him general gratitude, since of the numerous educated people who profess to have read Malory, few indeed could give a straightforward account of any tale except perhaps the last. The fact is that late medieval English prose style was based on *amplificatio*—the embroidering of a simple statement to the point where it almost ceased to make sense—and on the practice of lulling the ear with hypnotic rhythms. The story was regarded as of lesser importance.

—Robert Graves

Deyá, Majorca

The Tale of King Arthur

1. MERLIN

King Uther Pendragon, ruler of all Britain, had been at war for many years with the Duke of Tintagil in Cornwall when he was told of the beauty of Lady Igraine, the duke’s wife. Thereupon he called a truce and invited the duke and Igraine to his court, where he prepared a feast for them, and where, as soon as they arrived, he was formally reconciled to the duke through the good offices of his courtiers.

In the course of the feast, King Uther grew passionately desirous of Igraine and, when it was over, begged her to become his paramour. Igraine, however, being as naturally loyal as she was beautiful, refused him.

“I suppose,” said Igraine to her husband, the duke, when this had happened, “that the king arranged this truce only because he wanted to make me his mistress. I suggest that we leave at once, without warning, and ride overnight to our castle.” The duke agreed with her, and they left the court secretly.

The king was enraged by Igraine’s flight and summoned his privy council. They advised him to command the fugitives’ return under threat of renewing the war; but when this was done, the duke and Igraine defied his summons. He then warned them that they could expect to be dragged from their castle within six weeks.

The duke manned and provisioned his two strongest castles: Tintagil for Igraine, and Terrabl, which was useful for its many sally ports, for himself. Soon King Uther arrived with a
huge army and laid siege to Terraby; but despite the ferocity of the fighting, and the numerous casualties suffered by both sides, neither was able to gain a decisive victory.

Still enraged, and now despairing, King Uther fell sick. His friend Sir Ulfus came to him and asked what the trouble was. "Igraine has broken my heart," the king replied, "and unless I can win her, I shall never recover."

"Sire," said Sir Ulfus, "surely Merlin the Prophet could find some means to help me? I will go in search of him."

Sir Ulfus had not ridden far when he was accosted by a hideous beggar. "For whom are you searching?" asked the beggar; but Sir Ulfus ignored him.

"Very well," said the beggar, "I will tell you: You are searching for Merlin, and you need look no further, for I am he. Now go to King Uther and tell him that I will make Igraine his if he will reward me as I ask; and even that will be more to his heart than to mine."

"I am sure," said Sir Ulfus, "that the king will refuse you nothing reasonable."

"Then go, and I shall follow you," said Merlin.

Well pleased, Sir Ulfus galloped back to the king and delivered Merlin's message, which he had hardly completed when Merlin himself appeared at the entrance to the pavilion. The king bade him welcome.

"Sire," said Merlin, "I know that you are in love with Igraine; will you swear, as an anointed king, to give into my care the child that she bears you, if I make her yours?"

The king swore on the gospel that he would do so, and Merlin continued: "Tonight you shall appear before Igraine at Tintagil in the likeness of her husband, the duke. Sir Ulfus and I will appear as two of the duke's knights: Sir Brastias and Sir Jordana. Do not question either Igraine or her men, but say that you are sick and retire to bed. I will fetch you early in the morning, and do not rise until I come; fortunately Tintagil is only ten miles from here."

The plan succeeded: Igraine was completely deceived by the king's impersonation of the duke, and gave herself to him, and conceived Arthur. The king left her at dawn as soon as Merlin appeared, after giving her a farewell kiss. But the duke had seen King Uther ride out from the siege on the previous night and, in the course of making a surprise attack on the king's army, had been killed. When Igraine realized that the duke had died three hours before he had appeared to her, she was greatly disturbed in mind; however, she confided in no one.

Once it was known that the duke was dead, the king's nobles urged him to be reconciled to Igraine, and this task the king gladly entrusted to Sir Ulfus, by whose eloquence it was soon accomplished. "And now," said Sir Ulfus to his fellow nobles, "why should not the king marry the beautiful Igraine? Surely it would be as well for us all."

The marriage of King Uther and Igraine was celebrated joyously thirteen days later; and then, at the king's request, Igraine's sisters were also married: Margaux, who later bore Sir Gawain, to King Lot of Lowthean and Orkney; Elaine, to King Nentres of Garlot. Igraine's daughter, Morgan le Fay, was put to school in a nunnery; in after years she was to become a witch, and to be married to King Uryens of Gore, and give birth to Sir Uwayne of the Fair Hands.

