir Ewaine beheld this spectacle he said: "Woe is me, Elose, this is surely a very sorry sight to behold! Now I grieve me greatly that I am the cause of this, for I meant not to slay that knight. Yet in the heat of battle who may stay the hand for to measure the stroke that one giveth to his enemy?"

Sir Ewaine beholdeth the Lady Lesolie of the Fountain.

Then anon as Sir Ewaine still gazed upon that scene, he beheld that a lady followed after the bier, and he saw that her hair was hanging loose and that she was in great disarray. But maugre that, it appeared to him that she was the most beautiful lady his eyes had ever looked upon. Then Sir Ewaine said to Elose, who was looking out of the window beside him, "What fair lady is that who followeth the bier of the dead knight?" To the which she made answer: "That is the lady of this castle, and she is making sorrow for the knight her champion who is slain."

Then Sir Ewaine gazed and gazed at that lady for as long as he could see her, and when she had gone by, he said: "Elose, certes that lady is the most beautiful dame that ever mine eyes looked upon. Now I tell thee truly that I do not wonder that your knight-champion was willing for to serve her for a whole year with faithfulness; for I would willingly serve for even a longer time than that to win her good regard."

At this Elose laughed with great good will. "Is it so with you, Sir Knight?" quoth she, "and do you then find that your heart is inclined toward this lady?" And Sir Ewaine said, "Yea, it is even so with me." Elose said: "And wouldst thou be pleased, Sir Ewaine, if I could devise it in such wise that the lady of this castle should look kindly upon thee?" And again Sir Ewaine said, "Yea."

Then Elose smiled very cheerfully upon Sir Ewaine and she said: "Well, Messire, let be till to-morrow and then we shall see what that day shall bring forth." [230]

The damsel Elose serveth Sir Ewaine in the morning.

So when the next morning had come, Sir Ewaine arose greatly refreshed, and by and by Elose came to him with food with which to break his fast. And after he had broken his fast she brought a bowl of ivory with tepid water, and she brought a razor with a heft of ivory studded with gold, and she hung a fine linen towel upon her shoulder and she shaved Sir Ewaine so that his face was both fresh and clean. After that she brought him fine raiment—an undervest of soft cambric linen and a surcoat and hose

of azure silk embroidered with silver, and a cloak with a clasp of gold, and with pears of silver hanging from the corners thereof. And she brought a circlet of gold for his head, such as became the son of a king. Then she looked upon Sir Ewaine and he was very comely.

After all this had been done in that wise, Elose left Sir Ewaine and went to where was the Lady Lesolie, and the lady sat alone in her bower in great sorrow that her knight-champion was dead. But Elose entered that place with a very cheerful countenance, and she said, "Lady, what cheer?"

The Lady Lesolie rebuketh the damsel.

Then the Lady Lesolie looked upon Elose with great indignation because of her cheerful aspect, and she said: "Damsel, I am much displeased that thou shouldst appear so cheerful and gay of spirit when thou beholdest me in such sorrow. And I think very ill of thee that thou who art the best beloved of all my damsels hast not come nigh me in all this time for to offer me cheer or comfort in mine affliction."

Now Elose was greatly in favor with the Lady Lesolie so that she feared her not, wherefore she still bore a very cheerful aspect. And she said: "Lady, I know not wherefore I should take such sorrow as I see the sorrow to be that you assume for Sir Sagron. I did not love him so much that I should take more than reasonable grief when he suffered such misfortune of battle as may befall any knight."

Then the Lady Lesolie's eyes sparkled very brightly with anger, and she said: "Ha! Damsel! Thou goest beyond all measure of the liberty of speech which I allow to thee. Mayhap I loved not Sir Sagron as he would have had me, yet I honored him a very great deal, and now that he is gone I know not who may defend the fountain in his stead. So, because thou dost smile and take cheer in this time of trouble, thy presence is displeasing to me, wherefore I would have thee gone from hence."

Then Elose said: "Very well, Lady, I will go as thou hast bidden me, but I think thou wilt be sorry that thou didst not talk more with me and that thou dost not inquire of me why I appear so cheerful as I do."

Therewith Elose turned as though to go forth from that place. But[231] after she had gone a little distance, the Lady Lesolie arose and followed her to the door of the chamber and began coughing very softly. Then when Elose turned, the lady beckoned to her and said, "Come hither!" and Elose laughed and came. Then the lady said: "Thou art very saucy of disposition, but nevertheless I love thee more than thou deservest. Now tell me what it is that thou hast upon thy mind."

Then Elose said, "I will tell thee, but it must be where none may hear."

The lady said, "Come hither, then," and therewith she led Elose into a place where they were altogether by themselves, and when they were come there the Lady Lesolie said, "What is it, Elose?"

The damsel bespeaketh the Lady Lesolie.

Then Elose said: "Lady, there is in this castle a knight who loveth thee a very great deal, and this knight is exceedingly noble and of very great skill at arms, and he is a king's son, and he is a knight of King Arthur's court, and he is a knight of the Round Table. So great is the love of this knight for thee that thou mightest demand anything of him. Now it appeareth to me that since thou hast lost the knight who was our champion, thou wouldst do well to call upon this knight to defend thee. And if in good time thou shouldest choose him for thy lord, then it would be much to thy pride and greatly to the joy of this land."

Now all this while the lady had been regarding Elose very steadfastly, and when the maiden ended she said: "Who is this knight, and what is his name and his degree?" Elose said: "Lady, thou hast heard of him a great many times, for he is Sir Ewaine, the son of King Uriens of Gore and of Queen Morgana le Fay." Then the lady said in a very strange voice: "Elose, it is wonderful that a knight so famous as this should have been in our castle and yet we knew nothing thereof. Now tell me, when was it he came hither?" Then Elose was confused and said: "Lady, he hath only been here a little while, for he did but come this morning."

Then the Lady Lesolie smiled very curiously, and she said: "Bring that knight hither, that I may see him and speak with him." Then straightway Elose went to where Sir Ewaine was. And Elose said: "Sir Ewaine, arise and come with me, for my lady would have speech with thee."

So Sir Ewaine arose and went forth with Elose, and Elose brought him to where the Lady Lesolie was. And Elose introduced Sir Ewaine to the Lady Lesolie, and Sir Ewaine paid great homage to her for he beheld that she was very wonderfully beautiful. The lady looked at Sir Ewaine very steadily, and by and by she said, "Elose, this knight hath not the appearance of one who is a traveller new arrived from a journey; rather he appeareth like one who is fresh and well-bedight." [232]

Then at first Elose was confused and wist not where to look. Then presently the lady said: "Elose, I believe this was the knight who slew Sir Sagron."

Then Elose looked very steadily into the lady's face, and anon she spake boldly and without fear, and she said: "Well, lady, what then? So much the better for thee if this knight overcame Sir Sagron, who was the best knight in all this land. For if this knight overcame Sir Sagron, then is he better than Sir Sagron, and so he is better to be the defender of the Fountain."

Then the lady said: "Say no more, but go ye both away until I meditate upon this for a while." And thereupon Elose and Sir Ewaine quitted the apartment of the lady and went away to another part of the castle.

The damsel bringeth Sir Ewaine to the Lady of the Fountain.

After that they waited for word to come to them from the lady of the castle, yet no word came for a long while. But when the evening had come, the chatelaine sent a very courteous message to Sir Ewaine that it would pleasure her to have him sup with her. So Sir Ewaine went upon that command, and the lady received him very graciously and made place for him beside her at the table, and they sat and ate and drank together and talked of many things of court and field. And ever as they talked together the Lady Lesolie regarded Sir Ewaine very closely, and she perceived that he was very noble and haughty of appearance, and she wist that he was greater champion than she had ever beheld before.

Then, by and by, she said of a sudden to Sir Ewaine: "Messire, dost thou not think thou didst very ill to come hitherward to the destruction of our peace?"

Sir Ewaine promiseth to defend the Fountain.

Then Sir Ewaine spake very boldly, saying: "Lady, I am very sorry to have caused thee grief, but I did only as any knight-adventurer would do, taking my chance of battle and of death with him as he took his chance with me. Yet now that the chance of war hath brought me hither, I cannot repent me of anything that hath befallen me. For that chance hath brought me into thy presence and hath made me acquainted with thee." Then the lady said: "Well, Messire, what am I to do now that thou hast slain the knight-champion of this place?" To the which Sir Ewaine made reply: "Lady, if thou wilt take me for thy champion, I will serve thee very faithfully and will ask no guerdon from thee. For I know of no greater joy that could befall me than to be thy chosen champion." Then the Lady Lesolie smiled and said: "Sir Ewaine, thou speakest very well, and I believe that thy deeds are every whit as trustworthy as thy words. So I will accept thee as my[233] champion to do combat in my behalf and to protect my fountain and myself for a year and a day. If by the end of that time thou hast proved thyself to be entirely faithful, then I will consider anything else that thou mayst have to say to me."

So Sir Ewaine abided at that place and he defended the Fountain so well that no one came thither to assail it who was not overthrown, and from all whom he thus overthrew, Sir Ewaine took horse and shield and sent them away from that place afoot.

And Sir Ewaine dwelt in the Valley of the Fountain for nigh a year, and in that time he and the Lady Lesolie of the Fountain were betrothed to one another with intent to be wedded when the year was ended. And ever Sir Ewaine loved the Lady of the Fountain more and more, and ever she loved him more and more.

Yet oftentimes Sir Ewaine bethought him of the King's court and of his friends thereat and at those times he would long for them with a very great passion of desire. So it befell upon a day that Sir Ewaine and the Lady Lesolie were in the garden of the castle and Sir Ewaine sat sunk in deep and silent thought concerning those friends and that court. And meanwhile the lady watched him askance. Then by and by she said: "What is it that lieth upon thy mind, Messire, that causeth thee to take so much thought to thyself?"

Sir Ewaine longeth for the court of the King.

Then Sir Ewaine aroused himself and said: "Lady, it is that I think much of my friends and companions of the court of King Arthur. For now nigh to a year hath passed and in all of that time I have heard no single word of any of them."

Then the Lady Lesolie said, "Ewaine, art thou discontent with us at this place?" He said: "Nay, lady, thou knowest I am very well content and more than well content to be thus forever with thee. Yet ne'theless I would that I might have word of my companions, for I know not how it fareth with them. And furthermore, I would fain know whether they who went in quest of Sir Launcelot with me have yet heard anything of that noble and worthy champion."

Then the Lady Lesolie said: "Ah, Ewaine, I fear me that thou thinkest so much of thy friends that thou wilt, in a little while, be discontent to remain with us any longer." To which Sir Ewaine said: "Lady, thou knowest very well that that could never be." And she said, "Art thou sure of that?" "Yea," quoth Sir Ewaine, "I am well assured of it."

Then the Lady of the Fountain said: "Ewaine, I have it in my mind that thou shalt go and visit thy friends at the court of the great king.[234] For after thou hast seen them and hast satisfied thyself, I believe that thou wilt be better content to be here. So I lay it as my command upon thee that thou shalt go to Camelot, and have converse once again

with thy friends and companions. Yet I would not have thee remain too long away from us, wherefore I lay it as a further injunction upon thee that thou shalt return hither as soon as possible, for we can ill spare our champion who is so dear to us."



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he Lady of the Fountain:



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Chapter Fourth

How Sir Ewaine returned to the court of King Arthur, and how he forgot the Lady Lesolie and his duty to the Fountain.

So it came about that the day after that day, Sir Ewaine took horse and departed from the Valley of the Fountain as the Lady Lesolie had commanded him to do; and he travelled alone, going from that place in the same manner that he had come thither.

Now as he went upon his way in return to Camelot he must needs travel upon that same road by which he came thitherward. So by and by he again beheld that huge herdsman oaf who sat upon the mound as aforetold of, guarding his cattle. When this being beheld Sir Ewaine he shouted to him aloud in a great voice, "Hello, little man! Whither goest thou?" But to him Sir Ewaine made no reply, but rode steadfastly upon his way.

Anon, and about the hour of noon, he came to within sight of that wonderful valley wherein stood the enchanted castle of the Lady Vivien. And Sir Ewaine rode down into the valley and toward the castle, and as he drew nigh they of the castle were aware of his coming from afar.

So it was that as Sir Ewaine came nigh to the castle there issued forth a multitude of people, who approached him singing and making joy and giving him great voice of welcome. For ever they cried aloud: "Welcome, O noble champion! Welcome! And welcome still again!"

Sir Ewaine cometh to the castle of Vivien.

So they met him and brought him as it were in triumph to the castle, and when he had come nigh thereunto the Lady Vivien herself came forth to add her welcome to his coming. And she wore a very smiling and cheerful countenance, and she also cried, as did the others, "Welcome, Sir Ewaine! Welcome! Thrice welcome!" and she said: "Messire, I well know that thou didst come forth victorious from that adventure which thou didst undertake against the Knight of the Fountain, wherefore it is that I am rejoiced to see thee. For, as thou already must know, I bore no very high regard for that knight whom thou didst overthrow." [238]

Now Sir Ewaine was very well pleased with the welcome he found at that place, for he did not suspect that the Lady Vivien, who smiled so kindly upon him, nourished any thought of mischief against him. Wherefore he suffered them all to bear him into the castle in triumph and to relieve him of his armor and to bring him to a bath and to fit him with fine soft raiment wherewith he might with a good appearance come before the Lady Vivien in her bower.

After that Sir Ewaine went to where that lady was, and he sat with her and talked in great amity with her. Yet he knew not that all that while he talked with her she was planning mischief against him. So by and by, still in great amity, they went to a place

where a noble feast was prepared, and there Sir Ewaine sat beside the Lady Vivien with great pleasure in being thus near to her. Then, after a while, having in mind those several mischiefs she had planned against the knights of King Arthur and of the Round Table, he said to her: "Lady, you who are so kind and fair to me, I know not why you do mischief against those others, my companions, who are of King Arthur's court; and I know not why you do mischief against the Lady Lesolie of the Fountain so as to bring trouble upon that land. She hath done you no ill that you should so practise evil against her."

Then the Lady Vivien assumed an appearance of great meekness and contrition, and she said: "Messire, what you say is true, and I repent me of all those evil things which I have done." And she said: "Would it pleasure you if all enchantment should be removed from that fountain, and if the land of the fountain should be left at peace?" Sir Ewaine said, "Lady, it would pleasure me beyond measure." Then the Lady Vivien said: "So it shall be, and I promise you very faithfully that that enchantment shall be entirely removed from that land this very day forward unto all time." Then she looked upon Sir Ewaine and smiled upon him in such wise that he was bewitched with her smiling, and she said, "Sir Ewaine, let there be peace betwixt us from this time forth for aye!" and he said, "Lady, God knows I bear you no ill will and so there is peace betwixt us."

Then the Lady Vivien said, "Sir, I would that thou wouldst accept a pledge of peace from me." And he said, "What is that pledge?" Quoth she, "I will show thee."

The Lady Vivien giveth Sir Ewaine the ring of forgetfulness.

Thereupon saying, she smote her hands together, and in answer there came a fair young page clad in cloth of gold and with long, curling ringlets of golden hair hanging down upon his shoulders. To this youth the lady gave sundry commands, and he departed, returning anon bearing in his hands a patten of gold[239] and upon the patten was a fair white napkin of fine linen, and upon the napkin a ring of gold very cunningly wrought, and inset with a bright shining yellow stone. These the fair young page brought to the Lady Vivien, kneeling upon one knee, and she took the ring from the patten and gave it to Sir Ewaine, saying: "Sir, behold this ring! This I give to thee to wear as a pledge of the amity that lieth betwixt us." Therewith Sir Ewaine took the ring and set it upon his finger.

Now that ring was enchanted with very potent spells. For it was a ring of forgetfulness, so that whosoever wore it, that person would forget whatever the Lady Vivien would have him disremember.

Sir Ewaine forgetteth the Lady Lesolie.

So when Sir Ewaine set the ring upon his finger, that moment he forgot all about the Lady of the Fountain. And he forgot all the pledges that had passed betwixt himself and that lady, and he forgot all the other things that belonged to that part of his life. But all else he remembered: to wit, how he had undertaken that Adventure of the Fountain, and how he had overthrown the knight-champion of the Fountain and all other parts of his life.

Then Sir Ewaine looked at the Lady Vivien very strangely, like to one who is newly awakened from a sleep, and he said, "What is it we were speaking of anon?" And at that the Lady Vivien laughed and said, "Sir, it matters not." Sir Ewaine said, "Meseems I have had a dream, but I cannot remember what it was"; and then the Lady Vivien laughed again and said, "Neither does it matter what was thy dream." And she said: "It only matters that we are friends, and that thou wearest my pledge of amity upon thy hand. Now I prithee never remove that ring from thy finger, for from that moment the friendship that now exists shall cease betwixt us." Sir Ewaine said: "This ring shall remain upon my finger for aye, and I shall never take it from my finger even for a single moment."

So Sir Ewaine rested with great pleasure for that night at the castle of the Lady Vivien, and, when the next morning was come, he departed from the castle, betaking his way to the court of King Arthur.

For he said to himself: "Haply by this time they have some news of Sir Launcelot. So I will straightway return to the court of the King and learn if that be so."

Sir Ewaine returneth to the court of the King.

Now Sir Ewaine, because he had forgotten all about his life at the Valley of the Fountain, had no thought that he had been gone from that court for a longer time than a fortnight, wherefore when he was come amongst his friends again and when he found that wellnigh a year had passed, he knew not what to think. "How is this," he said, "and what hath befallen me? Surely there was[240] something that was like to a dream that I cannot remember. What is it that hath happened to me? I know not what it is." So Sir Ewaine was ashamed that he should not be able to remember what had happened to him for the year that had passed, wherefore he held his peace and said nothing concerning the matter. But ever Sir Ewaine feared lest he should betray to his friends that he had forgotten a whole year of his life. So it was he said to himself: "After that I have rested a little here at the court of the King I will set forth again in quest of

news of Sir Launcelot. For maybe by and by I may be able to remember what I have forgotten of this year that hath passed."

King Arthur rideth afield.

But Sir Ewaine did not immediately depart from the court, and so it chanced upon a certain day, the weather being very pleasant, King Arthur went afield with certain of his court and Sir Ewaine was one of those. That time it was early summer weather, and the breezes were soft and balmy, and full of the odor of growing things. So when the heat of the day was come the King ordained that a pavilion should be erected at a certain spot that pleased him very well, and he and the Queen and their courts sat in that pavilion at a fair feast which the attendants of the court had prepared for them.

There cometh a damsel to the King's pavilion.

Now whilst they so sat, there came of a sudden a bustle and a sound of several voices talking without, and anon there came into the pavilion a damsel very fair of face and with curling yellow hair. And the damsel was clad in garments of yellow silk and she wore a frontlet of gold upon her head, and she wore shoes of variegated leather with latchets of gold upon her feet. And she was further adorned with necklaces of gold and with armlets of gold, wherefore they who sat there were astonished at the beauty of the damsel and at the suddenness of her coming.

(Now you are to know that maiden was the damsel Elose, and yet Sir Ewaine knew her not because of the ring of forgetfulness which he wore.)

Then King Arthur arose where he sat, and he said: "Fair demoiselle, whence come you and what would you here? Tell us, I pray, who are you who cometh hither like to a fair vision from a dream."

Yet ever the damsel stood within the door of the pavilion, and because of the dazzling brightness of the sunlight whence she had come she could not at first see very well within the shadow of the tent. So she said, "I pray you tell me, is Sir Ewaine at this place?"

To that King Arthur, much wondering, said, "Yea, lady, yonder he sits," and thereupon the damsel Elose beheld Sir Ewaine where he was.[241]

The damsel Elose accuseth Sir Ewaine of treason.

Then Elose entered farther into the pavilion and came to where Sir Ewaine sat. Her eyes shone very bright with anger, and she said: "Sir Ewaine, I denounce thee as a false knight and a traitor!"

Then Sir Ewaine looked upon the damsel with great astonishment, and said, "Who art thou, lady, who dost accuse me of being false?"

Upon that the damsel cried out in a very shrill voice, "Thou knowest very well who I am!"

But ever Sir Ewaine looked very steadily at her and almost he remembered her, but he could not quite remember her because of that ring which he wore. Wherefore he said, "Nay, I know thee not."

Then Elose smiled upon Sir Ewaine very bitterly, and she said: "Thou didst not forget me when thou didst lay in peril of thy life in the Castle of the Fountain; but now that thou art enjoying thyself with thy fellows, it pleases thee to forget so poor an one as I, who preserved thy life for thee. But that I could forgive thee if the need were to forgive it; yet I cannot forgive thee that thou hast also forgotten that dear lady, my mistress, unto whom thou didst pledge thy faith, and unto whom thou art bound in fealty. Messire, thou hast a very short memory."

Then Sir Ewaine cried out in an exceedingly bitter voice like one in great pain: "Lady, why say ye these things to me? I know you not."

Then Elose came very close to Sir Ewaine and she took his hand, and she said, "Do you not know me now?" He said, "Nay, I know thee not." Upon that the damsel raised her right hand with her glove in it, and she smote Sir Ewaine upon the face with the glove so that the mark of her glove lay upon his cheek. And Sir Ewaine made no defence against her assault, but ever he gazed very steadfastly at her, and he said very bitterly: "Lady, if thou wert a knight, thou wouldst not dare to do that to me, for either thou wouldst pay for that blow with thy life, or else I would wipe out the disgrace thereof with mine own blood."

But Elose laughed, and she went out from that pavilion and mounted her horse and rode away, leaving Sir Ewaine with his head bowed full low upon his breast as though he had been struck a mortal blow.

Then after the damsel had gone, King Arthur said, "Ewaine, who was that lady?" And at that Sir Ewaine lifted his head and cried out with great vehemence: "Sire, I know her not; nor can I remember that I have ever seen her before."

At that King Arthur was silent and all those who were there looked[242] askance at Sir Ewaine and whispered together concerning those things that had happened. And Sir Ewaine was aware of how they regarded him and how they whispered together, yet he

heeded them not, but ever sat with his head bowed low with shame and humiliation. And ever he strove to remember who that damsel was, but could not remember.

The King's court is adoubt concerning Sir Ewaine.

So after that time there was much talk amongst those at the court concerning that which had befallen in the King's pavilion. And many of them said to one another: "How is it possible for a knight of honor and of repute thus to forget one who had saved his life? And if he did indeed remember her, what of honor hath he who would deny her before those who know him?"

So those of the court spake together, and Sir Ewaine was aware that they regarded him with disfavor and he was hurt to the quick by that knowledge. So one day he came to King Arthur where he was, and he said: "Lord, I am aware that I am held in disrepute in this court. Now I crave thy leave to depart from hence at least for a season." And King Arthur said: "Messire, I will not deny that many things displeasing to me are said concerning thee. So if it be that thou art of a mind to quit us for a while until thou art able to approve thy truth and thy honor, and until thou hast disproved these things which thy calumniators say against thee, thou hast my fair leave to depart according to thy request."

Sir Ewaine departeth from the court.

So Sir Ewaine took his departure from court, and his heart was filled with bitterness and anger toward those who were one time his friends. For he ever said to himself: "Why is it that they should contemn me because I cannot remember that which I have forgot? For I cannot remember me of that damsel."

Thus he rode upon his way in great bitterness of spirit and with anger toward all the world, because that all the world appeared to be set against him.

Now Sir Ewaine journeyed for a long time he knew not whither, for he travelled somewhiles like to one in a dream.

Sir Ewaine cometh to a lonely hut.

So it befell one day that he came to a thick woodland of great extent, and there night overtook him and he wist not where he was nor how he should be able to come out of that wilderness. And whilst he was travelling thus in darkness and perplexity, he was suddenly aware of a light shining at a distance, and he followed that light until he came to a rude hut of the forest, which same stood in an open glade of no very great

ex[243]tent. To this forest habitation came Sir Ewaine, and he smote upon the door thereof with the butt of his spear and anon came one and opened the door, and that one was an ancient and grisly beldame of a most repulsive and forbidding appearance. When she beheld Sir Ewaine before her at the door of the hut she would have shut the door again, but he would not let her do so, but thrust his spear into the opening of the door so that she could not close it.

Then that beldame, finding that he would not be denied, spake to him very harshly, saying, "What would you here, Sir Knight?" Sir Ewaine said, "I would have lodging for the night."

Then the hag laughed very loud and shrill, and she said: "Well, since thou wilt not be denied, thou shalt have thy desire. Enter, and may thy lodging be for long."

So Sir Ewaine dismounted from his horse, and turned it loose to graze upon the grass by night. Meantime he himself entered the hut.

Here he beheld a great fire burning, with loud roaring in the chimney, and over the fire he beheld a great cauldron, in which was seething a stew of venison, the flavor of which filled the hut with a very savory odor. And Sir Ewaine beheld a great table, whereon were many platters of wood, and beholding these things spread as for a feast, he said, "Good dame, I pray thee tell me who dwells here in this hut with thee?" The beldame said, "My husband and my sons dwell here with me." Sir Ewaine said, "Certes, thou hast a great family." And at that the beldame laughed very violently and said, "Yea, that is true."

After that the hag ladled forth a mess of the stew into a wooden bowl, and she poured forth a great flagon of strong ale and she set these things upon the board with a hunch of black bread, and Sir Ewaine sat him down and ate and drank with great appetite. Then, after he had thus satisfied his hunger and his thirst he was very drowsy, wherefore he laid aside his armor and stretched himself upon a wooden bench that stood to one side and placed his helmet beneath his head and presently was enwrapped in a sound sleep.

The thieves return to the hut.

Now that hut was a den of thieves and that old hag was their housekeeper and there were twenty and seven in all of those thieves. So about the middle watch of the night that band of robbers returned with a considerable booty which they had seized from a party of townsfolk who were traversing a part of the forest that was not very far distant from that place. These beholding Sir Ewaine where he was sleeping, withdrew a little to one side and whispered together. And they whispered to the old beldame, saying,

"Who is yon[244]der man, and what doth he here?" She said: "He is an errant knight, who demanded housing awhile since. So here he lieth now asleep and at your mercy to dispose of as you see fit."

Then the captain of the thieves came softly to where Sir Ewaine lay, and he looked closely at him and he beheld the rich chain of gold about his neck and he beheld the ring upon his finger that the Lady Vivien had given him. After that he withdrew a little and whispered to his fellow: "Here is a rich booty upon this sleeping knight. Now fetch hither cords and let us bind him. After that we may rob him at our ease, and after that again we may either slay him or else keep him here for a great ransom."

The thieves bind Sir Ewaine.

So some of the thieves brought a strong cord and they made a noose thereof, and first they privily took away all Sir Ewaine's weapons from him, and then they slipped the noose over his arms and in a trice and ere he was fully awake they had bound him several times about the body so that as to his hands and arms he was altogether helpless.

Thus Sir Ewaine was rudely awakened to find himself a captive in that place.

But when he saw who it was had made him captive, he assumed all the majesty of his high estate and he said: "Know ye what ye do? Wit ye that he whom you have thus bound is a king's son and a knight of the Round Table so that you have through me committed a very grievous offence."

Then several of those thieves were abashed at his words and at the great nobility of his bearing, but the captain of the band who was a hardened wretch, spake very boldly, saying: "It matters not who you are, only if you be truly a king's son and a knight of such worship, then will your ransom be all the greater." And he said: "First of all we will take this rich golden bawble from about your neck, and then we will take the fair golden ring from off your finger."

The thieves rob Sir Ewaine of the ring of forgetfulness.

So the chief robber first took the chain from about Sir Ewaine's neck, as he said, and then he drew the ring from his finger, and because Sir Ewaine was bound he could in no wise prevent the robber chief from taking those jewels from him in that way.

Sir Ewaine remembereth all.

But lo! when the robber had plucked the ring from the finger of Sir Ewaine, then in an instant the magic of forgetfulness departed from him, and he remembered upon that

instant all that had befallen him in the Valley of the Fountain. And he remembered the Lady Lesolie of the[245] Fountain, and he remembered him of all the vows of faith he had plighted to her. And he knew now of why Elose had come to him at the King's court and had struck him in the face before them all; for he wist that the damsel had come because she thought he had proved himself unfaithful and false to her lady. So it was as though a sword of remembrance had been struck through the heart of Sir Ewaine, wherefore he cried out in a loud and piercing voice, "Betrayed! Betrayed! Betrayed!" saying that word three times over. And the thieves wist not what he meant by those words, but thought that he meant that he had been betrayed by the beldame, not knowing that he meant that he had been betrayed by the Lady Vivien.

Then of a sudden in the fury of that remembrance of his own dishonor, it was as though the strength of ten descended upon Sir Ewaine. Wherefore, putting forth all his strength, he strained at his bonds so that they cut into his flesh. And he strained even more and more violently at his bonds until, of a sudden, they were burst and immediately he was free.

Sir Ewaine doeth battle with the thieves.

After that Sir Ewaine looked about him, but could find no weapon to his hand, wherefore he caught up the solid wooden bench whereon he had been lying awhile since. And he whirled that bench about his head and he smote with it upon the right hand and the left and he smote the thieves down upon the one side and the other. And so great was his fury that they bore back from before him in terror of his madness.

Sir Ewaine is wounded.

So Sir Ewaine might have slain all those thieves (though there were a score and seven of them in all) only for the captain of the band. He, beholding the fury of Sir Ewaine, ran to where there was a javelin that stood in a corner of that place. And he caught up the javelin and threw it at Sir Ewaine; and the javelin pierced through the shoulder of Sir Ewaine and pinned him fast to the wall of the hut.

Then Sir Ewaine wist that he was very sorely wounded, wherefore he roared aloud. And he strove with the javelin and anon he wrenched himself loose from the wall to which he had been pinned. Then he rushed at the thieves with the javelin still pinned through his shoulder and they made way before the terror of his onset.

Now as the robbers parted from before his onset, Sir Ewaine perceived that there was a way for him to the door. Thereupon he cast himself upon the door and he burst it open and fled away into the forest with the javelin still transfixing in his shoulder.[246]

Sir Ewaine escapeth.

Therewith, perceiving that their captive was escaping from them, the thieves rushed after Sir Ewaine and pursued him with great outcry. But ever they were afraid of the violence of his anger (for he had slain or broken the bones of eleven of them) wherefore they followed him not with as good a will as they would else have done. Hence it befell that Sir Ewaine made his escape from them and so got safe away into the cover of the night and of the forest, though sorely and woefully wounded.

After he had thus escaped from that danger, Sir Ewaine knew not what to do. For he was faint and bedizzied because of his wound and the agony thereof. But he wist that he must free himself from that javelin, wherefore he caught the haft of the weapon and he broke it in twain. After that he plucked out the javelin by the point which had transfixd his shoulder and with that a great issue of blood burst forth from the wound so that Sir Ewaine was nigh to swooning therewith.

But he did not swoon, but bare up under the passion of pain that lay upon him and from the issue of blood that followed what he had done. Wherefore, after he had rested him for a while, he went forward through the forest, tottering like a drunken man, now and then falling, and ever anon arising again and betaking his way he knew not whither.



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Damsel bringeth aid unto Sir Ewaine:



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Chapter Fifth

How Sir Ewaine was succored and brought back to life by a certain noble lady, how he brought aid to that lady in a time of great trouble, and how he returned once again to the Lady Lesolie of the Fountain.

Thus Sir Ewaine wandered for all that night he knew not whither, and sometimes he fell and anon he would arise and go onward again. So against the dawn of day, he began to approach the outskirts of the forest and there, as he wandered painfully onward, he met a fagot-maker who had a cart and who was coming, all early in the morning, into the forest to chop fagots.

This fellow, beholding that figure of misery with a face like to wax and a body all covered with blood, wist not whether it was ghost or mortal man whom he beheld, wherefore he fell to crossing himself and pattering prayers for fear. But Sir Ewaine spake, though in a very weak and plaintive voice, saying: "Alas, good fellow! I pray you, for the sake of God's mercy to take pity upon me and to bear me hence in your cart to where I may secure aid and succor, else I must assuredly die all alone in the forest."

Then the woodchopper was aware that Sir Ewaine was no ghost or spirit left behind by the night, but that he was mortal man, and when he looked upon that sad woeful figure, he was moved to great pity, and said: "Alas, poor mortal, thou art in a sad plight indeed and so I will be glad to aid thee as thou desirest."

The woodchopper giveth aid to Sir Ewaine.

So after that the fagot-maker spread a soft thick bed of leaves in his cart and laid the wounded knight thereon. And so he bore Sir Ewaine out of the forest, with intent to take him to some place where he might be cherished with care and attention.

Thus it was that a poor woodchopper of the forest lent aid and assistance to one of the most noble knights of the Round Table and nephew to King Arthur. As for that fellow, he wist not who it was to whom he was giving aid, but only thought that it was some poor wretch[250] who had fallen amongst thieves, for Sir Ewaine had neither armor nor weapons of any sort that might indicate how exalted was his estate, and even his golden chain of knighthood had been stolen from him by those thieves of the forest. Wherefore it was not possible for any one to know that he was other than a poor wayfarer of the forest. So the fagot-maker, unknowing who he was, bare that good knight out of the forest, and Sir Ewaine lay fainting, and all covered with blood and nigh to death, upon a bed of leaves in a poor woodchopper's cart.

Now when the fagot-maker had brought the wounded knight out of the woodlands and into the open country, he turned to find how it fared with him, for it seemed to the honest fellow that his burden was lying wonderful still and quiet. So the fagot-maker

called out, "Friend, what cheer have you?" To this Sir Ewaine answered him not, for in the meantime as they travelled onward he had fallen into a swoon and now he lay like one who was dying or was dead.

Then the woodchopper came and looked upon the face of Sir Ewaine, and he beheld that it was white like to death. And he could not see that Sir Ewaine breathed, wherefore he thought that the wounded man was dead.

Thereat the poor knave was filled with great fear, for he said to himself: "Of a surety if they find me thus with a dead man lying in my cart, they will believe that I have committed a murder and they will hale me before the judge and they will hang me." Wherefore, reasoning in that wise, he began to cast about him how he might rid himself of that which was within his cart so that he should not thus be found in company with a dead man.

The woodchopper layeth Sir Ewaine beside a lake.

Now at that time the cart chanced to be passing through a park coadjacent to a castle, the towers and the roofs and the chimneys of which might be seen through the leaves of the intervening trees. And at that place there was a little lake of water with many flags and sweet rushes growing around about the margin thereof, and this was a very secret, quiet place, for no one was nigh at that still early hour of day.

So here perceiving that no one could see what he would do, the fagot-maker stopped his cart and lifted Sir Ewaine out thereof and still he thought that the wounded man was dead. After that the woodchopper laid Sir Ewaine down very gently upon a soft bed of moss under the shadow of an oak tree and beside the margin of the lake. Having thus got rid of his burden in that wise he then went away and left the wounded knight lying alone in that place.

The lady of the castle perceiveth Sir Ewaine.

Now that part of the park where Sir Ewaine lay was a very favorite[251] spot of the lady of the castle, who was wont to take the air and to walk with her court of damsels beside the lake. So it befell that morning, it being a very pleasant and cheerful day, that she walked thither with those maidens in attendance upon her. So coming to that place, she perceived from afar where Sir Ewaine lay beneath the oak tree in the centre of the park. And when she saw him she said, "Who is yonder man and what does he do here?"

Then one of the damsels went more near to where Sir Ewaine lay, and she looked closely upon him and anon she said: "Lady, I believe this man is dead, for he is all covered with blood, and I do not see him move or breathe."

The lady said, "See if that be so," and therewith the damsel went closer to Sir Ewaine and reached forth and she laid her hand upon his bosom. Then she was aware that his heart beat, but only a little, and she knew that there was life in him. So she said: "Nay, he is not dead, but in a swoon that is like to death."

Then the lady came and also looked upon Sir Ewaine, and she was moved with pity to behold that great and noble frame of a man lying there in that way. Wherefore she said, "I am of a mind to save this man."

So after that she and her court retired to her castle, and when she was come there she took a very precious casket of ointment from a cabinet and gave it to that damsel who had touched Sir Ewaine. To her she said: "Take this ointment, damsel, to where that man lieth in a swoon. For wit you, this is a very potent oil to heal all manner of sickness and weakness even if one be upon the edge of death. Pour a little of this ointment upon the bosom of that man above his heart. Then rub it well with thy hand, and by and by he will revive. Take thou also yonder horse and some decent raiment fit for such a well-appearing man to wear, and let the horse be nigh to him when he awakens. Then do thou observe him from secret place, and bring me word of what he doeth."

A damsel of the castle bringeth succor to Sir Ewaine.

So the damsel did all as the lady had commanded her to do; she took the horse, and the raiment and the precious balm and went to where Sir Ewaine lay in that deathly swoon. But when she came to anoint him with the ointment, she poured not a little upon him, nor did she rub with her hand the bosom of him who lay there; otherwise she poured the whole of the balm upon Sir Ewaine's bosom, and then she went away to a little distance and hid herself to observe what he would do.

So in a little she saw that the wounded man began to bestir himself and move his arms this way and that. Anon he uplifted himself from where he lay and gazed all about him, and so, being revived, remembered all that^[252] he had aforetime forgotten. Then he groaned with great travail of soul, for the memory of his dishonor came upon him and he still suffered a grievous pain from that sore wound in his shoulder. Then anon he beheld the horse near by and the garments that were beside the horse, and he thought that maybe those things had been placed there for his use, though who had been so kind to him he knew not. So he arose with great pain and he

took the clothes from the horse and he went to the lake and bathed himself. After that he put on the clothes and mounted upon the horse with intent to depart from that place.

Then the maiden, who had beheld all that he did, came forth from the thicket where she had been hidden and whence she had observed him, and when Sir Ewaine saw her he said, "Maiden, was it thou who purveyed me with this horse and with these garments?" She said, "Nay, it was the lady to whom this place belongs." Sir Ewaine said, "Who is that lady?" And the maiden replied: "She is the widow of a very powerful lord, and she hath saved thy life this day. For she sent me with an ointment with which I bathed thee, and which gave thee strength to arise again. And she sent thee that horse and those clothes which thou hast put on." Sir Ewaine said: "Certes, she is most kind and charitable in her heart. Perhaps some time I may do her a service that will be equal to this service which she hath rendered to me."

Now the maiden did not suspect who it was with whom she spake, for his face was white like milk, and very haggard and wild with pain and weakness, so that his countenance showed none of that nobility that belonged to him. And, as aforesaid, he had no armor, for the thieves had taken away his armor and he had left it behind him in the hut whence he had escaped. So the maiden had no cause to think that he was one of great worship whom she beheld, so she said: "Good fellow, my lady hath need enough of aid, but I do not believe that thou art one who may help her in her trouble."

"Why dost thou think that?" quoth Sir Ewaine. "Thou shouldst not judge of my ability from what thou seest, for I may be other than what I appear to be."

Sir Ewaine declareth himself to the maiden.

Then the damsel was greatly astonished at the dignity of manner with which he spoke, for he spoke as one having authority and very calmly and haughtily. So she began to misdoubt that this was some one else than she had first thought him to be, wherefore she said, "I pray you, Sir, tell me who you are?" To the which he replied: "I am Sir Ewaine of King Arthur's court and of his Round Table, son to King Uriens of Gore and of the Lady Queen Morgana surnamed le Fay." [253]

At this proclamation the damsel was greatly astonished, wherefore she cried out aloud: "Is it indeed possible that this is so, and that so famous and so remarkable a knight should have come to such a pass as that in which you were found?" and the damsel said: "Now the lady of this castle will be very highly honored when she comes to know that she hath lent succor to so noble and haughty a champion as you

proclaim yourself to be. Let us go to her so that you may tell her the story of your misfortunes." And Sir Ewaine said: "So be it, and let us go."

So they both departed from that place and as they wended their way thence Sir Ewaine said: "Now tell me, damsel, what is the need of help that thy lady hath and concerning which thou didst speak to me anon?"

The damsel telleth Sir Ewaine concerning the lady of the castle.

The damsel said: "I will tell thee. The lady of this castle is a widow, and at the death of her husband she had two very noble castles and two great estates belonging to those castles. Those castles and that land her lord bequeathed to her to have and to hold for her own. Now after she was thus left a widow, it befell that a certain very proud and haughty lord who was her neighbor, desired to make her his wife; but she would not listen to his suit, having great love for that worthy knight her husband who was dead. So she refused the knight who desired to wed her and at that he was very angry. After that he came with a great array of armed men, and he despoiled her of one of her estates by force. And now, unless she should yield to him, he threatens to take away this other estate whereon she dwelleth and which is all that she hath in the world.

"So my lady is in a great pass and knoweth not what to do, having no knight for to defend her; for all those who should defend her, fall away from her in this time of trouble for fear of the anger of that lord who seeks her hand."

"Certes, this is a sad story which thou tellest me," said Sir Ewaine, "and indeed I will do what I may to help thy lady, who hath been so kind to me."

Thus talking together, they two approached the castle, and the lady of the castle, beholding them coming from a distance, was greatly surprised to see the damsel conversing in that wise with the wounded man whom she had been sent to succor.

Then when they were come to her the lady said to the damsel, "Didst thou use that balm as I told thee to do?" And the damsel said, "Yea." The lady said, "How much didst thou use thereof?" And the damsel said, "I used it all."

The lady of the castle is affronted at the maiden.

Then the lady when she heard how that the damsel had poured all of[254] that balm at one time upon Sir Ewaine, was much affronted and very angry with her, and she said: "What is this that thou hast done? I cannot easily forgive thee this, for thou hast wasted several score pounds worth of the precious ointment upon a stranger whom we know not and who hath no appearance of worship."

Unto her the maiden made reply: "Lady, be not offended at this, for wit you that this stranger is of far greater worth than all the balm you could pour upon him."

At these words the lady was much surprised, wherefore she said, "Who is he that is of such great worth as thou sayst?" and the damsel replied: "Lady, this is none other than Sir Ewaine, Knight of the Round Table and nephew of King Arthur."

The lady giveth welcome to Sir Ewaine.

Then the lady of the castle cried out with astonishment and said, "Is this true that I hear?" And Sir Ewaine said, "Yea, Lady." Then the lady of the castle came to Sir Ewaine and took him by the hand, and said: "Welcome, welcome, Sir Ewaine! Now this is a great honor that hath befallen us at this place to have given aid and succor to a knight so famous in chivalry as thou art."

"Lady," quoth Sir Ewaine, "you do me honor beyond my worth, and so you put me under still greater obligations than I rested under afore this. Now I am most desirous of repaying you in some measure for all the kindness that you have visited upon me, wherefore, if it be sooth as I have been informed by this maiden that you have need of such a knight-champion at this place, then do I offer myself as such a champion, trusting that I may be of aid to you and so repay to you in some measure those favors which you have bestowed upon me."

At this the lady was rejoiced beyond all measure, and she said: "Messire, I accept thy offer of championship with all gratitude and with much pride, for indeed I believe it would not be possible to find in all of the world a champion as haughty and as puissant as thou art."

So it came about that Sir Ewaine abided at the castle of that widowed chatelaine for a long time, and until he was altogether healed of his wound. And every day he grew more strong and sturdy of body and more noble of appearance, so that all they of the castle took great pride in having him there as their champion.

Now it befell upon a day that there came to this castle that evil-minded lord of whom the damsel had spoken to Sir Ewaine, and this lord brought with him six other knights, and all these seven knights pitched their pavilions before the castle gates. And they mocked at those in the castle^[255] and dared any one to come forth therefrom, for they knew not, as you may believe, that Sir Ewaine was there as the champion of the castle.

So when Sir Ewaine heard how that knight mocked at the people of the castle, he was very wroth, wherefore he quickly made him ready, and donned a suit of rich armor that

the lady had provided for him. And he mounted upon his horse, and so being in all wise prepared, he gave command to uplift the portcullis and to let fall the drawbridge. Then he rode forth from the castle, his horse's hoofs smiting the planks of the drawbridge with a noise like to thunder as he rode. And all of the people of the castle crowded out upon the walls, and when they beheld him ride past in that wise, they shouted with a loud voice because that such a champion was to defend the rights of their lady chatelaine.

Sir Ewaine doeth battle for the lady of the castle.

But when the knight and his companions who had come against the lady of the castle beheld that one champion ride forth in defence thereof, he was greatly surprised, and wist not what to think. So presently he rode forward to meet Sir Ewaine, and he said to him, "Sir, what knight art thou?" Sir Ewaine said: "I am the champion of the lady of this castle, and I come forth with intent to do battle in her behalf." Then that lord said, "What is thy estate?" To the which, Sir Ewaine, speaking with great pride and haughtiness, made reply: "It matters not that I tell thee at this present, but I may assure thee of this, that mine is a higher estate and a greater credit than thine own." Then the knight said, "Wouldst thou fight against us who are seven?" And Sir Ewaine said, "Yea, verily." And the knight said, "Thou art very foolish, but be it so."

So Sir Ewaine withdrew himself a little, and made himself ready in all wise for battle. Meantime that knight who had bespoken him withdrew to his party and he said to a knight who was the champion of his party, "Go thou forth against yon fellow." And the champion of that party did so.

Now that knight was the greatest and most powerful knight in all the country in which he dwelt. And he was very huge of girth and thick of limb, and so great had been his success at arms that he made sure that he could easily be able to overthrow his opponent. Wherefore he made him ready very proudly and took his station with great confidence. And when he was in all wise prepared, he shouted aloud and launched his horse against the horse of Sir Ewaine with full expectation that he would overthrow his enemy.

So they two rushed together like thunder and so met in the very middle of the course with such a crash of encounter that those who heard it stood appalled at the sound. But in that encounter the spear of the champion of that wicked lord's party broke all into splinters, but the spear of Sir[256] Ewaine held so that the other was cast to earth with such force that he lay stunned and altogether devoid of life and motion.

How Sir Ewaine overthrew the enemies of the lady.

Then when the other knights of that party beheld how their champion had been overthrown so violently to earth, all they were greatly amazed at the result of that encounter; for as was said, there was no knight in all of that region who was so strong as that champion. Then they were filled with rage, and dropping their lances in rest, they all rushed upon Sir Ewaine together, with intent to overthrow him by force of numbers and might of metal, and afterward to slay him when he was unhorsed. But Sir Ewaine did not give them their will, but wheeled his horse with great address and dexterity and in such a wise as to separate those who thus came upon him in a body. Then suddenly he wheeled about again, and ere they were prepared for attack, he smote down one knight and then another and another, so that only three of those who assailed him were left. With that the others were filled with a great terror of the woeful buffets that Sir Ewaine struck, wherefore, without further combat, they all three turned and fled. But ever Sir Ewaine pursued them with great fury and he came nigh to one who was fleeing and smote him down from his horse. And he came nigh to another and smote him down also. Then last of all he overtook that lord who was the enemy of that lady, and he smote him so sorely with his sword that he would have fallen from his horse had not Sir Ewaine caught him ere he fell. Then Sir Ewaine plucked that knight out of his saddle and he laid him across the bow of his own saddle. So after having overthrown all those seven knights in that wise, he rode back again into the castle bearing that wicked lord lying across his saddle bow.

Now when those who stood upon the castle walls beheld what wonderful battle their champion did, they were amazed beyond measure at his prowess and they shouted aloud for joy at the victory of their champion over their enemies. So Sir Ewaine rode into the castle, in the midst of all that shouting and loud acclaim. And he came to where the lady was standing in a balcony that overlooked the courtyard of the castle, and he looked up to where she stood and he said: "Lady, lo! I have brought you back your enemy in payment for that blessed balm with which you brought me back to life."

The lady of the castle giveth praise to Sir Ewaine.

Then the lady of the castle knew not what to do for joy. Wherefore she came down from where she was and caught Sir Ewaine by the hand and kissed it repeatedly. And she called upon Sir Ewaine as her savior, but Sir Ewaine withdrew his hand in great confusion, and said: "Lady, do not do so, for wit you^[257] I am a man who hath done a dishonorable thing. And though I did that ill thing unwittingly, yet I am attainted because of that which I did."

Then the lady said: "Sir, I will not believe that you were ever dishonorable, and I would that you would remain always in this castle."

Then Sir Ewaine smiled and said: "I thank you for that wish. But it may not be, for now that I have done my service in your behalf and have brought your enemy to you to deal with at your pleasure, to-morrow I must depart upon my way once more."

Then Sir Ewaine delivered the captive knight from the pommel of his saddle into the hands of the lady, and afterward that wicked knight was bound with many securities and hostages to good behavior, and so he tormented that lady no more from that time forth unto the end of her life.

Sir Ewaine departeth from the castle as a pilgrim.

Now when the next day was come Sir Ewaine appeared before the lady of the castle and besought her that she would take back the armor she had given him and that in place of that armor she would purvey him the dress of a pilgrim. So that lady did as she was asked, and when she had done so Sir Ewaine clad himself as a pilgrim and departed from the castle of that chatelaine.

And Sir Ewaine wandered hither and thither as a pilgrim for several weeks; and after much journeying he came at last to that valley where dwelt the Lady of the Fountain. For ever his will led him thitherward, and so it came about that at last he beheld that town and castle once more. And when he beheld that place and when he brought to mind all that had befallen him of good and of ill thereat the tears arose into his eyes so that all things that he beheld swam as in a flood of water.

Sir Ewaine returneth to the Castle of the Fountain.

Then by and by he went toward that Castle of the Fountain and when he had come thereunto, he knocked upon the postern door and besought those who opened to him that he might have speech with the lady of the castle. So anon he was shown into the apartment where the lady was, and Elose was with her, and several others of the damsels of her court.

Now the hood of the cloak that Sir Ewaine wore, and the pilgrim's hat, so concealed his face that no one who was there knew who he was. Wherefore the Lady Lesolie, speaking as to a stranger, said, "Sir, what wouldst thou have of me?" And Sir Ewaine answered saying: "Lady, I come hither to bear to you a message from one who has unwittingly done you a great injury."

Upon this the lady cried out very vehemently: "Sir, if you come from that recreant knight, Sir Ewaine, then you may return unto him again[258] who hath sent you hither." To which Sir Ewaine said, "Lady, I cannot return unto him, for it would be impossible."

At these words the Lady Lesolie's countenance fell, and for a while she spake not. Then after a while she said, "Dost thou bring ill news of him?" And Sir Ewaine said: "I know not whether the news be ill unto thee or not, but some while ago I beheld that unfortunate knight where he lay dying in a park beside a lake of water."

Then the Lady of the Fountain pressed her handkerchief to her lips as though to check an outcry, and after a little while she said, "Good Sir, tell me what you know." Sir Ewaine said, "I will do so." And he said: "You are to know that when Sir Ewaine left this court to return to the court of King Arthur, he fell in with the Enchantress Vivien, who gave him a ring of forgetfulness so that he disremembered all that had happened to him at your court. Afterward there came a young damsel from this place who put him to shame before all those who were his companions at the court of King Arthur. This that damsel did because she thought that Sir Ewaine was unfaithful to you. But he was not unfaithful and so he was shamed for no good reason. Now after being thus shamed before all the court of King Arthur in that wise, this woeful knight departed from his friends because he could not bear to dwell in his humiliation before them. So he left all those his friends and journeyed afar, and in his journeyings he fell among thieves, and these finding him unarmed, bound him whilst he slept, and robbed him and wounded him to death. So it was that I beheld him lying by the wayside, pierced through with a javelin and dying of that wound, and so have I come thither to tell you of this story."

Now when the Lady of the Fountain heard what that pilgrim had to say, she shrieked with great violence and immediately swooned away and fell upon the ground.

Then several of her maidens ran to her and these served her until by and by she revived from her swoon. Yet when she was thus recovered she straightway fell to smiting her hands together and crying aloud in a very bitter agony of spirit: "Woe is me that I should have disbelieved in the honor of that noble and worthy knight, for now because of my disbelief in him I perceive that I have lost him forever. For so hath died the best and truest knight that ever lived in all of the world." Saying this, she fell to weeping in great measure, and Elose strove to comfort her, also weeping, but the lady would not be comforted. Then Sir Ewaine said, "Lady, hast thou yet such a kind regard for the knight as this?" And the Lady Lesolie said with great passion: "Yea, truly, and so I al[259]ways shall have, for methinks that never such another knight as he lived in this world."

Sir Ewaine declareth himself to the Lady of the Fountain.

Then Sir Ewaine said: "Lady, you understood not my words. Sir Ewaine is not dead, and if you will you may easily have him here again." She said, "How know you that?"

Then Sir Ewaine cast off his hood and laid aside his hat and said: "Lady, I am that man; and if I have deceived thee in this, it is that I may again behold thy face that is so dear to me—yea, that is dearer than all the world besides." So saying, Sir Ewaine kneeled before the lady and embraced her about the knees, and she stooped and embraced his head and both of them wept with a great passion of love and joy. And so they were reconciled to one another.

And in that reconciliation there was much rejoicing, for all the town was bedraped with silken scarves and banners by day and illuminated by night because of joy for the return of the champion-defender of the Fountain. And there was feasting and drinking at the castle of the Fountain, and there was jousting from day to day for seven days, and in those joustings the knights of the court of the Fountain under the lead of Sir Ewaine defended their chivalry with such skill and valor that none of those that came against them were able to withstand them, but all those companies of knights-contestant were defeated, to the great glory of the Lady Lesolie of the Fountain.

Then after seven days of this rejoicing, Sir Ewaine was wedded with great pomp of circumstance to the Lady of the Fountain. And of that wedding it is to be recorded in the history of these things that Sir Ewaine and the Lady Lesolie rode to the minster upon milk-white horses, and that they were all clad in white samite embroidered with silver and inset with so many precious stones of all sorts and kinds that they glistened in the sunlight as though they were two figures of living fire. And it is recorded that tenscore damsels of wonderful beauty, clad all in white, preceded them upon the way, and spread the way with flowers, chaunting the while in voices of great rejoicing.

Thus Sir Ewaine was wedded at the castle of the Fountain, and after that he dwelt in the land of the Fountain with great peace and good content.

And Sir Ewaine ever defended the Fountain as he had aforetime, so that the fame of the Knight of the Fountain was known throughout the length and breadth of the land and in every court of chivalry. And many knights undertook the Adventure of the Fountain but in every case such errant knights were overthrown by the valor and the skill of the Knight of[260] the Fountain. And in every case where that knight adventurer was thus overthrown, the Knight of the Fountain would take from him his horse and his shield and would send him away upon foot, disarmed and ashamed.

So, because of the valor of the Knight of the Fountain, it came about in course of time that a very noble and worthy court of chivalry became established at the castle of the city of the Fountain, insomuch that the renown of that court of the Fountain hath been handed down in the histories of chivalry even to this day, when knighthood no longer dwelleth upon the earth.

Such is the history of Sir Ewaine when he undertook the Adventure of the Fountain whilst upon the quest of Sir Launcelot. And now if you choose to read further you shall hear how Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore found Sir Launcelot in the Island of Joy and of how Sir Launcelot returned to his friends once more.



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PART VI

The Return of Sir Launcelot

Here followeth the further history of Sir Launcelot of the Lake; of how Sir Percival and Sir Ector de Maris found Sir Launcelot where he was dwelling very peacefully and happily (albeit not with perfect content) in the Island of Joy, of which you have heard mention in that which hath gone before; of the notable affair-at-arms betwixt Sir Launcelot and Sir Percival, and of how Sir Launcelot, with Elaine the Fair, returned with Sir Percival and Sir Ector de Maris to the court of King Arthur. Likewise you shall there read of what befell that noble company in the Valley of the Fountain aforetold of.

All this history is of such a sort that it hath given me great pleasure to write it; wherefore if so be it may give you a like sort of pleasure to read it, then shall I be very well content with that which I have done in my endeavor to set forth these several events aforesaid.

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Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival
receive their Mother's Blessing:





Chapter First

How Sir Percival met his brother, and how they two journeyed to the priory where their mother dwelt and what befell them thereafter.

Now return we to Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore whom Sir Ewaine left (as aforetold of) still sleeping in that castle whence we departed so early in the morning—even before the break of day—to undertake the Adventure of the Fountain.

Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore depart together.

When those two good knights awoke and founds that Sir Ewaine had departed, they communed together in the bedchamber of Sir Percival. And they agreed that thereafter they two should join company and that in their further search for Sir Launcelot they should travel together as companions. So when they had broken their fast, they bade farewell to the lord of the castle, and departed upon their way, travelling very cheerfully together, side by side, and taking great joy in the gay and jocund weather, and in all the sweet freshness and the warmth of the springtide that embalmed them around about.

So they travelled as companions in arms for more than a year, and in that time they met with several bel-adventures, some of which are told of in books of chivalry and some of which are not told of. And I would that[264] I could recount those adventures that befell them, but I cannot, for it would take another book as great as this to tell all of the things that happened to them in their journeyings. Yet it shall here be said that in those adventurings they fell in with a great many sorts of folk of different condition, both gentle and simple, and that several times they met certain knights-companion of

the Round Table. And it shall here be said that they met in that wise with Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors de Ganis, concerning which meeting there shall be more said anon.

Of the manner in which they journey.

And if you would ask how they lodged them during their travels I would say that they lodged them in divers sorts and ways. For if it happened that at one time they would lodge them in such a noble castle as that where Sir Gawaine and Sir Percival met Sir Sagamore, then it would happen at another time that they would find shelter in the hut of some lonely shepherd upon the moorlands, and then it would happen at still another time that they would even have no shelter at all, but would maybe wrap themselves each in his cloak with nothing beneath him for a bed but the cold honest earth, and nothing above him for a coverlet but the silent company of God's own sky, all sprinkled over with a countless multitude of brightly shining stars. For so those good knights of old travelled errant in those days, taking whatever befell them in good part, and accepting all that came to them with a cheerful spirit.

If you would ask me in what sort of weather they travelled, I would tell you that they were content with whatsoever weather God sent to them; for if the weather were pleasant, as upon that first day of their journey, then they would travel very cheerfully up hill and down dale, in sunshine or shadow as the case might be; and if the weather were foul, then they would abide wheresoever heaven sent them shelter wherein to stay until the storm would pass by and be gone.

For this is true, that even wintry weather cannot chill a cheerful heart; wherefore, when the north wind would bluster loud and boisterously, and when the falling snow would be covering all the earth with frozen white, then those two worthy champions would be well content to lodge them at some wayside inn. For there they might warm them beside the roaring fire, whereof the blaze would shine in red sparks of light at several places upon the polished plates of their armor, and whilst they took cheer in the heat of the fire, and whilst they listened to the storm, how it beat and drummed upon the windows, and whilst they harkened at the wind, how it roared and thundered about the gables of the house, that while they would take great pleasure in the company of the good folk of the neighborhood, who would be gathered around a merry bowl of hot mulled[265] ale, with roasted crab-apples bobbing afloat in it, singing merry songs the while and telling jolly contes, and laughing and making rude and homely sport in several ways that afforded good entertainment to those two belted knights who listened thereunto.

Thus you may know how in several ways it was that those two good worthy knights travelled during that considerable time when they were journeying together as companions in arms, for in this wise I have taken great pleasure in telling you thereof.

Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore come to a fair valley.

Now after those two had thus been companions in amity together for the space of a year or a little more than a year, it chanced upon a certain day that they found themselves at a place where a woodland ceased and where there began a very fair valley with a smooth shining river winding like a ribbon down the length thereof. And they sat at the head of that valley and they gazed down for some while thereinto, and they beheld that valley with great joy because it was so fair and fruitful. For in it were several meadow-lands, all smiling with verdure, and there were many fields of growing corn, and these fields and meadows rose ever upward until they cut against the sky, as smooth with fertility as though carved out with the edge of a sharp keen knife. And beside the river were banks of reeds and rushes and pollard willows and thickets of alder and aspen. And the broad highroad followed the course of the stream and there were several mills in the valley and broad ponds of water with bosky trees and with houses clustered upon the banks thereof. And ever the breeze blew mild and steady, and very balmy and warm, and great round white clouds moved slowly across the high arch of the bright blue sky.

All this Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore beheld and they took such joy in it that so I cannot forbear to tell you of it as I have done because of the joy that I also take in what they beheld. Wherefore I pray you to forgive me if I have recounted more of those things than need be, who am writing a history of chivalry and of knightly daring.

So those two worthies sat there where were the highlands at the edge of the forest, and gazed their fill down upon that valley, all spread out, as it were, upon a table beneath them, and when they had thus gazed their fill they aroused themselves from their pleasant contemplations and descended down into that valley, riding along beside the shining river.

So they followed the highway, and by and by came to where the road crossed the river by a high-arched bridge of stone. At that place were several houses of stone with white walls that stood sheltered with great, [266] umbrageous trees and the walls of the houses touched the edge of the smooth and gently flowing river. Coadjacent to this place was a mill and a sheet of wide-spreading bright water where were so many

swifts, flitting hither and thither above the smooth surface, that they resembled bees flying about a hive upon a warm day in June.

Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore meet a knight at the bridge.

Now as Sir Sagramore and Sir Percival approached that bridge aforesaid with intent to cross it, they were presently aware of another knight who came toward them from the other end thereof. And as they went forward he also came forward so that it was likely that they three would meet in the midst of the bridge. And they beheld that the knight rode upon a great Flemish charger as black as a coal, and that he was of a very noble, haughty appearance, showing no fear at their advance, though they were two and he was but one. For ever he rode forward very boldly, and with great spirit, even though it would bring him to meet them in the middle of the way.

There was no device of any sort upon the shield or the armor of that knight, for it appeared that he was minded to travel unknown; so they wist not who he was, but in his appearance they beheld that he was strong and big and very lusty.

Sir Sagramore exchanges words with the knight on the bridge.

Then as they approached one another Sir Sagramore bespake that knight, saying: "Sir, what mean you, coming so boldly thus against us? Would you who are one against two dispute the passage of this bridge with us?"

To this the other said: "Messire, I have no mind to assume any dispute with you; yet you must be aware that it would ill beseem any one of true knightly courage to draw aside and to give you way. For, as you say, you are two and I am but one; wherefore, if I should withdraw me from this meeting it might be that you would impute a lack of courage to me. So, meseems, it would be better for you to give way for me, for you could do so without any impeachment of fear, whilst I would do an injury to the pure nobility of my knighthood if I should give way to you."

Then Sir Sagramore said: "Sir Knight, it need not be that there should be two of us against one. Let my companion withdraw to the farther side of the bridge and let us two try a fall together. So it shall be decided which of us shall of a verity have the right first to cross this bridge."

"Well," said the stranger knight, "that falleth in with my will in the matter; therefore let it be as you say."

So, it being thus decided, Sir Percival drew away from the bridge upon his side, and those two knights-contestant made each himself ready for combat. Each chose his station, and when they were in all wise pre[267]pared, each set spur to horse and

shouted to the assault and so dashed together across the space of bridge, each in a cloud of dust and with a noise like to thunder of horses' hoof beats upon the roadway of the bridge.

The strange knight overthrows Sir Sagramore.

So they met in the very centre of the bridge with a crash one might have heard a furlong or more away. In that encounter the spear of Sir Sagramore broke into many pieces but the spear of the other knight held so that Sir Sagramore was hurtled with great violence over the crupper of his horse, and, striking the ground with a roar of falling armor, he lay there like one who had been struck dead.

Now Sir Percival was greatly astonished to see so potent a knight as Sir Sagramore thus overthrown, wherefore he hurried forward with all speed to where his companion lay upon the ground. And Sir Percival leaped from his horse and went to his friend and found that he was not dead but only stunned by the violence of the fall he had suffered. For anon Sir Sagramore began to move and to bestir himself and so, after another while, Sir Percival was able to raise him up and set him upon his feet again, albeit Sir Sagramore's head was as light as a feather and swam like to running water.

Now all this while that other knight had been sitting very steadfastly observing Sir Percival what he was about. So when he beheld that no great harm had befallen that knight whom he had overthrown, he spake to Sir Percival, saying: "Sir Knight, are you satisfied upon your part, or will you also have to do with me in disputing the pass of this bridge?"

"Sir," quoth Sir Percival, "I would fain have had you go in peace, but since you have thus offered me the chance of battle or no battle, lo! I have no such choice, but must needs take this knight's quarrel upon myself. So make you ready that I may avenge his fall upon you."

Therewith Sir Percival gat Sir Sagramore to horse and cleared the bridge of him. Then he mounted upon his own horse and made him ready for that assault which he had undertaken.

So when he was in all wise prepared and perceiving that his enemy was also ready, he shouted to the charge and therewith drave forward in the assault.

Sir Percival and the strange knight do battle together.

Then again those two knights-contestant met in the centre of the bridge with such a violence of meeting that the spear of each was broken into splinters to the very truncheon thereof. And each would have fallen before the assault of the other except

that, with spur and bridle-rein, each uplifted his charger to foot again. Thereupon, having no spear wherewith to do further battle, each knight voided his saddle and each drew his sword and made him[268] ready for further battle. So they came together to assault afoot, and presently each fell to lashing at the other such violent buffets that the sound thereof could be heard in echo both far and near.

So they fought for a long time and in that while neither gained any advantage whatsoever over the other. But ever Sir Percival was more and more astonished at the valor and the prowess of his enemy, for, unless it were Sir Launcelot of the Lake, he knew not of any one in that land who might withstand his assault unless it were his own brother, Sir Lamorack.

So by and by Sir Percival stinted his battle, and he cried out, "Hold, Sir Knight!" and therewith upon that demand the other also stayed his assault, and stood leaning upon his sword, panting from the violence of the battle he had done.

Then Sir Percival said: "Sir, you assuredly fight a very wonderful battle, for I knew not there was any knight in this realm could withstand my assault, unless it were Sir Launcelot of the Lake or mine own brother who is Sir Lamorack of Gales. Wherefore I much marvel who you can be. Now I pray you tell me, are you Sir Launcelot, or are you my brother, Sir Lamorack?"

Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival declare themselves.

So spake Sir Percival, and at those words that other knight cried out in a loud voice: "What say you! What say you! Who are you who layeth claim to be brother to Sir Lamorack of Gales? Know I myself am Sir Lamorack of Gales, so that if you are my brother, then you can be none other than that good worthy knight Sir Percival."

Then Sir Percival cried out in a loud voice, "I am indeed Sir Percival!" and with that he uplifted the umbril of his helmet and showed his face. So also Sir Lamorack (for that other knight was indeed he) uplifted the umbril of his helmet and showed his face.

Then when Sir Percival beheld his brother's face and wist that it was indeed he against whom he had been doing battle, he cried out aloud: "My brother! My brother! Is it indeed thou with whom I have fought!" And Sir Lamorack also cried out, "My brother! My brother!" and thereupon each ran to the other and embraced him in his arms. And each kissed the other upon his cheek in great affection of spirit.

Then Sir Lamorack said: "My brother, I prithee tell me who was that knight whom I chanced to overthrow but now?" and Sir Percival said, "That was Sir Sagamore." Sir

Lamorack said: "That is a great pity that I should have assaulted him and done him a hurt. Let us now go see how he doeth." [269]

Sir Lamorack knoweth Sir Sagramore.

So they two went together to where Sir Sagramore was, and they found that he was now altogether recovered from his fall. And when Sir Sagramore heard that it was Sir Lamorack against whom he had run atilt, he made great exclamation of astonishment and he said: "Hah! I am not at all surprised that I should have met with such a mishap as that fall which I suffered, seeing that it was thou, Sir Lamorack, against whom I ran atilt."

After that there was much amicable talk betwixt the three. And after they had so talked for a considerable while, Sir Percival said to Sir Lamorack, "My brother, whither goest thou?" To this Sir Lamorack said: "I go to visit our mother at the Priory of Saint Bridget's. For wit you it hath now been three years since either of us hath seen her." Quoth Sir Percival: "Brother, what thou sayst is true, and I am greatly ashamed that it should be so long a time since I have beheld our mother. Now I am of a mind to go with thee upon this errand, and I will do so if my companion, Sir Sagramore, is willing to part company with me." And Sir Lamorack said, "I pray you do so."

Then Sir Sagramore said to Sir Percival: "Sir, I would not stay you from your duty. Go you with your brother in God's name and think naught of me." And Sir Percival said, "I will do so."

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack depart together.

So after a little while longer of friendly talk, Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack bade adieu to Sir Sagramore, and after that the two brothers betook their way toward the Priory of St. Bridget's as aforesaid and Sir Sagramore went his way alone.

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack behold their mother.

So Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack travelled upon their way for all that day, and upon the afternoon of the second day they came to that place where was the Priory of St. Bridget. Then you may suppose what joy that noble lady prioress, their mother, had in beholding her two knightly sons side by side before her once more. For it is recorded that when she beheld those two noble lords kneeling upon the ground so that she might bestow her blessing upon them, she wept very tenderly and said: "Ah, my dear sons! When your father was slain he left me four sons, of whom twain were slain by treachery so that now but you two are alive." And she said: "I pray God He may take you into His keeping and cherish you in all ways that be for your good, so that you may

be spared your lives and not perish by violence as did your father and your two brothers."

After that they three sat together talking very tenderly to one another; and they sat together far into the night, so that it was past midnight when they parted company to seek their repose. And as they said good night[270] to their mother, Sir Percival said: "Before the dawn of day cometh, dear mother, I must depart upon my journey once more." And Sir Lamorack said: "Is it so? Then I must depart with thee, my brother, for to keep thee company." At that the lady prioress fell to weeping, and still weeping she kissed them both and prayed that God might shield them both from sin and sorrow; and so they parted for the night.

So it befell that upon the first breaking of the morn, they two took horse and departed from that place. And when the lady prioress awoke, they were far upon their way. Then when the lady, their mother, found them gone, she cried out, "Alas! who would be a mother to suffer such partings as these!"

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack depart from the Priory.

Now after Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival had left the Priory of St. Bridget's in that wise, they rode side by side through the dawning of the day, what time a thin, cool mist like to a veil of silver lay all about the meadow-lands; what time everywhere the birds were singing their pretty matins with great joy; what time the leaves of the trees rustled with the first breath of the coming day. Anon the sky grew bright like to shining silver, very clear and remote, and then anon uprose the glorious sun and sent his beams across the meadow-land and wold.

Then Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack drew rein and dismounted each from his steed. Each turned his horse to grass and then each opened his wallet and broke his fast, quenching his thirst at a forest fountain that burst out of a cleft rock near by, as clear as crystal and as cold as ice.

After that they had thus refreshed themselves they took horse again and once more travelled onward as before.

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack hear a voice lamenting.

Now about the middle of the day, they being then journeying in a leafy woodland, they became aware of a sound of lamentation in a part of the forest and they wist that there was in that place some one who was in distress. So with one accord they followed that sound of lamentation a little to one side, and away from the path, and so, by and by, they came to a certain open glade of the woodlands where they perceived the

figure of a knight stretched out upon the ground. And that knight was covered with blood and his armor was cleft and broken as with battle. Beside the knight there knelt an esquire clad all in garments pied of red and white. And as the esquire thus kneeled beside the knight he wiped the face of the knight continually with a napkin, and ever made that outcry of sorrow which they two had heard from a distance.

Then Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack rode forward into that glade and[271] when the esquire perceived those two strange knights coming toward him, he arose and stood as though not rightly knowing whether to flee away or to remain where he was. This Sir Lamorack perceived and so called out: "Fair youth, be not afraid, but stay and tell us what is this sad sight which we behold, for we are knights errant and we mean ye well and not ill."

So the esquire, perceiving their intention to be friendly, remained where he was, and thereupon they two rode up to him and to where that figure of misfortune lay stretched in his blood upon the ground. Then Sir Lamorack said: "Is this noble knight living, or is he dead?" And the esquire said, "Alas, Messire! He is not dead, but mefeareth he is dying."

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack succor a wounded knight.

Then Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival dismounted from their horses and they went to where lay the unfortunate knight aforesaid. And they examined him to see whether he were alive; and for a while they thought that he was dead, but after a while they perceived that he was not dead, but that he was grievously wounded and very nigh to death. Then Sir Lamorack lifted up his face and looked at that esquire, and he said, "Who is this knight, and how came he here?" "Messire," quoth the esquire, "I will tell you all. This is a very worthy knight hight Sir Tarn. He and his lady with only myself in attendance were riding this morning through this part of the forest with intent to go to the castle of a brother of Sir Tarn's. Right as we rode thus, there met us a very cruel and savage knight of these marches hight Sir Godwin. This Sir Godwin had with him several armed men and these fell upon my lord and his lady, and him they struck down with many dolorous blows and left for dead and her they have led captive away with them. As for me, I escaped from their hands into the thick woodlands and after they had gone I returned hither to lend such aid as I might to my sad, unfortunate lord."

"Ha!" said Sir Lamorack, "this is a very sorry story and that is indeed a wicked and unkindly knight who treated thy lord in this wise. Well do I know this Sir Godwin, for I slew his brother, Sir Gaudelin, for such another piece of mischief as this of which thou complainest." And Sir Lamorack said to Sir Percival: "Brother, let us put this good knight to such ease and comfort as we may, and then let us go to the castle of Sir

Godwin and succor that lady of Sir Tarn whom he hath taken away captive." And Sir Percival also said, "Let us do so."

So they two dismounted from their horses and, with the help of that esquire they eased Sir Tarn of his armor. After that they searched his wounds and bathed them from the waters of a near-by fountain of the[272] forest. And they bound up those wounds with such bandages as they had at hand and so brought all the ease and comfort they were able to the wounded man. So anon Sir Tarn opened his eyes and sighed, and anon he moved and upraised himself upon his elbow.

Then Sir Lamorack said: "Lie still, Sir Tarn, and move not for this while and until thou art better than thou now art. And take comfort to thyself, for I am Sir Lamorack of Gales and this is my brother, Sir Percival of Gales, and presently we go to the castle of Sir Godwin for to succor thy lady and to bring her to thee again. For indeed I have great faith that God will be with us in that undertaking, and that we shall bring you peace of soul as we have brought you comfort of body."

So Sir Lamorack comforted Sir Tarn, and after that they bade the wounded man adieu for the time and so left him and departed thence, betaking their way to the castle of Sir Godwin.

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack come to the castle of Sir Godwin.

So after a while they perceived the castle of Sir Godwin where it was in the midst of the woodland. And they came close to the castle and when they were very near they dismounted from their horses and tied the bridles each to a sapling. After that they two went up to the gate of the castle and demanded admission.

Then presently the porter came to the gate and looked forth at them through the wicket, and he said: "Who are ye that demand admission, and what is your business?" Sir Lamorack said: "We be two knights who come to demand of Sir Godwin full satisfaction for the wounding of Sir Tarn and to demand that the lady of Sir Tarn be set free from durance."

So spake Sir Lamorack, and thereat the porter laughed and said: "Certes, ye be mad, or else ye be two fearless men to come thus upon such an errand." Therewith he shut the wicket and went away. And he went to where Sir Godwin was and told him how those two knights had come thither and what was their business.

When Sir Godwin heard that message he also laughed and he said to the porter: "Go thou and admit these two knights, and when they have entered the courtyard do thou

shut to the gate after them. So we will have them caught as in a trap. After that we may deal with them as we please."

Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack enter the castle of Sir Godwin.

So the porter did as Sir Godwin commanded; he went and opened the gates to Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival and he said, "Come in!" and when they were within the castle he shut to the gate again so that they might not go forth until they of the castle chose to let them out again. And at that time Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack were in a courtyard of the castle and there^[273] was no way whereby they might escape from that place upon any side, for all the doors and passes were closed against them.

Anon came Sir Godwin, the lord of the castle, clad all in full armor. And he appeared at a balcony that overlooked the courtyard beneath, and he said: "Who are ye who come hither, meddling with that which concerns you not?"

Him answered Sir Lamorack very boldly: "Thou wicked and unworthy knight! Know thou that I am Sir Lamorack of Gales, and that I am he who slew thy brother, Sir Gaudelin, for such an offence as this that thou hast this morning committed. I and my brother, Sir Percival, are come hither with intent to punish thee for the evil thing which thou hast done this morning, for we will not suffer that such things shall be done as thou doest. For those were like the deeds that thy brother did and for them he died. So repent thee or his fate shall presently be thy fate also unless thou dost presently repent and make amends for the injury thou hast done."

So spake Sir Lamorack, and at that speech Sir Godwin was so filled with rage that it was as though all the light of heaven turned red before his eyes. For a while he could not speak because of that rage, and then by and by he cried out: "Hah! Hah! Art thou indeed Sir Lamorack who slew my brother? Now I am right glad of that. Make thine orisons, for this night thou shalt assuredly sup in Paradise with thy brother for company."

Sir Godwin attacks Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack in force.

Therewith he departed and was gone, and Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack knew not what was to happen next. Then, after a while, a door of the castle was suddenly opened upon the courtyard and a score or more of full-armed men rushed very violently into the space where Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival were. At that same time another door was opened upon the other side of the courtyard and thereupon there rushed in Sir Godwin and other armed men. All of these ran forward and flung themselves upon Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival with intent to overthrow them by dint of numbers.

But when Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack were aware of their coming, they straightway set themselves back to back and each whirled his bright shining sword about his head so that it flashed like lightning. Then there befell a great battle in that narrow courtyard, many against two. Yet ever those two bare themselves very valiantly so that in a little space of time there were six or ten men lying groaning upon the ground, and the pavement of the courtyard was become all slippery with blood. Yea; so great was the terror that those two spread about them that in a little[274] while they who assaulted them drew away from the death that was measured out to those who were nearest to the two.

Sir Lamorack slayeth Sir Godwin.

So, for a while, there came a pause in that battle, and in that pause Sir Lamorack perceived where Sir Godwin stood in the midst of the castle folk, urging them to the attack. Thereat of a sudden the madness of battle fell upon Sir Lamorack, so that he waited not for another assault, but, shouting aloud, he ran at his enemy, whirling his sword about his head. At that fierce attack the castle folk scattered from before him like to chaff before the wind, and so Sir Lamorack and Sir Godwin stood face to face with no one to stay Sir Lamorack in his assault. Then Sir Lamorack whirled his sword and smote such a buffet that though Sir Godwin took that buffet upon his shield, yet his wits melted away from him because of the blow he had received. Then his defences fell low before him, his head hung upon his breast, he staggered, and his thighs trembled with weakness. Then he cried out, "Mercy! Mercy!" saying those words twice over. But Sir Lamorack would not hear him, but lifting up his sword he smote Sir Godwin again, and with that second stroke Sir Godwin fell down upon his knees to the ground. Then Sir Lamorack rushed off the helmet of Sir Godwin and he caught Sir Godwin's head by the hair and drew his neck forward. And he whirled up his sword and he smote Sir Godwin's head from his body so that it rolled down upon the stones of the courtyard.

Now when the followers of Sir Godwin beheld how their master was slain they were seized with a great terror of death insomuch that they crowded away to the extremities of the courtyard like to rats caught in a pit. And they held up their hands and cried aloud, "Mercy! Mercy!"

Then Sir Lamorack, panting for breath from his fight and leaning upon his sword, said, "Take your mercy." And he said, "Where is the major of this castle?" They say, "We will get him for you, lord," and therewith several ran upon that errand. Anon they came bringing a fat old man all trembling and quaking with fear. This fat old man kneeled down before Sir Lamorack, and Sir Lamorack said, "Art thou the major of this place?"

And he said, "Yea, Messire." Sir Lamorack said, "What captives have ye here?" to the which the major replied, "There be seven captives, and four of those seven are ladies." Sir Lamorack said, "Take us to them."

So upon the command of Sir Lamorack the major arose from his knees, trembling with fear. And he conducted Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival to the keep of the castle and to the secret dungeons that were within the[275] keep. There they found and liberated those seven poor and miserable creatures who were held prisoners in that place.

Sir Lamorack liberates the castle captives.

Amongst those ladies who were captive was the lady of Sir Tarn, and amongst the knights who were captive was Sir Percevant of Hind. All these seven captives Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival liberated and they gave great praise and loud acclaim to those two most worthy champions who had set them free from their piteous and miserable durance.

Then Sir Lamorack said, "Where is the treasure of this castle?" and in obedience to that command, the major conducted Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival to the treasure-house. There they found twelve great chests full of treasure, which same Sir Godwin had gathered by murder and robbery and rapine.

Then Sir Lamorack said: "Let this treasure be divided equally amongst these captives so that they may be recompensed for all the misery they have suffered."

So it was done as he commanded and thus it was that those who had been so sad in captivity were made glad in their liberation. Nor would Sir Lamorack take any of that treasure for himself; otherwise he gave it all to those who had suffered so much at the hands of Sir Godwin.

Then after all this was accomplished, it being then come eventide, Sir Lamorack said: "Let every living soul quit this place, for it is a den of thieves, and shall no longer be permitted to stand stone upon stone."

Sir Lamorack setteth fire to the castle.

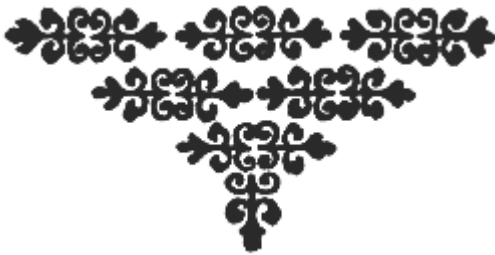
So all they of the castle came and stood without the walls, both young and old, strong and weak, man and woman, the sick and the well. And when all had thus come forth, Sir Lamorack gave command that torches should be set here and there to the castle. So it was done according to that command, and in a little while all that castle was in a flame of fire, so that the falling night was made bright with the illumination thereof.

In the light of that illumination Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival rode away with the lady of Sir Tarn. And they brought the lady to where the wounded man lay—and he had then recovered his strength in a great measure and was in a way of regaining his life and his health once more.

So a pavilion was set up over Sir Tarn and after he was in all wise made comfortable, Sir Percival and Sir Lamorack departed from that place and went upon their way, riding through the night and all enwrapped around about by the darkness of the night and of the woodlands.

Thus it was that Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival met at that bridge in[276] the valley; thus they visited together their mother, the prioress of St. Bridget's Priory; thus they destroyed that nest of thieves, and thus they departed once more upon their way.

And now followeth the story of how Sir Percival met Sir Ector de Maris; of how Sir Percival joined company with Sir Ector; of how they discovered a certain very wonderful isle in a lake of clear water, and of how Sir Ector had to do with a certain knight who was the champion of that island aforesaid.



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ir Percival and Sir Ector look upon the Isle of Joy:



[279]



Chapter Second

How Sir Percival and Sir Ector de Maris came to a very wonderful place where was a castle in the midst of a lake.

That night Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival lay in the woodlands, each wrapped in his cloak, and each sleeping very soundly after all the travails of the day. And when the next morning had come Sir Percival awoke a little before the dawning of the day and Sir Lamorack still slept.

Sir Percival leaveth Sir Lamorack asleep.

Then Sir Percival bethought him that he must again depart in quest of Sir Launcelot and that his brother, Sir Lamorack, was not upon that quest. So he rose very softly and he went aside and donned his armor so quietly that he did not disturb his brother's slumbers. After he had thus donned his armor, he took horse and rode alone into the forest, leaving Sir Lamorack still asleep where he lay.

And Sir Percival traversed that woodland for a long while, not knowing whither he went, but trusting ever to God to bring him out thence all in good time. So as he journeyed he came about the prime of day to a certain open place where there was a crossroad and a wayside shrine and a little chapel. And as Sir Percival drew nigh to this place, he beheld that a knight in shining armor was kneeling at that wayside shrine, reciting his orisons.

Sir Percival meets with Sir Ector de Maris.

Beside the kneeling knight there stood a noble dapple-gray war-horse, and the spear of the knight leaned against the bole of a near-by oak tree, and the shield of the knight hung suspended to the spear. And the knight wore neither helm nor bascinet, wherefore Sir Percival could see his face and so could know who he was. And Sir Percival knew that the knight who kneeled there was Sir Ector de Maris, the brother of Sir Launcelot of the Lake.

Now though Sir Ector heard the sound of the footsteps of the horse as Sir Percival drew nigh, yet he neither ceased his orisons nor turned his head, but ever continued very steadfastly to recite his prayers. And so Sir[280] Percival drew rein at a little distance and waited until Sir Ector was done his prayers, nor did he disturb the kneeling knight in any wise until he had crossed himself and arisen to his feet.

Then Sir Percival said, "This is well met, Sir Ector," and because the umbril of Sir Percival's helmet was uplifted, Sir Ector knew him and so he said, giving him greeting, "Well met indeed, Sir Percival."

Therewith Sir Percival dismounted from his horse, and he came to Sir Ector and clasped Sir Ector in his arms, and each kissed the other upon the cheek as though they had been brothers.

After that they went a little to one side and sat them down in the soft long grass of the wayside and beneath the shadow of a wide-spreading tree.

Then Sir Percival said to Sir Ector: "Sir, hast thou any news of thy brother, Sir Launcelot?" And Sir Ector said: "Nay, I have no news of him, but I had hoped that you might have news."

Sir Percival said, "I have no news," and he said, "Do you still go in quest of that noble and gentle knight your brother?" And Sir Ector said, "Yea." Sir Percival said: "So do I go upon that quest, and I would fain that we might travel somewhere together for the sake of companionship." And Sir Ector said: "So also would I wish it to be."

Now as they thus talked there came the hermit of that chapel to them where they sat, and he said to them: "Messires, will ye not break bread with me ere ye depart from this place?" Whereunto they said: "Yea; gladly will we do so."

So they all went together to the hermit's cell, and therewith he prepared for them such food as he had at his dwelling-place; to wit, sweet brown bread, with honey of the forest and berries freshly gathered from the thickets. So those two noble knights ate with great appetite and were fully refreshed and their hunger stayed.

Sir Percival and Sir Ector ride together.

Then, after they had thus eaten their fill, they gave many thanks to the good man for their refreshment and so departed from that pleasant place, riding side by side together, talking in pleasant discourse, and now and then chanting a bit of song, either one alone or both together. Meantime the warm sun shone very brightly, flickering ever and anon through the leaves and blazing of a sudden with a quick and wonderful glory as it caught upon the polished plates of their armor.

Sir Percival and Sir Ector behold a fair valley.

In this wise Sir Percival and Sir Ector travelled and by and by they came out of that forest. And they travelled for several days, until at last they one day came to a certain place whence they overlooked a valley.[281] Here they drew rein upon the heights and looked down into that valley, and they beheld that it was a very fair place. And in the midst thereof they beheld that there was a lake of water, wonderfully clear and very blue and tranquil, as it were a part of the bright shining sky that lay within the cup of that valley. And they beheld that in the midst of the lake there was an island, and that upon the island there stood a castle, very tall and stately, and with many tall roofs of tile that shone all red like to several separate flames of fire against the mild blue sky behind. And they beheld that there was a little town of houses of stone and brick not

far away from that castle, and they beheld that the rest of the island was very fertile and green, like to a pure emerald of bright fertility. And they beheld that there were several groves and plantations of trees and of fruit-trees at several places upon the island, so that, what with this and what with that, it was like a fragment of paradise planted in that place.

All these they beheld, as it were, upon the palm of the hand. And after they had gazed for a while, Sir Ector said: "Methinks that yonder is as fair a place as ever I saw in all of my life. Now let us descend thitherward and let us seek to discover to what noble lord yonder island castle belongeth." To the which Sir Percival said, "That meeteth altogether my wishes."

So thereupon those two rode down into that valley and so came to the margin of the lake. And they beheld that the waters of the lake were as clear as crystal and that all around the lake was a strand of yellow pebbles that appeared like pebbles of gold in the sunlight, wherefore it was as though that lake was altogether surrounded with the ring of gold. And beyond this strand of pebbles were meadows of long grass and of flowers, and chiefly these flowers were daffodils.

Sir Percival and Sir Ector ride beside the lake.

So those two knights proceeded along that golden strand, all in the shining sunlight, until, by and by, they came to a certain part of the lake that was nighest to the castle. And the island at that point sloped very gently down to the water, and as these two knights gazed across the waters they saw how that a wide, smooth meadow lay betwixt the castle and the waters of the lake, and that the meadow was besprinkled with an incredible number of bright daffodil flowers like to the meadows upon the other side of that strand of pebbles. And they perceived that there was a lady standing deep in the long grass of the meadow and in the midst of the flowers, and they saw that she wore many ornaments of gold set with jewels and that she carried a sparrow-hawk upon her wrist.[282]

Sir Percival bespeaketh a lady of Joyous Isle.

Of the champion of Joyous Isle.

Then Sir Percival called to that lady across the water, saying, "Lady, what is this castle and who is the lord thereof?" To this the lady also called out in reply (speaking in a voice that was wonderfully high and clear), saying: "This is hight the Joyous Isle and yonder is the castle of Joyous Isle, and the lord of the castle is a very noble knight hight, le Chevalier Malfait. We of this castle are exceedingly proud of that knight, holding him to be the most noble champion in all of the world. For there have been

several tournaments and jousts held in these marches, and in none of them hath any one been able to stand against our knight. And many knights have come hither at different times to try an adventure against our knight, but all these hath he overthrown with wonderful skill and strength."

Thus spake that lady; and to her Sir Percival said: "Certes, lady, this must be a very noble knight according to your accounting. Now I pray you tell me how came so puissant a knight as that into this remote place?"

Quoth she: "I cannot rightly tell you that, only I know that he came hither as a madman and that he was healed of his madness, and that he was wedded to the daughter of the king of this country, who is one of the most beautiful ladies in the world, and that since then he hath been living here at Joyous Isle."

Then Sir Percival said: "Lady, we came not hither upon any such adventure as that of trying the skill of your champion, but what you inform us concerning him giveth me a great appetite to try of what mettle he is. Now I pray you tell me, how may I come at this knight so as to adventure myself against him."

At this the lady laughed, and she said: "Messire, if such be your wish, you will find yourself very welcome at this place. If you would come at this adventure, you must travel by the margin of the lake a little farther upon the way you are going and until you have come to that part of the lake that is back of the castle. There you will find a ferryman and his two sons. Make your want known to this ferryman and he will take you into his boat and will ferry both you and your two horses across the water of the lake so that you may come to the other side."

So spake the lady; and after that Sir Percival gave her gramercy and therewith he and Sir Ector took their departure. And so they travelled some little while by the margin of the lake as the lady with the sparrow-hawk had directed, and by and by they came to that part of the lake that was back of the castle. Here they beheld a vessel such as the lady had described, and they beheld a hut beside the margin of the lake; and when[283] they called there came forth out of the hut the ferryman and two others who were his sons. Of these Sir Percival made demand that they should transport him across the lake to the island and thereupon the ferryman immediately prepared to do so.

Then Sir Percival said to Sir Ector: "Sir, I pray you of your courtesy for one thing," and Sir Ector said, "What is that?" Sir Percival said: "I pray you that you will abide here and let me undertake this adventure alone. For I would not have it that two of us together should go forth against this one knight. And indeed I have great hope that I may be

successful in this, even though I go thus alone, wherefore it is that I pray you of your courtesy that you will abide here, and patiently await my return."

So spake Sir Percival, and Sir Ector said: "Messire, let it be as you say and I will even abide here at this place and await your return. And if you should fail in that which you undertake, then will I also essay this adventure to discover if I may meet with better success."

Sir Percival passeth to Joyous Isle.

So therewith Sir Percival entered the boat, and the ferryman and his two sons also entered it, and they bent to their oars and in a little while they had rowed Sir Percival across the water to the island that lay upon the farther side.

Then when Sir Percival had safely come to the island in that wise, he rode up toward the castle through that very pleasant meadow aforetold of, and so came to the castle gateway. Here he beheld a bugle horn hanging by a chain. Then he took that bugle horn into his hands and blew upon it until the walls of the castle rang with the sound thereof. Anon, in answer to that blast, there came the porter of that castle and looked at Sir Percival through the wicket of the gate. And the porter said: "Messire, what would you have of us of this castle?"

Quoth Sir Percival: "Good man, I have heard news of the great prowess of the knight-champion of this castle, and so I have come hither to make a better acquaintance of that prowess. Now I, pray you to go to him and to tell him that there hath come an errant knight who would fain do battle with him in a friendly tilt if so be he will come forth hither without the castle and meet me in the meadow that lieth beneath the walls. For that meadow is a pleasant place, smooth and level, where two knights may have great joy in running atilt in friendly contest."

"Messire," quoth the porter, "it needs not that the knight of this castle should come forth out of the castle to meet you. For inside of this castle is a very pleasant tilt yard, and there is a gallery around about the tilt yard whence the lords and ladies of this place may view the contest between you and our knight. Wherefore, I pray you enter and take no fear, for you will be very well received at this place."

"I give you gramercy," said Sir Percival, "and I find that this is indeed a very gentle and kindly place whereunto I have come. So I pray you give me way and I will enter as you desire me to do."

Sir Percival entereth the castle of Joyous Isle.

So anon the portcullis of the castle was raised and the drawbridge was let fall and thereupon Sir Percival rode forward across the drawbridge and entered the castle and the courtyard thereof, the iron hoofs of his horse sounding very loud and noisy upon the stones of the pavement.

Then immediately there came several esquires running to him and asked of him what was his will and why he had come to that place. Sir Percival told them what he would have, and that he would have a friendly contest of arms with the knight of that place; whereunto the esquires said, "It shall be as you desire."

So two of those esquires ran to find the knight of the castle to tell him how that a challenger was come to run atilt against him, and meantime several other esquires led Sir Percival's horse to the tilt yard of the castle and others still again brought him a cup of fair spiced wine for his refreshment. Anon the folk of the castle began to gather in the balcony that overlooked the tilt yard, and Sir Percival, casting upward his eyes toward those who gathered there, beheld that that was as fair a court of chivalry as ever had looked down upon any battle that he had fought in all of his life.

After that, and by and by, there came the knight-champion of the castle, riding into the farther extremity of the tilt yard, and when Sir Percival looked upon him it seemed to him that he had hardly ever seen so noble and haughty a figure as that castle champion presented.

Sir Percival doeth battle with the champion of Joyous Isle.

Then straightway those two knights prepared each himself for the encounter, and when they were in all ways made ready the marshal of the lists came forward and proclaimed the conditions of battle—that it was to be ahorseback or afoot as the knights-contestant chose. After that proclamation the marshal withdrew a little to one side. Then he called upon those knights to make them ready. Then in another little while, and beholding that they were both ready in all wise, he blew a loud blast upon his trumpet, whereupon in an instant they quitted each his post and launched the one against the other like to two bulls rushing together in a charge. So they two met in the midst of the course with such an uproar of encounter that the ears of those who stood near by were stunned with the noise thereof.[285]

In that encounter each knight splintered his lance to the very butt thereof, and at the violence of the blow that each gave the other, the horse of each tottered back upon his haunches and would have fallen but for the address of the knight rider, who quickly recovered him with spur and voice and rein.

Then each knight voided his saddle and leaped to the ground, and each drew his sword from its sheath for an encounter afoot. Then flashed their swords like lightning in the sunlight, and blow followed blow with such great spirit and good will that the sound thereof deafened the ears of those who looked down upon that encounter from the balcony. And ever these two champions lashed at the other such buffets that it was a wonder that any skill and address at arms could have turned aside such strokes as fell in that friendly battle.

So they two fought for so long a time that those who onlooked were astonished at the strength and the courage and the endurance of those two champions, and in all that while neither knight had suffered aught of harm and neither had had aught of advantage over the other.

Sir Percival and the champion stint their battle.

Then at last the champion of the castle cried out, "Sir Knight, hold thy hand!" and thereupon Sir Percival ceased his battle and stood leaning upon the pommel of his sword, panting because of the great endeavor which he had put forth during that conflict. Then the knight-champion of the castle said: "Messire, I have met many knights in my day and amongst them I have encountered those who were regarded to be the best knights in the world, yet I make my vow that never until this time have ever I met any knight who hath proved himself to be so strong and so powerful as you have shown yourself to be in this battle. Now I pray you, Messire, that you of your courtesy will declare your name and degree, for I doubt me not that you are one whom we shall find to have conferred great honor upon us by coming to this place."

Sir Percival declareth himself.

To this Sir Percival said: "Messire, your civility of words is equal to your address at arms. Gladly will I declare my name and degree, and happy will I be if it hath aught of significance to you, for I do not think that even Sir Launcelot of the Lake himself was ever a better knight than you have shown yourself to be. Know you that I am Sir Percival of Gales and that I am son to King Pellinore and brother unto Sir Lamorack of Gales. And now I beseech you upon your part to declare your name and title to me."

But to this speech the champion of the castle made no reply. Otherwise, when he heard what Sir Percival said, and when he heard the name^[286] and degree of Sir Percival, he gave forth a great cry, either of joy or of something different from joy. Therewith, and thus crying out, he flung away his sword and he flung away his shield, and he ran to Sir Percival and threw himself down upon his knees before Sir Percival

and embraced him about the thighs. And he cried out: "What have I done! What have I done to do battle with thee in this wise!"

At this Sir Percival was very greatly astonished and he said: "Sir, what is this thou doest to kneel to me? Who art thou who sayst such words as these I hear? Now I pray thee that thou wilt immediately declare thyself to me who thou art!"

Sir Launcelot declareth himself.

Then that knight, still kneeling, said: "Sir Percival, I am he whom men one time called Sir Launcelot of the Lake." Therewith saying, that knight of the castle lifted up the umbril of his helmet and Sir Percival beheld that it was indeed Sir Launcelot.

Then Sir Percival cried out even as Sir Launcelot had done, and thus crying out he said: "At last, at last I have found thee!" Therewith he lifted up Sir Launcelot into his arms, and he embraced Sir Launcelot and kissed him upon the cheek and they wept over one another with a great joy of meeting, and all those in the balcony who beheld that sight wondered what was its occasion.

Sir Percival beholdeth Elaine the Fair.

Then Sir Launcelot said to Sir Percival: "Sir, let me bring you to my lady." And therewith he took Sir Percival by the hand and led him up into the gallery and to where the Lady Elaine sat in the midst of her court. And Sir Percival looked with a very earnest regard upon that lady, and it appeared to him that he had never before beheld so sweet and gentle and beautiful a countenance as that which he then looked upon. And Sir Percival said: "Lady, now that I see thee I wonder not that Sir Launcelot hath remained thus hidden away from the sight of all of us for these two years past. For if this island wherein ye dwell is a fair paradise then certes art thou a very fitting queen to that dwelling-place."

So spake Sir Percival, and after he had spoken the Lady Elaine smiled very kindly upon him and she said: "Messire, your words are very fair and they flatter me far beyond my deserving. Great is your renown amongst us and I declare that you are very welcome to this place. Now I pray you put aside your armor and bathe and refresh yourself, and after that we shall all take gentle sport together."

Sir Percival said: "Lady, gladly would I stay with you at this present. But there is awaiting me at another place not far distant from this one whom Sir Launcelot will be even more glad to behold than he was glad[287] to behold me. Now I pray you, suffer me first to go and bring that one hither and then will we both remain with you in greater joy of your company."

Quoth Sir Launcelot, "Who is it that could give me more pleasure to see than you, Sir Percival?"

"Sir," said Sir Percival, "it is your own brother, Sir Ector. For I left him upon the other side of the water of this lake whilst I came hither alone to try my fortune with you. Now I pray you let me go to him and bring him hitherward so that we may all rejoice together."

Then Sir Launcelot cried out: "This is indeed joy upon joy. Now I pray you, Sir Percival, go and bring him!" Therewith Sir Percival departed to fetch Sir Ector thither in accordance with that saying.

So Sir Percival rode down through the meadow of the island to the margin of the lake, and when he had come there the ferryman ferried him across the water as they had brought him across before. And Sir Percival found Sir Ector waiting for him, who, when he beheld Sir Percival coming, said: "Sir, what fortune had you in your adventure?" Quoth Sir Percival: "Oh, friend! that fortune which I had was greater than you or I could have deemed to be possible."

At these words Sir Ector was greatly astonished, and he said: "What great fortune is this of which thou speakest?" and Sir Percival said: "I will tell thee. Whom thinkest thou I have found upon this adventure? None other than thine own brother, Sir Launcelot, for he it is who is the lord of this castle."

Then Sir Ector cried out with astonishment, and he said: "Can this be so indeed?" And then he said: "Let us make haste and go to him upon the wings of the wind."

Sir Percival bringeth Sir Ector to Joyous Isle.

So again they entered the ferry and were ferried across the water. And after they were upon the farther side they rode together through that meadow of flowers and up to the castle.

Now as they drew nigh to the castle in that wise they beheld a great concourse of the castle folk coming forth to meet them and giving great sound of jubilation and rejoicing. At the head of these who approached to meet them came Sir Launcelot and the Lady Elaine, they two riding side by side, Sir Launcelot upon a great black horse, and she upon a white palfrey. And she was clad all in garments of white sarsanet embellished with pearls and embroidered with threads of silver, and she was adorned with ornaments of shining gold and she wore a golden crown upon her head such as was befitting the daughter of a king to wear. Her fair hair was enmeshed in a network of golden threads[288] so that what with this and that her beauty shone from afar with

exceeding lustre. And though Sir Ector had beheld her aforetime yet it was as though he had never beheld her until that day, for her joy and her pride of Sir Launcelot and in his meeting Sir Ector and Sir Percival again so illuminated her countenance that it was as though her beauty shone with a singular brightness from within; yea, it was as though her soul itself had illuminated her body of flesh with a pure and shining beauty that was other than of this world.

Sir Ector and Sir Launcelot meet one another.

So as they met, Sir Launcelot and Sir Ector each leaped from his horse and they ran together and embraced and kissed each other and wept one upon another in such a wise that all of those who looked on wept also for joy of their joy. And then Sir Ector came to the lady and took her by the hand and kissed her hand and kissed it again and yet again.

After that they all went up to the castle of the Joyous Isle together, and they entered into the castle with sounds of rejoicing and loud acclaim so that the very walls of the castle seemed, as it were, to cry out with joy. So after they had thus entered the castle, a number of attendants took Sir Percival and Sir Ector and made them comfortable in all wise. And they were given rich robes of royal make for to wear and after that there was feasting and rejoicing beyond measure.

Thereafter day followed day in great cheer and mirth and there were many joustings and tournaments held in honor of these two royal knights who had come thither.

Sir Ector bespeaketh Sir Launcelot.

Now one day Sir Launcelot and Sir Ector were walking together in the garden of that fair castle and they were alone, no attendants being with them at that time. Anon Sir Ector said to Sir Launcelot, "My brother, I pray ye read me a riddle." Quoth Sir Launcelot, "What is your riddle?" "It is this," said Sir Ector: "What should one do if a messenger came to him with command from a queen to whom he had sworn duty—that command being that he should show himself at court? Should that one neglect the command that his queen had transmitted to him, or should he obey that command."

Then Sir Launcelot turned his face aside so that Sir Ector might not read his eyes, and after a little he said, "I will not return to court."

"Why will ye not do so?" said Sir Ector, and Sir Launcelot made reply: "Because a duty that is greater than any queen's command keeps me here with this lady unto whom I have pledged all my truth and all my faith." [289]

After that Sir Ector was silent for a little, and then after a little while he said: "Sir, you know very well that I would do naught to advise you against that which I believe to be your duty and your honor. But are you so doubtful of yourself that you fear to perform one duty lest you should fail in another duty? Now we are commanded by that queen whom you swore to serve to search you out and to find you and to tell you that it is her command unto you that you return to the court of the Great King and make your peace with her. Are you then so doubtful of your truth to the Lady Elaine that you fear to obey the command of the Queen?"

Then Sir Launcelot cried out, "Say no more to me of this!" and so Sir Ector said no more. So, shortly afterward they parted company.

After that they had so parted Sir Launcelot went to a certain chamber of the castle where he was alone and there he communed with his spirit, and these communings were very bitter and sad. Anon came the Lady Elaine to that place and knocked upon the door and demanded entrance, but for a while Sir Launcelot denied her. But ever she knocked, and so after a while he opened the door a little and admitted her into that place where he was.

Then the Lady Elaine came close to Sir Launcelot and looked very deeply into his eyes, and by and by she said, "Launcelot, what ails thee?" He said, "My brother hath been talking to me concerning certain matters." She said, "What was it he said to thee?" And Sir Launcelot replied, "I will not tell thee."

The Lady Elaine bespeaketh Sir Launcelot.

Then the Lady Elaine smiled into Sir Launcelot's face and she said: "It needs not that thou shouldst tell me what thy brother said, for I can guess very well what it was." Then she took Sir Launcelot's head into her embrace and she said, "Launcelot! Launcelot!" and he said, "Elaine! Elaine!" And the Lady Elaine said: "Alas, love, thou must return with these good knights unto the court of the King, for it is thy duty to do so. After that thou mayst return hither, and I pray God that thy staying away from this place may not be for very long."

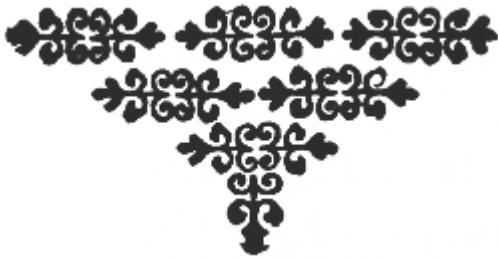
Then Sir Launcelot said: "Elaine, I will not go away from this place unless it be that thou also goest with me. Wherefore, if thou wilt have me go to King Arthur's court, then go thou along with me. Otherwise, if thou wilt not do that, then I will disobey the Queen's commands and will stay forever here with thee."

Then the Lady Elaine smiled again though somewhat sadly and she said: "Ah, Launcelot, I am sorry for thee and for thy doubts. But as[290] thou wilt have it so, so let it be and I will go with thee to the court of the King." Therewith she kissed Sir Launcelot upon the face and he kissed her as with a great passion.

They all depart from Joyous Isle.

So three days after that time all they departed from Joyous Isle—to wit, Sir Launcelot and Sir Percival and Sir Ector and the Lady Elaine—and in the court who went along with them there also travelled Sir Lavaine, the Lady Elaine's brother, who had aforetime been Sir Launcelot's companion at arms in that tournament at Astolat as aforetold of. These with their courts of esquires and ladies and demoiselles wended their way from that place with great state of departure and with all the pomp and circumstance that befitted the high estate of those who travelled.

So it was that Sir Launcelot was found, and now if you will read this history further you shall hear of a very pleasant adventure that befell them upon their way to the castle of King Arthur and of how Sir Ewaine and the Lady of the Fountain joined them and went with them to the court of the King.



[291]

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ir Lavaine the Son of Pelles:



[293]



Chapter Third

How Sir Launcelot and Sir Percival and Sir Ector and the Lady Elaine progressed to the court of King Arthur, and how a very good adventure befell them upon their way.

Now, as was said, Sir Launcelot and the Lady Elaine departed for Camelot, together with Sir Percival and Sir Ector and Sir Lavaine, for their intent was to return to King Arthur's court. With them went a very noble court of knights and ladies, and of many attendants of all degrees in waiting upon them. So it was that whensoever their cavalcade would make a halt, that place where they would rest would suddenly bloom forth, as it were, with the glory of their coming. For upon such a halt there would immediately be spread a number of pavilions of all sorts and colors for the accommodation of those lords and ladies, wherefore the green fields and meadow-lands would presently be covered all over with a great multitude of gay colors of all sorts, bedazzling the eye with their brightness and their variety. Then all the air would be aflutter with silken pennants and banners, and all would be bright with the shining of armor and the movement of gaily clad figures, and all would be merry with the chatter and music of many voices talking together, and all would be alive with movement and bustle—some running hither and some running thither—and everywhere pages and esquires would be busy polishing pieces of armor, and damsels would be busy in gentle attendance upon the lady.

How they rest within the forest.

So it was that they made progression in that wise, all gay and debonnaire, and so one day they made halt toward the sloping of the afternoon in a certain very pleasant woodland where a fair fountain of water, as clear as crystal and as cold as ice, came gushing forth from a mossy rock of the woodland. Here was a very pleasant meadow of lush green grass all besprinkled with pretty flowers and around about stood the trees of the forest, ever rustling and murmuring their leaves in the soft and balmy breezes that caused their ancient heads to move, very slowly this way and that, as though they were whispering to one another concerning the doings of those gay travellers aforesaid.[294]

Now as those knights and ladies who had been travelling all that day were anhungered with journeying, a repast had been spread in the open air, and all they sat at table with only the blue sky and the bright floating clouds above their heads for a canopy, and only the soft green grass and the pretty flowers beneath their feet for a carpet. And so as they sat, pages and attendants ran hither and thither with plates and dishes and pattens of silver and of gold full of meats of all kinds, and with beakers and pitchers and goblets of silver and of gold full of wines of various sorts; and with these foods the attendants served that noble company as they sat at table. And all the stillness of the forest was filled full of the noise of the chanting of many voices, and of laughter and of snatches of song. What time there stood near by several minstrels who played upon harps for the entertainment of those who ate at the table.

A strange damsel appeareth in the forest.

So, as they sat, all enjoying themselves with feasting and good cheer, there came forth of a sudden from the forest a very beautiful damsel riding upon a milk-white horse with two esquires in attendance upon her—the one walking upon the one side of her horse, and the other upon the other. This damsel and the esquires were all clad in flame-colored satin and all these were adorned with many ornaments of gold. And the damsel wore about her neck several shining necklaces of gold inset with jewels of divers sorts, and she wore armlets of gold also inset with jewels upon her arms, and her hair was gathered into a net of gold. So it was, what with that flaming raiment and the shining of those several ornaments of gold, that she who came thither was all one living flame of fire.

So she drew nigh to them who sat at table, and they beheld that the face of that damsel was of a very singularly beautiful appearance, being like to ivory for whiteness; and they beheld that her lips were like to coral for redness, and that her eyes were like two jewels, very bright and shining. And they beheld that her hands were long and slender, and were adorned with many rings of wrought gold, so that each finger shone, as it were, with pure brightness because of those several hoops of gold that encircled them.

Such was the appearance of that damsel and all they who sat there at feast were astonished with wonderment when they beheld her, for they all wist that without doubt she was fay.

The damsel bespeaketh them.

Now when that damsel had come pretty close to where they sat at their feast, she drew rein and cried out: "God save you, gentles! Now I pray you tell me if there is any knight here who hath a mind for an adventure that would doubtless be very pleasant for him to undertake?"[295]

To this Sir Launcelot made reply: "I dare say, fair maiden, that there are several knights here who would take pleasure in assuming any adventure that one so beautiful as you are might call upon him to perform. Speaking for myself, I shall be very glad to assume such an adventure; wherefore, I pray thee, tell me what that adventure is."

"I will tell you," said the damsel. "The adventure which I would have you undertake is hight the Adventure of the Fountain, and if you would assume it, you have only to take yonder path that leads through the woodlands in that direction and you shall come to it anon. For if you go in that way you will come, by and by, to a high mound, where you will find a huge black man sitting, watching a herd of cattle. Tell him that you are come

to assume the Adventure of the Fountain, and he will direct you farther upon your way."

Then Sir Launcelot said: "This is a very strange thing that thou hast set me to undertake. Now I prithee tell me further concerning this adventure, and what will befall after I have bespoken that black herdsman of whom thou tellest." But at this the maiden only laughed and said: "The black man who sits upon the mound, he will tell you all that is necessary for you to know." Thereupon she turned her horse about and immediately departed with those two esquires who attended her. And so presently she reached the edge of the woodland and disappeared into the forest whence she had emerged not a very long while before. And all that court of knights and ladies were equally amazed at her coming and at her going.

Then after she had thus gone Sir Launcelot said: "I know not what it is that this damsel has set me to do, but let us abide here to-night as we had purposed, and when to-morrow comes then we will all depart together in quest of this adventure which she calleth the 'Adventure of the Fountain.' For I doubt not that it is some very excellent undertaking that will afford us extraordinary entertainment."

They depart upon the Adventure of the Fountain.

Accordingly, that night they abided where they were, and when the early breaking of the day had come they departed thence upon the way that the damsel had pointed out.

After they had thus departed, they travelled for a considerable distance through the forest in that direction and anon they came to that mound of which the damsel had spoken. And they beheld that the mound stood in a wide open space of the woodland. And they beheld that there were many cattle grazing around about this mound and upon the mound, and they beheld that upon the mound there sat a gigantic being of such a hideous aspect that they were astonished at his[296] appearance. For his skin was wellnigh black, and his half naked body was covered all over with hairs like to the hairs upon the body of an ape.

Then, when this being beheld them where they came, he roared at them in a great voice, saying, "Where go ye, little people, and what is your business?"

To him Sir Launcelot made reply: "Fellow, I came hither to assay that Adventure of the Fountain and these are my companions who come with me. Now tell me what that adventure is and what I shall do to fulfill it."

Then that gigantic oaf bellowed with loud laughter and he cried out: "Seekest thou that adventure? Now I warrant thee, thou wilt be well satisfied when thou hast found it. For so all have been satisfied who have come this way. Take thou yonder path and by and by thou wilt come to a certain valley that is very fair and beautiful. In that valley is a lake and there is a fountain nigh to the lake, and thou mayst know the fountain because a great tree stands beside it and shelters the waters thereof. Beside the fountain is a slab of stone and upon the slab is a silver bowl attached to the slab by a chain of silver. Dip up some water from the fountain into the silver bowl and cast the water upon the slab of stone, and thou shalt straightway meet with an adventure that will, I doubt not, satisfy all thy desires for a long time to come."

So spake that gigantic being in a voice like to thunder, and after he had spoken they presently all departed upon further quest of that adventure.

They behold the valley of the Fountain.

So they travelled a very long distance until by and by they came to that steep hill aforetold of in this history. Thereafter they climbed to the top of this hill and found themselves at a place where the forest ceased and whence beneath them lay a very fair valley. And they perceived from a distance the lake and the fountain of which they had been told, and after that they all rode down in that valley and to the place of the fountain.

Here, finding a fair level meadow, they pitched their pavilions around about the place of the fountain and Sir Launcelot and Sir Percival and Sir Ector and their knights armed themselves in all wise so as to be ready for any sort of adventure that might befall.

Sir Launcelot poureth water upon the slab.

Thus being in all ways prepared, Sir Launcelot approached the fountain, and when he had come to it he found the silver cup chained to the slab of stone as the gigantic herdsman had said that he would find it. So he took the silver cup into his hand, and he dipped up the water of the fountain therein, and he cast that water upon the slab of stone.

Then it befell just as it had aforetime befallen with Sir Sagramore and[297] Sir Ewaine. For the earth trembled and shook so that all those who were there were filled with a great terror at the earthquake. Then there arose a mighty wind, so violent that all the pavilions that had been erected were overthrown and blown away before the blast. Then the skies thundered and thick dark clouds gathered over the heavens so that the light was presently altogether obscured, although it was hardly yet come to the prime of the day. After that the rain fell in such a deluge that all they who were there feared

for some while that they would be drowned in that rainfall. And ever, as it rained, they heard, as from a distance, the voices of many raised, as it were in lamentation. For all this was just as it had been when Sir Sagamore and Sir Ewaine had come to that place.

Then after a while it ceased raining and the clouds cleared away from the sky, and the sun shone forth once more with an extraordinary brilliancy. And anon there came that multitude of birds flying, as aforetold of in this history, and these, descending upon the tree by the fountain, straightway fell to singing with such a piercing rapture of melody that the hearts of those who listened were altogether ravished with the charm of their song.

Then, whilst those who were there stood listening to that singing of the birds, they perceived a great distance away the form of a knight who came riding toward that place with great speed. And that knight was clad altogether in black armor and he rode upon a great black horse, and all the trappings and the furniture of that horse were as black as all the other things that belonged to that knight. So that knight came violently riding to where they were, and perceiving that great court of knights and ladies who stood there all drenched and wet with the rain, he cried out in a proud and menacing voice, "Who are ye, and which of ye was it who meddled with this fountain?"

To this Sir Launcelot replied, "Sir, it was I."

Then the black knight, speaking very fiercely, said: "Know ye that ye have done a very woeful mischief, for, because you have meddled with this fountain, ye have brought a deluge upon this land that hath done great damage to all they that dwell therein. Now make you straightway ready for battle, for I have great hopes of punishing you for the mischief you have done to this land by thus meddling with the fountain."

Then Sir Launcelot answered, speaking both with great pride and with dignity of demeanor. "Messire," quoth he, "never yet have I refused any call to battle, nor shall I do so at this present. As for that mischief of which you speak, wit you that I knew not I was making any mischief in what I did. Ne'theless, now that that mischief is done, I am ready to defend mine act since you have called upon me to do so." [298]

So saying, Sir Launcelot withdrew to one side in that meadow near to the fountain as aforetold of; and the Knight of the Fountain likewise withdrew himself to that same place, and when they had come there each chose such ground as seemed to him to be best fitted for the encounter. Meantime, all they who were there gathered in a good place whence they might onlook that encounter and behold the upshot of the adventure.

So when all was ready for the encounter, as aforesaid, each knight shouted aloud and drave spur to horse and each charged against the other with all the fury of two wild bulls.

Sir Launcelot doeth battle with the Knight of the Fountain.

So they met in the midst of the course with such a roar of encountering spears and armor that the ears of those who heard it were stunned with the noise thereof. In that encounter the spear of each knight was shattered to splinters up to the hand that held it, and the horse of each sunk back upon his haunches as though he had encountered a stone wall. But each knight recovered his horse with spur and voice and with wonderful skill and dexterity, so that neither horse nor man suffered a fall from that encounter.

Then each knight voided his horse and leaped to the earth and each straightway drew his shining sword, all flashing in the bright sunlight. And each rushed upon the other with a great rage for battle, smiting and slashing with their swords, and dealing such dreadful buffets that those who beheld that battle were affrighted at the vehemence with which those two champions fought. So they did combat for a great while and in all that time neither suffered any great harm from the buffets of the other. Then, at last, that knight who did battle against Sir Launcelot cried out, "Stay thy hand for a little, Sir Knight, while I hold speech with thee!"

So Sir Launcelot ceased his battle and each knight-champion stood panting, leaning the while upon his sword. Then the Knight of the Fountain said: "I pray thee, Sir Knight, if so be thou wilt do me that courtesy for to tell me thy name. For I declare unto thee that never before this day have I ever met so great a champion in battle."

Sir Launcelot declareth himself.

Then said Sir Launcelot: "Sir, wit you that I am Sir Launcelot of the Lake. As for you, I know not who you are, only know I for a certainty that you must be some very puissant champion, for never did I encounter a more worthy battle than this that I have met with to-day."

Now when the Knight of the Fountain heard the name that Sir Launcelot declared, and when he wist who it was against whom he had been doing battle, he cried out in a loud and piercing voice, "What say you?" And again he cried out, saying: "Art thou indeed Sir Launcelot of the[299] Lake? Then have I been fighting against him whom I love very dearly and whom I have sought for both long and far." So crying out, he threw aside his sword and his shield and ran to Sir Launcelot where he was. And he cast his arms around the body of Sir Launcelot and embraced him as with a great passion of joy.

Then Sir Launcelot was greatly astonished to find himself embraced by that strange knight, wherefore he said: "Messire, who art thou, and why dost thou embrace me in this wise?"

Sir Ewaine declareth himself.

Upon this the Knight of the Fountain uplifted the umbril of his helmet and he said: "Behold me! I am thy one-time companion in arms. I am Ewaine, the son of King Uriens of Gore." Therewith Sir Launcelot beheld the face of Sir Ewaine and knew him, and thus knowing him, he cried out with astonishment even as Sir Ewaine had cried out, saying: "Ewaine, is it thou against whom I have contended? Alas, what have I been doing to fight against thee in this wise!" Therewith he also cast aside his sword and shield and took Sir Ewaine into his arms and embraced him before them all, even as Sir Ewaine had embraced him. Then either kissed the other upon the face, and after that all the others of those who were one-time companions of Sir Ewaine came forth and also gave him greeting, rejoicing beyond measure to see him again.

Then Sir Launcelot brought Sir Ewaine to where was the Lady Elaine and he made the one acquainted with the other, and Sir Ewaine took the Lady Elaine's hand into his and kissed it with a great ardor of love. After that they all sat down together in full amity of discourse.

Then Sir Launcelot said to Sir Ewaine: "Messire, I prithee tell me how it is that you have come hither and are now dwelling here as the champion of this fountain. For certes, it is a very strange thing to find you thus engaged."

Sir Ewaine telleth his story.

To this Sir Ewaine made reply, "I will tell thee." And thereupon he told them all that had befallen him since he had left Sir Percival to go upon that Adventure of the Fountain in the which Sir Sagramore had failed to achieve success as aforetold. Meantime all they listened to him with great attention and with close regard. And when he had ended, all said that that was as wonderful an adventure as ever they had heard tell of in all of their lives.

Then Sir Ewaine said: "Gentles all, I pray you of your courtesy that you will wend with me to the castle where dwelleth my fair beloved lady, for certes it would be a great honor to her and to me to have you become acquainted with her." [300]

They come to the castle of the Fountain.

So said Sir Ewaine, and all agreed with great joy to what he said, so shortly afterward they departed from that place and betook their way down that Valley of the Fountain

to the castle of the Fountain as Sir Ewaine asked them to do, and they arrived at that place somewhat past the noon of the day.

There they were received with great joy and rejoicing, and after that for several days there was feasting and merrymaking and pleasant sports of all sorts at the castle of the Fountain.

Now after several days had passed thus joyously at the castle of the Fountain, it chanced that Sir Ewaine and his lady and Sir Launcelot and the Lady Elaine were together in the garden of the castle, and no one else was there but they. So as they sat in discourse Sir Launcelot said to Sir Ewaine: "Messire, as we are going to the court of the King, will you not join our company with your fair Lady of the Fountain to accompany us? Certes it is that there would be great joy at court if so be we would all return together in that wise."

To this Sir Ewaine said: "Sir, that would indeed be a very good thing for us to do, and we will be glad to go with you as you ask us."

They all depart from the castle of the Fountain.

So straightway they of that place of the Fountain began to prepare themselves for journey, and three days after all the court of Sir Launcelot and his lady and all the court of Sir Ewaine and his lady made their departure from the Valley of the Fountain and betook their way toward Camelot.

Now the way they took led them toward that mound whereon sat that gigantic black man herding his cattle. And when this being perceived all those people passing that way, he sat there and laughed like to the pealing of thunder, though why he laughed not one of them wist, for there was naught of mirth to be seen in their progression. Yet ever that great black creature laughed and laughed until they had passed by and gone, still leaving him laughing in that wise.

The Lady Vivien hath vanished.

And as they went still farther along that way they came by and by to where was the valley of the Lady Vivien. And they looked for that castle of the Lady Vivien whereunto Sir Ewaine had twice come as aforetold and, lo! it had entirely disappeared. Yea, there was not to be seen nor stick nor stone nor sign of it anywhere, and at that they all greatly marvelled, much wondering what had become of that enchanted place.

Nor was it ever known what had become of it, nor was it ever known whether the enchantress had wearied of her mischiefs, or whether she^[301] feared the anger of so many who had now been raised up against her. Only this was known to be true, that she had betaken herself and her court and her castle altogether away from that place, nor was she seen there any more again.

Moreover, it is to be said at this place that from that time forth the enchantment of the fountain was removed and the cup and the slab of stone disappeared from where they lay, and thenceforward they of the valley were at peace. So endeth that part of the story of the Fountain.

They behold Camelot again.

Now when that noble concourse of knights and ladies who were in attendance upon Sir Launcelot and Sir Ewaine and their ladies drew nigh to the neighborhood of Camelot (which same was upon the fourth day after they had left the valley of the Lady Vivien) Sir Launcelot sent an herald messenger before them to announce their coming. So it befell that when they came within sight of the town, they beheld a great concourse of knights and esquires of the court who had come forth to meet them. These gave loud acclaim to Sir Launcelot and his companions, crying, "Welcome, ye glorious champions who are returning to us again!"

This welcome they gave on behalf of King Arthur, by whom they had been sent, for the King was glad beyond measure to have those champions who were so dear to his heart return to him once more. So it was that those who came to meet them cried out, "Welcome, welcome, ye glorious champions," in that wise. So rejoicing and giving welcome all they progressed toward the King's town—Sir Launcelot and his lady and Sir Ewaine and his lady, and their companions and all their courts, surrounded with great pomp of circumstance by those knights and esquires of the court of King Arthur, who had been sent to meet them.

And all they who had thus come forth from the town looked with great curiosity upon the Lady Elaine and the Lady Lesolie and all were astonished at the beauty and the grace of these two high dames. But more especially were they astonished at the beauty of the Lady Elaine, for her loveliness shone like to a star in the midst of her court, wherefore they who looked upon her said to one another: "Certes, even Queen Guinevere herself is not more beautiful than yonder lady."

They kneel before the King and the Queen.

So they came to the King's town and they entered the town and they entered the castle of the King, and there they found King Arthur and Queen Guinevere sitting in state to

receive them. Both the King and the Queen were crowned with golden crowns, and each sat upon a throne to receive those who came in fitting pomp and with sufficient ceremony. So Sir Launcelot and the Lady Elaine and all those who were with them came before the King and[302] Queen and kneeled down before them as they sat high aloft in royal state. Then as they kneeled there the King arose and descended from his throne and came forward and gave great welcome to them all; for his heart was filled with gladness and joy to behold them kneeling before him in that wise.

And all that while the Queen's face was smiling like to a beautiful mask. And ever she gazed very steadily at the Lady Elaine, beholding how that the countenance of that lady was exceedingly beautiful and very noble and gentle. And as the Queen gazed thus upon the Lady Elaine she hated her with great bitterness, yet ever she hid that hatred beneath a smiling countenance.

That day there was great feasting and rejoicing at the court of the King because of the return of Sir Launcelot and Sir Ewaine and Sir Percival and Sir Ector. And ever the Lady Guinevere took part in that rejoicing, albeit her heart was full of great bitterness and of a sort of despair.

The Queen withdraweth the Lady Elaine from Sir Launcelot.

Now the next day after that day, the Lady Guinevere sent for the Lady Elaine to come to her, and when she was come the Queen said to her: "Lady, I have it in mind to do thee a singular honor that I would bestow upon thee, and this is that thou shouldst be in personal attendance upon me. To this end I have purveyed thee a room next to mine own chamber in mine own part of this castle, and there thou and thy attendants may lodge so that ye shall ever be near to my person. And ever thou shalt be in close attendance upon me and never shalt thou be parted from me for all the time that thou remainest at this place."

Thus spake the Lady Guinevere, for so, under the mask of friendliness and pretence of doing honor to the Lady Elaine, she purposed to separate Sir Launcelot from his lady and after that to keep them separate from one another. This she did, though why she should do it she could not rightly tell even to her own heart.

So it was that Sir Launcelot returned to the court of the King; so it was that they were received at Camelot, and so it was that the Lady Elaine the Fair was separated from Sir Launcelot as I have recounted above.[303]



Conclusion

Now at this time the Lady Elaine was in very tender health, wherefore, after a day or two or three, she began to repine at being thus separated from Sir Launcelot as aforesaid; wherefore it befell that she grew lonely in that strange place and wept a great deal and ate little and slept little.

Now there was at this time with the Lady Elaine that Lady hight Dame Brysen before spoken of—she who went with the Lady Elaine to Sir Launcelot when he lay so nigh to death in the castle of Corbin. This lady saw how it was with the Lady Elaine and how that she pined in that wise for Sir Launcelot, and she wist that the Lady Elaine was like to fall sick unless she had sight of her lord. So Dame Brysen went to Sir Launcelot one day and she said to him: "Sir, if you find not some opportunity to see your lady, she will fall ill and maybe wane away to death because of her longing for you." Sir Launcelot said: "How may I see her?" Dame Brysen said: "Come to me this night in a certain passage of the castle during the mid-watch of the night and I will bring you to her. So you may cherish and comfort her for that while and so she will take good cheer once more."

How Sir Launcelot visiteth the Lady Elaine.

So that night Sir Launcelot came to the place where Dame Brysen had appointed and Dame Brysen took him to where was the Lady Elaine. And when the Lady Elaine beheld Sir Launcelot she could scarce control the transports of her joy in having him with her once more, for she caught him in her arms and held to him like as one sinking in deep waters holds to another who comes to save him. And ever she cried in her transport, "Thou art here! Thou art here!" And ever Sir Launcelot soothed her and spake words of comfort to her. So at last she took good cheer and smiled and laughed as she was wont to do aforetime.

So Sir Launcelot remained with the Lady Elaine for a long while, and Dame Brysen was with them for all that while, and the damsels of the court of the Lady Elaine were with them, for Sir Launcelot did not^[304] quit that place until the early watches of the morning were come, what time the Lady Elaine had fallen asleep like to a child who slumbers.

Then ere it was come the dawning of the day, Sir Launcelot took his departure and Dame Brysen conducted him thence as she had brought him thither.

The Queen is angered.

Now there was a fair young damsel of the court of the Queen who acted as a spy upon Sir Launcelot. So when the next morning had come this damsel went to the Queen and told her how Dame Brysen had brought Sir Launcelot to the apartments of the Lady Elaine the night before, and when the Queen heard that news she was wroth as though she were gone wode, yet what she did and what she said and how she behaved hath never been told, for no one beheld her in the madness of her wrath but that damsel who was the spy and one other. Only it is known that after a while the Queen cried out in a voice very harsh and loud: "Where is that false traitor knight, Sir Launcelot! Bring him hither!" And then she said: "Let no one else come in to me but him, and when he comes let us be alone together!"

Sir Launcelot standeth before the Queen.

So anon came Sir Launcelot conducted to that place where the Queen was, and then all those who were there withdrew, and no one was left in that apartment but Sir Launcelot and the Queen herself. So Sir Launcelot stood before the Queen and he said, "Here am I."

Then the Lady Guinevere looked for a long time upon Sir Launcelot, and her eyes were very wide as she stared upon him and her face was white like to wax. Anon she said, speaking in a voice that was very harsh but not loud: "Is it true that thou camest to this part of the castle last night?" and Sir Launcelot said, "Yea, lady." Then the Queen ground her white teeth together, and she said, still speaking in that same voice that was not loud: "Traitor! Traitor! how didst thou dare to come hither without my permission?"

Then Sir Launcelot looked very long into the Queen's face, and at last he said, "I am betrayed, it seems." "Yea," said the Queen, "thou art betrayed indeed, but it is thou who hast betrayed thyself."

Sir Launcelot said: "In what way have I betrayed myself, and in what way am I a traitor to thee or to anyone? Is not my duty first of all toward that lady to whom I have sworn my duty? What treason did I then do in cherishing her who is sick and weak and sad and helpless in this place where thou keepest her prisoner?"

So said Sir Launcelot and after that those two, to wit, the Queen and the knight champion, stared very fiercely at one another for a while.[305] Then by and by the

Queen's eyes fell before his eyes, and anon she fell to trembling. Then, of a sudden, she cried out in a very bitter voice: "Ah, Launcelot, Launcelot! May God have pity upon me for I am most unhappy!" Therewith she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes and so covered her face with it. And that while her face was altogether hidden excepting her lips which were all writhed and twisted with her passion. And yet she wept not, but ever her bosom rose and fell very violently as with a convulsion.

Sir Launcelot pitieth the Queen.

Then Sir Launcelot wist not what to do, albeit his heart was rent with love and pity. Then by and by he came close to her and he said: "Lady, lady! What is this you do! May God have pity on us both, for you tear my heart strings with your grief." Therewith, they two being alone, he sank down upon his knees before her, and he took her hands into his and strove to draw them away from her face. And for a while she would not let him withdraw her hands and then after a while she did let him, and so he held them imprisoned very tight in his own. Yet ever she kept her face turned away from him so that he could see but little of it. So with her face turned away she said after a while, "Launcelot! Launcelot! Art thou not sorry for me?" He said: "Yea, lady, I am sorry for thee and I am sorry for myself, and for which of the two I am more sorry I cannot tell. For God knoweth I would abide by my duty and my faith, and mefeareth thou wouldst have me do otherwise." Then the Queen said: "Launcelot, what is duty and what is faith when we measure these things with the measurement of happiness and unhappiness?" And Sir Launcelot said, "Lady, for God's sake, forbear."

The Lady Elaine appeareth at that place.

Now as Sir Launcelot said those words he became of a sudden aware that some one was in that room. So he looked up and behold! not far away from them there stood the Lady Elaine, and she was regarding them both and her face was as white as death, for she had entered that place without their knowing and she had heard much of that which had passed.

Then Sir Launcelot was aware that she had overheard his words to the Queen and with that he was overwhelmed with confusion and with pity. So he arose from his knees, though not quickly, and stood there before the Lady Elaine with folded arms and with his gaze downcast upon the floor. Then the Queen also looked up and likewise beheld the Lady Elaine where she stood, and therewith her face flamed all red like to fire.

Then the Queen arose very haughtily and she said: "Lady, this is well met, for I was about to send for you. Now tell me, was it by your will[306] that this knight came last

night to this part of the castle?" and the Lady Elaine said: "Yea, lady, it was by my will he came, for I was sad, and no one but he could comfort me."

Then the Queen's eyes sparkled with anger and she said: "Then you have broken an ordinance of the King's court, for well you know that such a thing as that is not permitted. For this I might punish you even unto death and I chose to do so. Yet I will not so punish you, but will have mercy upon you and will spare you. Nevertheless I command you that you quit this place with all expedition that is possible."

The Lady Elaine chideth the Queen.

So spake the angry Queen. But ever the Lady Elaine looked very proudly upon her. And when the Queen had ended that speech she said: "Lady, it shall be as you ordain, and to-morrow I shall be glad to depart from this place, for it is a place of great unhappiness to me. But tell me this, lady, ere I go: What would you say of one who took from another who harmed her not, all the happiness and joy that that other had in her life? And what would you say if that one who would so rob the other had for herself a lord who was the most noble and the most worthy knight of any in all of the world?"

At this speech the eyes of the Queen shone very wild like to the eyes of a hawk. And first she strove to speak and could not, and then she did speak, yet it was as though the words strangled her. And she said, "Go! Leave me! You know not what you say!" and other than that she could not say, but only strove to speak without any sound issuing out from her throat.

Then the Lady Elaine turned with great dignity and went away leaving those two alone together, and she neither turned her head nor paused at any time in her going.

Then the Queen, turning to Sir Launcelot, said: "Messire, I lay this command upon you, that though your lady shall depart, yet that you shall remain here at this court until such time as I give you leave to depart hence." Then she also turned and went away, and for a while Sir Launcelot remained, standing alone like to a statue of stone.

The Lady Elaine quitteth the court.

So the next day the Lady Elaine quitted the court of the King but Sir Launcelot remained. And he said not to any one that the Queen had commanded him to stay, for he would not betray her, so it was that all who were of the King's court thought that he stayed of his own will.

But ere the court of the Lady Elaine departed from that place Sir Lavaine, the brother of the Lady Elaine, came to Sir Launcelot and no one was present but they two. And

Sir Lavaine said to Sir Launcelot: "Mes[307]sire, do you not go hence with your lady?" and Sir Launcelot said: "Nay, but maybe I shall follow her anon."

Sir Lavaine accuseth Sir Launcelot of treason.

Then Sir Lavaine said: "Sir, see you not that your lady, my sister, is in exceeding tender health?" and Sir Launcelot said, "Yea, I see it." Then Sir Lavaine said, speaking very fiercely: "What honor hath a man who will leave his own lady for the smiles of another woman? If you do such a thing you are dishonored as a knight and are a traitor to your troth."

Then Sir Launcelot looked very steadily at Sir Lavaine and his face was exceedingly white and his eyes were like to coals of fire. Anon he said: "Messire, you speak bitter words, but you are safe from mine anger." Then Sir Lavaine laughed, though not with mirth, and immediately he went away from Sir Launcelot and left him where he was.

That same hour the Lady Elaine quitted the court of King Arthur, riding thence in a closed litter so that few, saving those immediately in attendance upon her, could know aught of what she thought or said or did.

And yet the whole world might have seen her countenance, for it was very calm and steadfast and without any mark of passion. And all the world might have heard her words for those words were also without passion of any sort. Yea, I believe that at that time her soul itself was altogether cheerful and well-content and without any shadow of sorrow upon it.

For once, when Sir Lavaine spoke with great anger and indignation, she chid him for his heat, saying: "My brother, let be. What matters it? Could you but see into the future as I gaze thereinto, you would know that it mattereth but very little indeed that such things as this befall a poor wayfarer in this brief valley of tears."

And at another time she said: "My poor lord, Sir Launcelot! Him do I pity indeed, for God is like to chasten him before long, and to bend him and to bruise him as though he were a reed that was bent and bruised so that it may never be able to stand fully erect again. Yet even this mattereth but little; for the span of life is but very short, and all is in the hands of God."

So spake the Lady Elaine, very calmly and without passion or sorrow of any sort! For, as aforesaid, I believe that even at that time her eyes penetrated into the future and that she beheld therein what was to befall all of them.

Thus they journeyed by easy stages for two days, what time they came out from the mazes of the forest and into an open plain where they beheld a fair priory of the forest

set in the midst of fair and fertile fields of corn and of rye. And the walls of the priory gleamed as white as snow in the[308] sunlight, and the red roofs thereof shone like flames of fire against the deep blue sky against which they stood. And the road whereon they travelled went down beside the banks of a smooth and placid river, very bright and shining like to polished silver; and there were willows and aspens upon the one hand and smooth fields of ripening grain upon the other.

Now at that time the Lady Elaine was suffering great pangs of sickness, wherefore she said to those in attendance upon her: "Dear friends, it is well that we have come hither to this place. For this is a house of peace, and I am very sick. Wherefore I pray you let me rest here till God shall have dealt with me in my travails in such a manner as He shall see fit."

So spake the Lady Elaine, and upon that command they bare her to the gates of the priory. And they bare her into the priory and laid her upon a soft couch and there she had such ease in her sickness as they could bring to her at that time.

Meantime Sir Launcelot abided at the court of the King, very heavy of heart and very sorrowful of spirit. For his soul was dragged this way and that way. And whether he had gone away from the court or whether he had stayed as he did, in either case he would have been most unhappy. Yet to his present unhappiness was added many pangs like to the pangs of remorse. For he could not tell whether he did altogether ill or somewhat well in remaining at the King's court as he did.

Yet ever his thoughts went out after the Lady Elaine and he said to himself: "So soon as I can escape from this place with courtesy to the Queen, I will follow after her." Wherefore had he wist that even then she was lying so sick at the priory in the forest, it may well be believed that he would not have tarried a single moment longer, but would have flown to her upon the wings of the wind.

But Sir Launcelot knew not how it was with his lady, and so God was even then preparing a great punishment for him for which he might never hope to escape for as long as he should live.

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PART VII

The Nativity of Galahad

Here followeth the story of the nativity of Sir Galahad and of how Sir Gawaine heard a miraculous prophecy concerning the Achievement of the Holy Grail, and of how it was prophesied that Sir Galahad should achieve that holy chalice. Also it shall be told how the infant Galahad was confided to the care of Sir Bors de Ganis, who alone knew what then became of him, until in due time he was manifested to the world as the greatest and the most puissant knight who ever lived.

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Merlin Prophecieth from a Cloud of Mist:





Chapter First

How Sir Bors de Ganis and Sir Gawaine went forth in search of Sir Launcelot. How they parted company, and what befell Sir Gawaine thereafter.

Now the history hath been told of those things that happened to several of the knights who went forth in quest of Sir Launcelot after that he went mad as aforetold; to wit, the history hath been told of Sir Percival and of Sir Ewaine and of Sir Sagramore and of Sir Ector de Maris. Here followeth an account of that which befell Sir Gawaine, when he, together with Sir Bors de Ganis, also went forth in search of Sir Launcelot.

After they two had left the court of King Arthur they joined company for a while. Thus travelling together as companions in arms, they met with several adventures, some of which are told in histories of chivalry and some of which are not. In such companionship there passed the spring and the summer and by and by it was the fall of the year.

How Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors rode forth together.

Now some there be who love the summer time the best and some there be that love the spring; yet others still there be who love the autumn the best of all. And certes each season hath its beauties, so that one cannot[312] wonder that there are some who love the beauties of the fall above the beauties of all other seasons. For in that time of the year there comes the nutting season, when country folk take joy in being abroad in the hazel thickets, gathering the bright brown fruits of the hazel bushes.

Then are days so clear and frosty, all early in the morning, that it is as though the whole vault of heaven were made of clear crystal. Then, when you look into the cold blue shadows of the wayside bank, there you behold everywhere the sparkling of many myriads of bright points of light where the thin frosts catch the shining of the early and yet slanting sun. Then do the birds cry with a wilder note as though heralding the approach of dreary winter. Then do the squirrels gambol in the dry, dead foliage in search of their winter store of food. Then is all the world clad very gloriously in russet and gold, and when the bright and jolly sun shines down through the thin yellow leaves of the woodland, all the earth appears to be illuminated with a wonderful splendor of golden light, so that it may be that even the glory of Paradise is not more wonderful than that unusual radiance.

Such was the world of autumn in which in the latter part of their journeyings in company those two noble knights made progress together. For anon they would ride along the smooth and dusty highways, where were hedgerows, growing thin of leaves but all bright with red and purple berries; and anon they would be riding through some thin woodland where the dry and fallen leaves rustled under foot with a sound like to a faint thunder of multitudinous rustlings; and anon they would be journeying along the wolds where the wind blew strong and free and the great white clouds sailed very smoothly and solemnly across the sky above their heads.

They meet Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore.

So travelling ever in that wise—sometimes here, sometimes there—they came one day in the early morning to where there was a smooth and shining lake, the chill waters whereof were all as smoke in the gentle warmth of the newly risen sun. And here were sedge and reeds, all fading brown and yellow, and at many places, wild fowl, disturbed at their coming, would spring up with loud and noisy splashings from the entangled water. So as they went beside that lake they beheld two knights coming toward them, riding side by side in the sunlight. And when they four had met together and had saluted one another and had bespoken one another, they found that those two knights were Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore, and that they also were journeying as armed companions, as aforetold of in this history.

So they four went a little farther to where there was a pleasant thatched farmhouse not far distant from the roadside, and there they broke their[313] fast with bread and milk and fresh laid eggs and honey, which the farmer's wife served to them.

Sir Sagramore telleth of the Adventure of the Fountain.

Then Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors besought Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore for news, and therewith they two told Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors how they had parted with Sir Ewaine and how that he had gone upon that Adventure of the Fountain. Then Sir Sagramore told them how it had befallen with him upon that same adventure, and to all this Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors listened very intently. And after Sir Sagramore had ended his story, Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine asked him many questions concerning those happenings, and he answered all that they asked him. Then Sir Gawaine said: "Well, Messire, I wot that all this mischief of which thou tellest us was brewed by that sorceress the Lady Vivien. Well I know her, and often have I had reason to chide her in times gone by for the mischiefs she was continually plotting against innocent folk. Now I have a mind to turn aside from my present quest and to find that lady and to bring her to repentance. And if I may not bring her to repentance then I shall compel her to undo all these mischiefs she hath done in this matter of the Fountain." Then Sir Sagramore said: "Sir, hearken to me and let be, or else thou wilt entangle thyself in those mischiefs also."

Sir Gawaine seeketh the Lady Vivien.

So spake Sir Sagramore very wisely, but Sir Gawaine would not listen to what he said; otherwise he declared and affirmed that he would go and find the Lady Vivien and have speech with her so that he would either persuade or else compel her to better conduct. So ere Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore had departed from that farmhouse, Sir Gawaine had diligently inquired the way in which he should go so as to be likely to find the Lady Vivien, and after that he bade Sir Sagramore and Sir Percival farewell, and he bade Sir Bors farewell, and so took horse and rode away in quest of the Lady Vivien.

Now after Sir Gawaine had thus parted company with those other knights, he travelled all alone upon his way for the entire day, and that night he lodged in the woodland, near to where there was a fountain of clear pure water. And as he had no other shelter he wrapped himself in his cloak and laid his head upon his helmet and so fell asleep with great comfort and peace of mind.

So also he awoke very cheerfully in the dawning of the day, and laying aside his armor he went to the fountain of water near to which he had reposed and bathed himself therein and so was refreshed.

Sir Gawaine findeth the Lady Vivien.

Now after that and while Sir Gawaine was still unarmed, he was suddenly aware that several people were coming thitherward toward him through[314] the yellow woodlands, and when they had come pretty near he beheld that those who

approached were a company in attendance upon a lady. And he beheld that the company and the lady who rode in the midst of that company were clad all in flame-colored satin, so that the entire woodland was illuminated, as it were, by a great shining, flaming fire. And when that lady had come pretty nigh to Sir Gawaine, he knew who she was and wist that she was the Lady Vivien.

Then Sir Gawaine went to meet that lady, and he laid his hand upon the bridle rein of her palfrey and he said: "Lady, if I mistake not, thou art the Lady Vivien."

Quoth she: "Yea, I am that one, and thou, I perceive, art Sir Gawaine." To the which Sir Gawaine said, "Yea, I am he," and he said, "I have come hither with the especial purpose of having speech with thee."

Upon this the Lady Vivien looked at Sir Gawaine very strangely, and by and by she said, "What is it thou wouldst have of me, Messire?"

Sir Gawaine rebuketh the Lady Vivien.

Sir Gawaine said: "Lady, I am informed that thou hast done much mischief to a certain valley called the Valley of the Fountain, and I know that through this mischief thou hast brought mischance upon many good worthy knights. Now what I would have to say to thee is this: I would beseech thee to remove all of those mischievous enchantments from that Valley of the Fountain and so set that valley free from the ills that happen to it. This I beseech thee of thy gentleness to do, but if thou wilt not do it because I so beseech thee, then I will compel thee here and now to remove those enchantments."

Then the Lady Vivien's brows drew together into a frown and her cheeks grew very red and her eyes shown like sparks of fire, and she said: "Hah, Messire, methinks thou art very saucy in thy speech. What is it to thee what mischiefs I may do to others? Lo! I do no mischiefs to thee, wherefore this is none of thy affairs. Now I bid thee straightway to take thy hand from off my bridle rein or else a greater ill than thou hast any thought of will speedily befall thee."

Sir Gawaine said: "I will not take away my hand until thou hast promised me to do that thing which I have demanded of thee and to remove the enchantments of the Valley of the Fountain."

The Lady Vivien said, "Take away thy hand, Messire!" Sir Gawaine said, "I will not."

Then the Lady Vivien cried out: "Thou fool! Then thank thyself for what thou shalt suffer."

Now the Lady Vivien had in her hand a long white wand and as she spake she lifted this wand and smote Sir Gawaine with it upon the shoulder.[315] And as she smote him she cried out: "Quit the shape that thou now hast and take instead the shape of a misshapen dwarf."

The Lady Vivien bewitcheth Sir Gawaine.

Then as she cried in that shrill and piercing voice, there befell a very wonderful thing, for, upon the instant, it happened in that wise as she commanded. For Sir Gawaine immediately began to shrink and to shrivel so that in the space one might count five he had ceased to be what he was and became instead a misshapen and diminutive dwarf.

Then all they of the Lady Vivien's party laughed and laughed until all the woods echoed with their mirth. And thus laughing, they took their departure, and rode away from that place, leaving Sir Gawaine standing there all bewildered and astonished with terror at what had befallen him.

So he stood for a little, like one in a maze, but after those others had entirely gone, he suddenly awoke, as it were, to his woful case. Then straightway he began running hither and thither, as though he had gone mad. And he ran in this direction and in that direction, seeking for the Lady Vivien, but nowhere could he discover any sign of her or her court. And ever as he ran he cried aloud in a voice of exceeding agony, "Have mercy! Have mercy!" But, as aforesaid, the lady and those who were with her had disappeared, and only the lonely woodlands surrounded him. Yet it appeared to him that he heard the sound of mocking laughter echoing through the forest, though whether that was really so or whether he was cheated by his fancy he could not certainly tell.

So after a while Sir Gawaine flung himself down upon the earth and wept with despair. Then after another while he bestirred himself and prayed God for help and wiped his eyes. And after that he gathered together the pieces of his armor which he could not now wear upon his shrunken and misshapen body, and he carried these pieces of armor away and hid them in a cave which he had observed not far distant from that place. Then he mounted upon his horse and rode away, not knowing whither to turn or what to do in the direful trouble that had fallen upon him.

Now after he had ridden for a while in that way, perched high upon his horse like some diminutive and withered ape, being still in the woodlands, he was aware of the sound of voices and of horses' hoofs coming toward him and then he was further aware of a company approaching from a distance through the half-naked forest.

The Forest company behold Sir Gawaine as a dwarf.

Then Sir Gawaine was filled with a great panic of shame, and he thought of naught but how he might hide himself and his misshapen body from those who were coming. But ere he was able to hide himself, those others had caught sight of him. And[316] they saw how singularly small and deformed and withered was his shape, wherefore they shouted aloud and gave chase to him as though he had been a wild creature. So they pursued him for a long distance and at last they came up with him and surrounded him.

Then, finding that he could not escape, Sir Gawaine leaped down from his horse's back, and flinging himself upon the ground he covered his face with his hands and sought to bury it, as it were, under the earth, so that they who had caught him might not behold the shame of his misshapen countenance. But they dragged him to his feet and they pulled his hands away from his face and beheld it what it was. Then, when they beheld that his face was like the face of an ape they all shouted aloud again and again with laughter.

Then he who was the chief of that party said: "Who are you and how is it that a misshapen dwarf such as you should be riding about here in the forest upon a noble and knightly war-horse?" To the which Sir Gawaine said: "Sir, a great misfortune hath befallen me, and I am not he whom I was a little while ago." So said Sir Gawaine, and when they heard his speech they thought he jested wherefore they laughed again and again with a great uproar of laughter.

They mock at Sir Gawaine.

Then he who had spoken to Sir Gawaine turned to those others and said, "This poor creature is mad," but Sir Gawaine cried out: "Nay, I am not mad, but very miserable and unfortunate. For this morning I was a noble knight of royal lineage and now I am what you behold me."

At this speech they who heard laughed more than ever, for they thought no otherwise than that this poor dwarf was mad and was making sport for them.

Then he who had before spoken to Sir Gawaine spake still again, saying: "Sirrah, you are to know that the pet dwarf of the lady of the castle at which we dwell hath died only a few days ago. Now I will that you shall go with us to her, and that you shall serve her instead of the other creature who is dead. For certes you are the smallest and the most misshapen elf that ever I beheld in all of my life. What think you of this? If you go with us you shall have meat and drink in plenty and you shall have good clothes and lodging and fifty bright silver pennies a year for your hire."

Then Sir Gawaine cried out in a voice of great anguish: "I will not go with you for such a service. For if you did but know who I am and what it is that hath befallen me, you would know that such as I are not they to take such service upon them, nor am I one to make sport for a lady[317] by exhibiting the miserable condition into which I have fallen from an one time high estate."

Thus said Sir Gawaine in a great agony of spirit, but still those that heard him did but laugh. Then seeing that he was of no mind to go with them, they bound his hands and his feet together so that he could not escape and so they constrained him to go whether he would or not.

After that they departed out of that forest and away therefrom, and by and by Sir Gawaine beheld that they were approaching a castle and that the castle was a very noble, stately, and lordly dwelling place.

They bring Sir Gawaine to the castle of a lady.

So they came to the castle and entered into the courtyard thereof, and after they had so arrived, he who was the leader of that party took Sir Gawaine up to a certain place where the lady of the castle was, and he said to her: "Lady, behold this dwarf; we have caught him in the woodlands and have brought him to you to serve you instead of that creature who died a while since. Saw ye ever such a wonderful dwarf as this?"

Then the lady of the castle looked upon Sir Gawaine and beheld how exceedingly diminutive he was and how exceedingly misshapen. And she was astonished at his appearance, and she said to him, "Who art thou, and whence comest thou?" She spake with such kindness and gentleness that Sir Gawaine was emboldened to tell her of his misfortune wherefore he cried out: "Lady, if I would tell you you would not believe me, for I am not what I appear to be, but am something altogether different. This morning I was a noble knight, but I have been enchanted and now I am what you behold me."

The lady pitieth Sir Gawaine.

At this the lady of the castle also thought that Sir Gawaine was certainly mad, wherefore she said: "This poor creature is not in his senses. Take him hence and treat him very kindly. Let him be fed and clothed and then chain him with a very light chain of silver so that he may not escape until he hath become used to this place, and yet so that he may not be burdened with these chains."

So spoke the lady very kindly and gently, but Sir Gawaine was filled full of an utter despair at her words. So he was taken away and fed like to some pet creature and he was chained as the lady had said and ever he wept for pure despair.

Now the lady of that castle was very tender of heart, wherefore she pitied Sir Gawaine because he appeared to be so misshapen and deformed. So ever she spoke kindly and gently to him and she would not suffer that any of the people of the castle should torment him. Thus it was that though at first Sir Gawaine was minded to escape from the castle, yet[318] afterward he would not escape, for he said to himself: "Why should I leave this place; and where can I, poor wretch that I be, find a better and kinder shelter in my misfortunes than I have at this castle?" So he became gentle and tractable and would not have quitted that place even if he could have done so.

How Sir Gawaine dwelleth at the castle.

And Sir Gawaine abode in that castle for more than a year, and ever the lady treated him with kindness and with gentle tenderness and ever he treated her with such courtliness as a knight royal might bestow upon a lady. So great was his courtliness of demeanor that the lady marvelled much thereat, yea, insomuch that she said to herself: "Certes this poor creature must have been reared in a noble court or else he must have dwelt a long time in such a place, for to have learned such courtliness of manner as he showeth."

And sometimes it befell that the lady would question Sir Gawaine as to what had happened to him in times gone by; but Sir Gawaine had taught himself wisdom upon that point and now he would tell her nothing; for he was aware that whenever he had been moved to speak about himself and what had befallen him, then they who heard him would think him to be mad, and would laugh at him and mock him, wherefore he would no longer give any one the chance to declare that he was mad. So ever he held his peace and ever the lady of the castle wondered how it was that he had come to have so much of gentleness and dignity of demeanor.

So that winter and another winter passed, and during all that time Sir Gawaine abode at the castle of the gentle lady as aforesaid. Then came the springtime and the summertime again, and the season when all the trees were green and bosky and when the days were warm and balmy once more.

Now it befell about the middle of that summer that the lord and the lady of the castle whereof Sir Gawaine was now the dwarf went forth ahawking, and a very gay court of the castle folk went with them. With these the lady took her dwarf, for it was now come that she could hardly ever bear to be parted from him. And it befell that when

the heat of the day had come the lord of the castle gave orders that a pavilion should be pitched in a pleasant shady place, and there he and his lady took their midday meal and rested until the sun should shed a less fervid heat.

Sir Gawaine beholdeth the golden bird.

That time Sir Gawaine was wandering very sadly about the skirts of the forest, making great moan of that enchantment that lay upon him. So as he wandered he was suddenly aware of a bird with plumage of gold that sat upon the ground at a little distance, regarding him with eyes that were very bright and shining. Now when Sir Gawaine beheld that bird, his heart leaped very strangely in^[319] his breast, for he bethought him that this was that same golden bird of the Lady Nymue of the Lake which she had sent to him one time before to guide him to the valley where Sir Pellias was abiding. For it hath been aforetime told in that Book of King Arthur (which hath been written before this book) how that same golden bird had conducted Sir Gawaine and Sir Ewaine and Sir Marhaus of Ireland through the forest to where Sir Pellias was at that time in great trouble and anxiety of soul. So Sir Gawaine, beholding that bird there in the forest, wist that it was the Lady Nymue's bird, and he thought that if he should follow it now, maybe it might bring him to the Lady of the Lake, and that she would release him from his deformity.

So Sir Gawaine went back to that pavilion whence he had come, and he took a palfrey that he found there, and no one stayed him, for the dwarf was now permitted to go whithersoever he pleased. So Sir Gawaine mounted the palfrey and departed without saying a single word to any one, and no one stayed him in his going.

So Sir Gawaine came again to where he had seen the bird and the bird was still sitting upon the ground where he had first beheld it.

Sir Gawaine followeth the golden bird into the forest.

Then as Sir Gawaine approached the bird it took wing and flew with shrill chirping to a little distance and then settled again upon the ground. And when Sir Gawaine approached it again, again it took wing and flew chirping to a little distance. So ever it flew and so ever Sir Gawaine followed, and thus it conducted him into the forest and away from that place where was the pavilion of the lord and lady.

Thus ever the golden bird led the way and ever Sir Gawaine followed, until, at last, the bird brought Sir Gawaine out of the forest and to a strange place which he had never beheld before. For beyond the edge of the woodland he beheld a dreary valley, naked and bare, and covered all over with a great multitude of stones and rocks. And in that valley could be seen no sign of vegetation or of herbage of any sort, but only those

naked and desolate rocks and stones all shining bright in the heat of the sun as though they were ribs of stones shining in a furnace of fire.

Sir Gawaine beholdeth the cloudy mist.

And Sir Gawaine beheld that in the centre of the valley there was a cloud of thick mist in the shape of a solid pillar of smoke. And he beheld that that cloud of mist moved not in any way but remained fixed in its place as it were a pillar of stone.

Then Sir Gawaine looked for that golden bird and he beheld it perched upon the high branches of a tree near by. And he saw that the bird had folded its wings as though to rest, wherefore he knew that there must be[320] somewhat at this place for him to undertake, and that the bird must have conducted him to this place for that purpose.

So Sir Gawaine, in that enchanted appearance of a dwarf, went down into the valley and drew near to that pillar of mist. And he came close to the cloud and he stood and looked upon it. Then as he so stood, a voice issued of a sudden out of the midst of the cloud saying, "Gawaine! Gawaine! is it thou who art there?" And Sir Gawaine was astonished beyond all measure that a voice should thus address him from out of the midst of the pillar of cloud, for he had long since ceased to think that any creature, mortal or otherwise, would know him in the guise into which the Lady Vivien had bewitched him.

But though he was so astonished, yet he answered in the voice of the dwarf, saying, "Who art thou who callest upon the name of Gawaine, the son of Lot of Orkney?"

Sir Gawaine heareth the voice of Merlin.

Then the voice replied: "I who speak to thee am Merlin. Here for twelve years have I been lying asleep, enclosed in a coffer of stone, yet once in every six years I awake for one hour of life and at the end of that hour I relapse into sleep again. This is my time for waking, and so hast thou been brought hither that thou mightest hear that prophecy that I have to utter.

"And this is my prophecy:

Of the prophecy of Merlin.

"The Sacred Grail that has been lost to the earth for so long shall be brought back to that earth again. Yea, the time draweth nigh and now is when he who shall achieve the Quest of that Holy Chalice is about to be born into the world."

And the voice from out of the cloud continued, saying:

"When that babe is born into the world he shall be taken away by that knight who is most worthy to handle him, and after he hath been taken away he shall be hidden by that knight from the eyes of man until his time hath come.

"You, who are a sinful man, may not have that babe in your keeping, but there is one who hath but little of sin and he may do so. So do you according to the ordination of this command:

"Follow that golden-winged thing that hath conducted you hither and it will lead you to where you may become purified of your enchantment. After that you shall follow that golden bird still farther and it will lead you to where you shall find Sir Bors de Ganis. He it is who is most worthy in all of the world at this present for to handle that babe, and so he shall care for him and shall hide him in a place of safety until his time shall be come.[321]

"Bid Sir Bors to follow that golden bird along with you and it shall bring you both to where you shall find that wonderful infant aforesaid.

"Thereafter, when that babe shall have been taken away by Sir Bors, go you forth and proclaim to all men that when eighteen years have passed, then shall the Knights of the Round Table depart in quest of the Holy Grail. And do you proclaim this prophecy: that when that Grail hath been recovered, then soon after shall come the end of the Round Table, and so shall end the days of all this chivalry that shall forever be remembered to all the world.

"And this is the prophecy of the Grail which you have been brought hither to hear, so go you forth and declare it abroad so that all good worthy knights may know that this prophecy hath been uttered."

So spake that voice, and then it ceased and Sir Gawaine listened for a while, but still it spake no more. Then Sir Gawaine cried out aloud: "Merlin, what may I do to free thee from the enchantment that lieth upon thee?" And he waited for a reply, but no reply was vouchsafed him. And he cried out again, "Merlin, what may I do to free thee from where thou liest?" but still no answer was given to him.

Sir Gawaine striveth to enter the cloud of mist.

Then Sir Gawaine went forward with intent to enter that cloud of mist, but lo! it was like to a wall of adamant and he could nowhere enter into it. And he strove at several places but still there was no place where he might penetrate it. For the enchantment that lay upon that pillar of mist was so potent that it was not possible for any one to

enter it saving only the enchantress Vivien, who herself had created that cloud by her powerful enchantments.

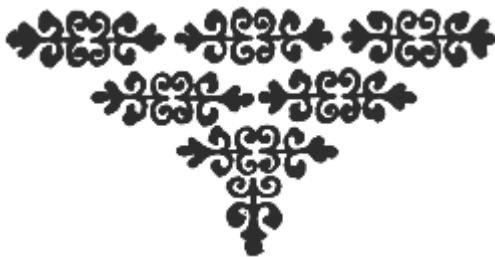
And ever Sir Gawaine called repeatedly upon the name of Merlin, but at no time did Merlin answer him. Then by and by Sir Gawaine was aware that the golden bird that had brought him to that place was flitting hither and thither near by, as though it were very restless to depart. So Sir Gawaine was aware that it behooved him presently to quit that place whither he might never return again. So once more he called aloud upon Merlin, saying, "Farewell, Merlin," and it appeared to him that he heard a voice, very faint and distant as though sounding from a dream that is fading, and he seemed that voice said, "Farewell."

Thereafter Sir Gawaine mounted his palfrey and turned him about and departed from that place, still in the guise of a dwarf, and so that prophecy of Merlin was completed.

Of the sleep of Merlin.

And never more after that time was the voice of Merlin heard again, for no one saving Sir Gawaine ever found that valley with its pillar of cloud.[322] Yet it may be that Merlin did but sleep, for it was prophesied of him that at the ending of the age he should come forth again into the world, but whether he should come forth in the spirit or in the flesh, no one knew. Yea, there be many who opine that Merlin hath awakened again and is alive this very day, for such miracles are performed in these times that it is hardly possible to suppose otherwise than that the spirit of Merlin is in the world once more. Wherefore it is that many suppose that he is now again alive, though haply in the spirit.

Now followeth the story of the birth of Galahad, who was the most famous knight who ever lived in the world and who achieved the Quest of the Grail as was foretold by Merlin in that prophecy herein recounted. So I pray you to read that story as it shall presently be told.



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[324]

Sir Bors de Ganis, the good :



[325]



Chapter Second

How Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine came to a priory in the forest, and how Galahad was born at that place.

Sir Gawaine cometh to the magic lake.

So Sir Gawaine followed the golden bird away from that valley of enchantment where Merlin lay bound in sleep in the stone coffer (and concerning that stone coffer and the enchantment of Merlin it was aforetold of at length in the Book of King Arthur). And ever he followed that winged golden creature both long and far, and ever the bird ceased not to flit before him, but led him onward in a certain direction. So thus it befell that toward the evening of that same day Sir Gawaine, still following the golden bird, came out of the forest again and to a wonderful place, lit by a strange golden light that was not like the light of the moon nor like the light of the sun nor like any other kind of light that was to be found in the world of mortal man. For though it was toward evening when Sir Gawaine came to that place, yet everywhere there was that golden radiance both upon earth and in the sky. And in this light Sir Gawaine beheld a wide and circular lake, very still and shining, and without any ripple upon the face thereof, so that it was rather like to a lake of crystal than to a lake of water. And all about the margin of the lake there bloomed an incredible number of tall flowers, both lily flowers and asphodels.

Then, as Sir Gawaine drave his horse forward through those flowers, he became aware that this was that magic lake where dwelt the Lady Nymue of the Lake and where dwelt Sir Pellias who was her lord and the knight-champion of the lake—for he had beheld that lake aforetime by moonlight when he had followed Sir Pellias to that place.

Now as Sir Gawaine thus advanced amidst the flowers, he was aware that a little distance away there stood a pavilion of green satin adorned with golden figures of cherubim and so he went forward toward that pavilion, for ever the golden bird led him thitherward.

So as he came toward that pavilion there issued forth therefrom a lady[326] who came to meet him. And that lady was clad all in a garment of shining green; and she wore about her neck many bright and glistening ornaments of gold inset with stones about her wrists and arms. And her hair was perfectly black and her face was white like to ivory for whiteness and her eyes were black and shining like to two jewels set in ivory. And Sir Gawaine immediately knew that lady who she was and that she was the Lady of the Lake herself; for so she appeared to King Arthur and so she appeared to several

others, as you may read of if it should please you in those volumes of this history that were written before this volume.

So the Lady of the Lake came forward to meet Sir Gawaine, and she beheld Sir Gawaine how that he was bewitched into the guise of a dwarf as aforetold. And the lady said: "Certes, Messire, this is a great misfortune that hath befallen thee. Now I prithee come with me until I make an end of thy enchantment."

So the Lady of the Lake took the horse of Sir Gawaine by the bridle, and she led the horse through those flowers for some little distance, and so brought him to the margin of the waters of the lake. And when they had come there the Lady of the Lake stooped and dipped up some of the water of the lake into her hand; and she flung the water upon Sir Gawaine, crying out in a high and piercing voice: "Cease from thy present shape, and assume that shape that is thine own!"

The Lady of the Lake healeth Sir Gawaine of his enchantment.

Therewith, upon an instant, the enchantment that had rested upon Sir Gawaine was released from him and he became himself again, resuming his own knightly appearance instead of that semblance of a misshapen dwarf into which the enchantment of the Lady Vivien had cast him.

Then Sir Gawaine leaped down from off the back of that poor palfrey upon which he had been riding, and he kneeled down before that fair and gentle Lady of the Lake, and he set the palms of his hands together and gave her words of pure gratitude beyond stint that she had removed that enchantment from him. And ever the Lady of the Lake looked down upon Sir Gawaine and smiled very kindly upon him. And she said: "Messire, abide this night in yonder pavilion, for it hath been prepared for thee to rest in. To-morrow, after thou hast thus rested and refreshed thyself, then thou shalt go forward upon thy way again."

The Lady of the Lake departeth.

Then the Lady of the Lake gave her hand to Sir Gawaine and he took it and kissed it. And after that she turned and approached the lake, and at that time the sky was all golden both with the glory of the fading day and with that other glory, the strange magic light that embalmed that[327] wonderful lake as aforetold. And Sir Gawaine, still kneeling upon the strand of the lake, beheld that the Lady of the Lake reached the water, and stretched forth her foot and set it upon the surface of the lake as though the water had been a sheet of clear glass. And as soon as that lady thus touched the water of the lake, she immediately disappeared from sight, and thenceforth was seen no more at that time.

After that Sir Gawaine arose from where he kneeled, and he went toward the pavilion and as he approached it there came forth two esquires to meet him. And those esquires were people of the lake, for they also were clad in garments of green like the garments of the Lady of the Lake, and those garments also shone with a singular lustre as did her garments. And their hair was perfectly black and each wore a fillet of gold about his head.

Sir Gawaine is served by the people of the lake.

These came to Sir Gawaine and conducted him to the pavilion and into the pavilion. In the pavilion was a couch and Sir Gawaine seated himself thereon, and after he had done so the two esquires brought a table of gold and placed it before him. Then they spread a napkin of white linen upon the table and anon they set before Sir Gawaine a very bounteous feast of various meats, and of manchets of white bread and of divers wines both red and white. So Sir Gawaine ate and drank and refreshed himself, and meantime the two esquires of the lake served him in all ways.

After that Sir Gawaine laid him down to sleep, and he slept very peacefully and gently and without any anxiety whatsoever. And when the morning had come he bestirred himself and presently there came to him those two esquires and aided him to arise. And they brought new rich garments for him to wear, and they brought him food wherewith to refresh himself, and after that they brought him a suit of splendid armor, polished like a mirror and inlaid with various singular devices in gold.

Then those esquires of the lake armed Sir Gawaine and brought him forth from the pavilion, and Sir Gawaine beheld a noble and lordly war-horse caparisoned in all ways, and in all ways fitting for a Knight Royal to ride upon. And the esquire said to him: "Sir, this is your horse, and it hath been purveyed expressly for you."

So Sir Gawaine viewed the war-horse and saw how noble it was, and he mounted upon it with great joy of possession and he gave thanks without measure to those two esquires who had served him. After that he rode away from that place with such lightness of heart and with such peace and happiness of spirit as doth not often come to any man in this life.[328]

Sir Gawaine followeth the golden bird once more.

Then presently there came that golden bird once more and flitted before Sir Gawaine as it had aforetime done, chirping very shrilly the while. And Sir Gawaine followed the bird once more as aforetime, and it led him as it had before done ever in a certain direction. So it brought him onward in that wise until about the middle of the day, what

time he came forth into an open place of the forest and there beheld before him the forest hermitage several times mentioned in these histories.

And Sir Gawaine saw that a noble black war-horse stood beside that forest sanctuary, and he saw that a great spear leaned against a tree beside the hermitage and that a shield hung from the spear. And when Sir Gawaine had come close enough he knew by the device upon that shield that it was Sir Bors de Ganis who was there at the hermitage.

Now as Sir Gawaine approached the cell of the hermit of the forest, the horse of Sir Bors neighed aloud, and the horse of Sir Gawaine neighed in answer. Therewith, as though that neighing had been a summons, the door of the hut opened and the hermit appeared in the doorway, shading his eyes with his hand from the glare of the sun. So when he perceived that it was Sir Gawaine who approached that lonely place he cried out aloud: "Welcome Sir Gawaine! Welcome to this place! Sir Bors is here and awaiting thee. For it hath been told him in a dream that thou wouldst meet him here at this time to-day, and so he is here awaiting thy coming in fulfillment of that dream."

Sir Gawaine meets Sir Bors again.

So Sir Gawaine dismounted from his horse and he entered the cell of the hermit and there he beheld Sir Bors kneeling at prayer at a little altar, and Sir Gawaine stood and waited until Sir Bors had finished his orisons. And when Sir Bors had crossed himself and had arisen to his feet, he turned with great joy and took Sir Gawaine into his arms; and either embraced the other and either kissed the other upon the cheek.

After that they sat down and the hermit brought them food and they ate of the simple fare of the hermit's cell, and meantime Sir Gawaine told Sir Bors all that had happened to him since they had parted company. To all that was said Sir Bors listened with deep attention, for he was much, astonished at that which had befallen Sir Gawaine and at the enchantment he had suffered at the hands of the Lady Vivien. And indeed it was, of a surety, a very wonderful adventure, such as any one might well have marvelled to hear tell of.

But when Sir Gawaine told Sir Bors concerning the prophecy of Merlin, then Sir Bors became all enwrapped as with a certain exaltation of spirit.[329] Wherefore, when Sir Gawaine had finished that part of his story, Sir Bors cried out: "How wonderful is this miracle that thou tellest me! Know ye that certain things of this sort have been presented before me of late in several dreams, but lo! now they have been manifested to thee in reality." And he said: "Let us straightway arise and go forth hence, for methinks that even now we have tarried too long in performing the bidding of this

prophecy." Accordingly they arose and they gave thanks in full measure to that good old hermit and they bade him farewell. Thereafter they went forth and mounted their horses and took shield and spear in hand and departed thence, and after they had so departed, straightway the golden bird appeared once more and flew chirping before them.

Then Sir Bors, beholding the bird, said: "Lo! is not yonder the bird that has been sent to lead us upon our way?" And Sir Gawaine said, "Yea; that is it." And then Sir Bors said, "Let us follow it apace."

Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors follow the golden bird.

They come to the priory of the valley.

So they followed the bird, and ever it flew before them, leading them upon the way. Thus they travelled for a long while, until at last, toward the sloping of the afternoon, they became aware that the forest wherein they rode was becoming thinner. And anon they were aware of the ringing of a bell somewhere not a great distance away. And the bird led them toward where that bell was ringing, and so in a little pass they came forth out of the forest and into a very fertile valley. And there was a smooth river, not very broad, that flowed down through the valley, and beside the river there was a fair priory, not large in size but very comely, with white walls and red roofs and many shining windows, very bright in the sun. And all about the priory were fair fields and orchards and gardens, all illuminated very bright and warm, in the full light of the slanting sun that was now turning all the world to gold by its bright, yellow and very glorious shining.

So when Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine entered this pleasant plain, the golden bird that had led them thitherward suddenly chirped very loud and shrill, and straightway flew high aloft into the air and immediately disappeared over the tree tops. Thereupon those two champions knew with certainty that this must be the place whither they were to come, and they wist that here they should doubtless find that young child of which the prophecy of Merlin had spoken. So they went forward toward the priory with a certain awe, as not knowing what next of mystery was to happen to them.

They meet Sir Lavaine.

So as they approached that holy place, the gateway of the priory was suddenly opened, and there came forth a young knight of a very noble[330] and haughty appearance, and both Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors knew that one, that he was Sir Lavaine, the brother of the Lady Elaine, and whilom the companion in arms of Sir Launcelot of the Lake. And as they drew more near they beheld that the face of Sir

Lavaine was very sad and that he smiled not at all as he gave them greeting, saying: "Ye are welcome, Messires, and ye come none too soon, for we have been waiting for you since the morning." And he said, "Dismount and come with me."

So Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine dismounted from their horses and straightway there came several attendants and took the steeds and led them away to stable. Then Sir Lavaine turned, and he beckoned with his hand, and Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine followed after as he had commanded them to do. So Sir Lavaine brought them through several passageways and from place to place until at last he brought them to a small cell of the priory, very cold and bare and white as snow.

They behold the Lady Elaine.

In the centre of the cell there lay a couch and upon the couch there lay a figure as still as death and Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine beheld that it was the Lady Elaine who lay there. Her hair lay spread out all over the pillow of the couch, shining like to pure gold, and in the midst of the hair her face shone very white, like to pure clear wax for whiteness. Her eyes looked, as it were, from out of a faint shadow and gazed ever straight before her and she never stirred nor moved her gaze as Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine and Sir Lavaine entered her cell; for it was as though her looks were fixed upon something very strange that she beheld a great distance away.

They behold the young child.

Then Sir Lavaine, speaking in a whisper, said, "Come near and behold," and thereupon Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine came close to the couch upon which the Lady Elaine lay. So when they had come nigh, Sir Lavaine lifted the coverlet very softly and they beheld that a new-born babe lay beside the lady upon that couch. Then they wist that that babe was the child of Sir Launcelot of the Lake and the Lady Elaine; and they wist that this was the babe of whom Merlin had spoken in his prophecy. For the child was very wonderfully beautiful, and it was as though a certain clear radiance of light shone forth from its face; and it lay so perfectly still that it was like as though it did not live. So Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine knew because of these and several other things that this must indeed be that very child whom they had come to find. Yea, it was as though a voice from a distance said: "Behold! this is that one who shall achieve the Quest of the Holy Grail according to the prophecy of Merlin." [331]

So Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine kneeled down beside the bed and set their palms together, and Sir Lavaine stood near them, and for a while all was very silent in that place. Then suddenly the Lady Elaine spake in that silence in a voice very faint and remote but very clear, and as she spake she turned not her eyes toward any one of

them, but gazed ever straight before her. And she said, "Sir Bors, art thou there?" and Sir Bors said, "Yea, Lady."

The Lady Elaine bespeaketh Sir Bors.

Then she said: "Behold this child and look you upon him, for this is he who shall achieve the Quest of the Holy Grail and shall bring it back to the earth again. So he shall become the greatest knight that ever the world beheld. But though he shall be the greatest champion at arms that ever lived, yet also he shall be gentle and meek and without sin, innocent like to a little child. And because he is to be so high in chivalry and so pure of life, therefore his name shall be called Galahad." And she said again, "Sir Bors, art thou there?" and he said, "Yea, Lady."

She said: "My time draweth near, for even now I behold the shining gates of Paradise, though it yet is that I behold them faintly, as through a vapor of mist. Yet anon that mist shall pass, and I shall behold those gates very near by and shining in glory; for soon I shall quit this troubled world for that bright and beautiful country. Nevertheless, I shall leave behind me this child who lieth beside me, and his life shall enlighten that world from which I am withdrawing." Then she said for the third time, "Sir Bors, art thou there?" And Sir Bors wept, and he said, "Yea, Lady, I am here."

Then the Lady Elaine said: "Take thou this child and bear him hence unto a certain place that thou shalt find. Thou shalt know that place because there shall go before thee a bird with golden plumage, and it shall show thee where thou art to take this child. Leave the child at that place whither the bird shall lead thee, and tell no man where that place is. For this child must hide in secret until the time shall come when he shall be manifested to the world." And she said, "Hearest thou me, Sir Bors?" And Sir Bors, still weeping, said, "Yea, Lady."

Then she said: "Go and tarry not in thy going, for the ending is very near. Wait not until that end cometh, but go immediately and do as I have asked thee to do."

Sir Bors departeth with the young child.

Then, still weeping, Sir Bors arose from where he kneeled, and he took the young child and he wrapped it in his cloak and he went out thence and was gone, taking the babe with him.

And this while Sir Gawaine and Sir Lavaine also wept, and ever Sir Gawaine still kneeled and Sir Lavaine stood beside him.[332]

Such is the story of the nativity of Sir Galahad, who afterward achieved the Quest of the Holy Grail as was prophesied in the prophecy of Merlin.

The passing of Elaine the Fair.

That same day the Lady Elaine died about the middle watch of the night, departing from this world in great peace and good content, and Sir Gawaine and Sir Lavaine were with her at the time of her passing.

Then Sir Gawaine said, weeping, "Let me go and fetch Sir Launcelot of the Lake hither." But Sir Lavaine, speaking very sternly, said: "Let be and bring him not, for he is not worthy to be brought hither. But as for you, do you depart, for I have yet that to do I would do alone. So go you immediately and return unto the court of the King. But when you have come to the King's court, I charge you to say nothing unto any one concerning the birth of the child Galahad, nor of how this sweet, fair lady is no more, for I have a certain thing to do that I would fain perform before those things are declared. So when you have come to court say nothing of these matters of which I have spoken." To the which Sir Gawaine said, "Messire, it shall be as you desire in all things."

Sir Gawaine departeth from the priory.

So immediately Sir Gawaine went forth and called for his horse, and they brought his horse to him and he mounted and departed from that place, leaving Sir Lavaine alone with his dead.

And it remaineth here to be said that Sir Gawaine went directly from that place to the court of the King, and when he had come there he told only of those adventures that had happened to him when the Lady Vivien had bewitched him. But of those other matters: to wit, of the nativity of Galahad and of the death of the Lady Elaine, he said naught to any one but concealed those things for the time being in his own heart.

Yet ever he pondered those things and meditated upon them in the silent watches of the night. For the thought of those things filled him at once with joy and with a sort of terror; with hope and with a manner of despair; wherefore his spirit was troubled because of those things which he had beheld, for he knew not what their portent might be.[333]

he Barge of the Dead 卐卐



[335]



Conclusion

Now after Sir Bors had departed and after Sir Gawaine had departed as aforesaid—the one at the one time and the other at the other—there came several of those of the

priory to that cell of death. And they lifted up that still and peaceful figure and bare it away to the chapel of the priory. And they laid it upon a bier in the chapel and lit candles around about the bier, and they chanted all night in the chapel a requiem to the repose of the gentle soul that was gone. And when the morning light had dawned Sir Lavaine came to that chapel when the candles were still alight in the dull gray of the early day and he kneeled for a long time in prayer beside the bier.

Thereafter and when he had ended his prayers, he arose and departed from that place, and he went to the people of the priory, and he said to them, "Whither is it that this river floweth?" They say: "It floweth down from this place past the King's town of Camelot, and thence it floweth onward until it floweth into the sea to the southward."

Sir Lavaine findeth a boat.

Sir Lavaine said, "Is there ere a boat at this place that may float upon the river?" And they say to him: "Yea, Messire, there is a barge and there is a man that saileth that barge and that man is deaf and dumb from birth." At that Sir Lavaine said: "I pray you to bring me to where that deaf and dumb bargeman is."

So one of those to whom he spake took him to a certain place where was that barge, and the deaf and dumb bargeman. And the bargeman was a very old man with a long beard as white as snow and he gazed very steadfastly upon Sir Lavaine as he drew near thitherward. So Sir Lavaine came close to the bargeman and he made signs to him, asking him if he would ferry him down the stream to the King's town, and the dumb bargeman understood what Sir Lavaine would have and he made signs in answer that it should be as Sir Lavaine desired.

Sir Lavaine with the dead lady departeth in the barge.

After that Sir Lavaine gave command that the barge should be hung and draped all with white samite embroidered with silver and he gave command that a couch of white samite should be established upon the[336] barge, and the covering of the couch was also embroidered with silver. So when all was in readiness there came forth a procession from the chapel, bearing that still and silent figure, and they brought it to the barge and laid it upon the couch of white sa mite that had been prepared for it. Thereafter Sir Lavaine entered the barge and took his station in the bow of the boat and the deaf and dumb man took his station in the stern thereof.

Then the bargeman trimmed the sail and so the barge drew slowly away from that place, many standing upon the landing-stage and watching its departure.

So they descend the flood.

And after that the barge floated gently down the smooth stream of the river, and ever the deaf and dumb man guided it upon its way. And anon they floated down betwixt banks of rushes, with here and there a row of pollard willow-trees and thickets of alder. And all about them was the pleasant weather of the summertime, with everything abloom with grace and beauty.

Then anon, departing from those marshy stretches with their rushes and their willows and their alders, they drifted past some open meadow-lands, with fields and uplands all trembling in the still hot sunlight. And after that they came to a more populous country where were several small towns and villages with here and there a stone bridge crossing the river. And at those places of habitation many came and stood upon a bridge beneath which they passed, and others stood upon the smooth and grassy banks of the stream and gazed in awe at that wonderful barge as it drifted by adown the flood. And they who thus gazed would whisper and marvel at what they beheld and would cross themselves for awe and terror.

So ever they floated onward until at last they came to within sight of the town of Camelot.

After that, in a little they came to the town and as they passed by the town walls, lo! a great multitude of people came and stood upon the walls and gazed down upon that white bedraped barge and those who were within. And all the people whispered to one another in awe, saying: "What is this and what doth it portend? Is this real or is it a vision that we behold?"

So they come to Camelot.

But ever that barge drifted onward past the walls and past those who stood thereon, and so, at last, it came to a landing-place of stone steps not far distant from the castle of the King. There the dumb bargeman made fast the barge to the iron rings of the landing-stage, and so that strange voyage was ended.

Now at that time King Arthur and many of the lords and some of the[337] ladies of his court sat at feast in the royal hall of the castle, and amongst those was Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere. So as they sat thus, there came one of a sudden running into the hall as in affright, and thereat all looked upon him and wondered wherefore he came into the hall in that way. Then King Arthur said, "What ails thee that thou comest hither to us thus?"

King Arthur heareth news of the barge.

Then he who came kneeled before King Arthur, and he said: "Lord, here is a wonderful thing. For down by the river there hath come a barge to the landing-stairs of the castle, and that barge is hung all with white samite embroidered with silver. And in the barge and upon a couch of white samite there lieth a dead lady so beautiful that I do not think her like is to be found in all of the earth. And a dumb man sits in the stern of the boat, and a noble young knight sits in the bow of the boat with his face shrouded in his mantle as though for grief. And that knight sits there as silent and as motionless as the dead lady, and the dumb man sits there also, like to an image of a man rather than a man of flesh and blood. Wherefore it is that I have come hither to bring you word of this wonderful thing."

Then King Arthur said: "This is indeed a most singular story that thou tellest us. Now let us all straightway go and see what this portendeth."

So the King arose from where he sat, and he descended therefrom, and he went forth out of the hall, and all who were there went with him.

King Arthur and his court go to where is the barge.

Now first of all there went King Arthur, and among those who were last there went Sir Launcelot of the Lake. For when he had heard of that dead lady he bethought him of the Lady Elaine and of how she was even then in tender health, wherefore he repented him with great bitterness of heart that he was not with her at that time instead of lingering at court as he did. And he said to himself: "Suppose that she should die like to this dead lady in the barge—what would I do if that should have happened unto me?" So it was that his feet lagged because of his heavy thoughts, and so it was that he was near the last who came to the riverside where was that barge as aforesaid.

Now, there were many of the towns folk standing there, but upon King Arthur's coming all those made way for him, and so he came and stood upon the upper step of the landing-stairs and looked down into the boat. And he beheld that figure that was lying there and knew it that it was the Lady Elaine who lay there dead.

Then the King looked for a little upon that dead figure as it were in a sort of terror, and then he said, "Where is Sir Launcelot?"[338]

Sir Launcelot beholdeth the dead.

Now when the King so spake, they who stood there made way, and Sir Launcelot came through the press and stood also at the head of the stairs and looked down into the barge. Then of a sudden—as it were in an instant of time—he beheld with his very eyes that thing which he had been thinking of anon; for there before him and beneath him

lay in very truth the dead image of that dear lady of whom he had been thinking only a moment before.

Then it was as though Sir Launcelot had suddenly been struck with a shaft of death, for he neither moved nor stirred. Nay, it was not to be perceived that he even so much as breathed. But ever he stood there gazing down into that boat as though he had forgotten for that while that there was anybody else in all of the world saving only himself and that dead lady. And many of those who were there looked upon the face of Sir Launcelot, and they beheld that his countenance was altogether as white as the face of that dead figure who lay in the barge beneath them.

Sir Lavaine accuseth Sir Launcelot.

Then a great hush of silence fell over all and every voice was stilled, and at that hush of silence Sir Lavaine lifted the hood from his face and looked up from where he sat in the boat at the feet of the dead lady, and so beheld Sir Launcelot where he stood. Then upon the instant Sir Lavaine stood up in the barge and he cried out in a great loud harsh voice: "Hah! art thou there, thou traitor knight? Behold the work that thou hast done; for this that thou beholdest is thy handiwork. Thou hast betrayed this lady's love for the love of another, and so thou hast brought her to her death!"

So said Sir Lavaine before all those who were there, but it was as though Sir Launcelot heard him not, for ever he stood as though he were a dead man and not a living man of flesh and blood. Then of a sudden he awoke, as it were, to life, and he clasped the back of his hands across his eyes, and cried out in a voice as though that voice tore his heart asunder, "Remorse! Remorse! Remorse!" saying those words three times over in that wise.

Then he shut his lips tight as though to say no more, and thereupon turned and went away from that place.

Sir Launcelot departeth.

And he turned neither to this side nor to that, but went straight to the castle of the King, and there ordered that his horse should be brought forth to him upon the instant. So when his horse was brought he mounted it and rode away; and he bade farewell to no one, and no one was there when he thus departed.

So for a long while Sir Launcelot rode he knew not whither, but after a while he found himself in the forest not far away from the cell of the hermit of the forest. And he beheld the hermit of the forest, that he[339] stood in an open plat of grass in front of his cell and that he was feeding the wild birds of the woodland; for the little feathered

creatures were gathered in great multitudes about him, some resting upon his head and some upon his shoulders and some upon his hands. And a wild doe and a fawn of the forest browsed near by and all was full of peace and good content.

But at the coming of Sir Launcelot, all those wild creatures took alarm; the birds they flew chirping away, and the doe and the fawn they fled away into the thickets of the forest. For they wist, by some instinct, that a man of sin and sorrow was coming thitherward; wherefore they were afeared and fled away in that wise.

But Sir Launcelot thought nothing of this, but leaped from his horse, and ran to the hermit and flung himself down upon the ground before him and embraced him about the feet. And the hermit was greatly astonished and said, "What ails thee, Sir Launcelot?" Whereunto Sir Launcelot cried out: "Woe is me! Woe is me! I have sinned very grievously and have been grievously punished and now my heart is broken!"

Then the hermit perceived that some great misfortune had befallen Sir Launcelot, wherefore he lifted Sir Launcelot to his feet and after that he brought him into his cell. And after they were in the cell together, he said: "Now tell me what ails thee, Sir Launcelot. For I believe that in telling me thou shalt find a great deal of ease."

So Sir Launcelot confessed everything to the hermit—yea, everything to the very bottom of his soul, and the good, holy man hearkened to him.

Then after Sir Launcelot had said all that lay upon his heart, the hermit sat for a while in silence, communing with his spirit. And after a while he said: "Messire, God telleth me that if thy sin hath been grievous, so also hath thy punishment been full sore. Wherefore meseemeth I speak what God would have me say when I tell thee that though neither thou nor any man may undo that which is done, nor recommit that which is committed, yet there is this which thou or any man mayest do. Thou mayst bathe thy soul in repentance as in a bath of clear water (for repentance is not remorse but something very different from remorse), and that having so bathed thyself thou mayst clothe thyself as in a fresh raiment of new resolve. So bathed and so clad, thou mayst stand once more upon thy feet and mayst look up to God and say: 'Lo, God! I am Thy handiwork. I have sinned and have done great evil, yet I am still Thy handiwork, who hath made me what I am. So, though I may not undo that which I have done, yet I may, with Thy aid, do better hereafter than I have done heretofore.'

"For every man may sin, and yet again may sin; yet still is he God's[340] handiwork, and still God is near by His handiwork to aid him ever to a fresh endeavor to righteousness.

"So, though thou hast sinned, thou art still the creation of God and may yet do His will in the world who hath sent thee hither."

Then Sir Launcelot wept, and he said, "There is much comfort in thy words."

After that he abode for three days in the cell of the hermit and at the end of that time he went forth again into the world, a broken yet a contrite man, and one full of a strong resolve to make good the life that God thenceforth intended him to live.

So by and by you shall hear of further adventures that befell him; yet not at this place.

So it was with Sir Launcelot, and now it only remaineth to be said that, after his departure from the King's court as aforesaid, they brought the dead figure of the Lady Elaine to the minster at Camelot and there high mass was said for the peace of her pure and gentle soul. So for two days (what time Sir Launcelot was bathing himself in the waters of repentance as aforetold) that figure lay in state in the minster and with many candles burning about it, and then it was buried in the minster and a monument of marble was erected to the memory of that kind and loving spirit that had gone.

So endeth the history of the Nativity of Galahad and so therewith this book also cometh to an end.

Yet after a while, if God giveth me life to finish that work which I have undertaken in writing these histories (and I pray He may give me to finish that and several other things), then I shall tell you many things more than these. For I shall tell you how Sir Launcelot came back again into the world, and I shall tell you of the history of the Quest of the Grail, and I shall tell you of other knights who came in later days to make the court of King Arthur even more glorious than it was before.

Already two histories have been written concerning these things and this makes the third, and another, I believe, will complete that work which I have assigned myself to do; wherefore, as was said, I pray that God may grant that I shall be able to finish that fourth book and so end my work that I have here undertaken. Amen.