A few months later it was seen that Igraine was with child, and one night, as she lay in bed with King Uther, he asked her who the father might be. Igraine was greatly abashed. "Do not look so dismayed," said the king, "but tell me the truth and I swear I shall love you the better for it."

"The truth is," said Igraine, "that the night the duke died, about three hours after his death, a man appeared in my castle—the exact image of the duke. With him came two others who appeared to be Sir Brastias and Sir Jordana. Naturally I gave myself to this man as I would have to the duke, and that night, I swear, this child was conceived."

"Well spoken," said the king; "it was I who impersonated the duke, so the child is mine." He then told Igraine the story of how Merlin had arranged it, and Igraine was overjoyed to discover that the father of her child was now her husband.

Sometime later, Merlin appeared before the king. "Sire," he said, "you know that you must provide for the upbringing of your child?"

"I will do as you advise," the king replied. "That is good," said Merlin, "because it is my reward for having arranged your impersonation of the duke. Your child is destined for glory, and I want him brought to me for his baptism. I shall then give him into the care of foster parents who can be trusted not to reveal his identity before the proper time. Sir Ector would be suitable: he is extremely loyal, owns good estates, and his wife has just borne him a child. She could give her child into the care of another woman, and herself look after yours."

Sir Ector was summoned, and gladly agreed to the king's request, who then rewarded him handsomely. When the child was
born he was at once wrapped in a gold cloth and taken by two knights and two ladies to Merlin, who stood waiting at the entrance to the castle in his beggar's disguise. Merlin took the child to a priest, who baptized him with the name of Arthur and thence to Sir Ector, whose wife fed him at her breast.

Two years later King Uther fell sick, and his enemies overran his kingdom, inflicting heavy losses on him as they advanced. Merlin prophesied that they could be checked only by the presence of the king himself on the battlefield; and suggested that he should be conveyed there on a horse litter. King Uther's army met the invaders on the plain at St. Albans, and the king duly appeared on the horse litter. Inspired by his presence, and by the lively leadership of Sir Brasitus and Sir Jordanus, his army quickly defeated the enemy and the battle finished in a rout. The king returned to London to celebrate the victory.

But his sickness grew worse, and after he had lain speechless for three days and three nights Merlin summoned the noble to attend the king in his chamber on the following morning. "By the grace of God," he said, "I hope to make him speak."

In the morning, when all the nobles were assembled, Merlin addressed the king: "Sire, is it your will that Arthur shall succeed to the throne, together with all its prerogatives?"

The king stirred in his bed, and then spoke so that all could hear: "I bestow on Arthur God's blessing and my own, and Arthur shall succeed to the throne on pain of forfeiting my blessing." Then King Uther gave up the ghost. He was buried and mourned next day, as befitted his rank, by Igraine and the nobility of Britain.

During the years that followed the death of King Uther, while Arthur was still a child, the ambitious barons fought one another for the throne, and the whole of Britain stood in jeopardy. Finally the day came when the Archbishop of Canterbury, on the advice of Merlin, summoned the nobility to London for Christmas morning. In his message the Archbishop promised that the true succession to the British throne would be miraculously revealed. Many of the nobles purified themselves during their journey, in the hope that it would be to them that the succession would fall.

The Archbishop held his service in the city's greatest church (St. Paul's), and when matins were done the congregation filed out to the yard. They were confronted by a marble block into which had been thrust a beautiful sword. The block was four feet square, and the sword passed through a steel anvil which had been struck in the stone, and which projected a foot from it. The anvil had been inscribed with letters of gold:

* Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anylyd is Ewygwyse Kynge Borne of all Britayne *

The congregation was awed by this miraculous sight, but the Archbishop forbade anyone to touch the sword before mass had been heard. After mass, many of the nobles tried to pull the sword out of the stone, but none was able to do so. A watch of knights was set over the sword, and a tournament proclaimed for New Year's Day, to provide men of noble blood with the opportunity of proving their right to the succession.

Sir Ector, who had been living on an estate near London, rode to the tournament with Arthur and his own son Sir Kay, who had been recently knighthed. When they arrived at the tournament, Sir Kay found to his annoyance that his sword was missing from its sheath, so he begged Arthur to ride back and fetch it from their lodging.

Arthur found the door of the lodging locked and bolted, the landlord and his wife having left for the tournament. In order not to disappoint his brother, he rode on to St. Paul's, determined to get for him the sword which was lodged in the stone. The yard was empty, the guard having slipped off to see the tournament, so Arthur strode up to the sword and, without troubling to read the inscription, tugged it free. He then rode straight back to Sir Kay and presented him with it.

Sir Kay recognized the sword, and taking it to Sir Ector, said, "Father, the succession falls to me, for I have here the sword that was lodged in the stone." But Sir Ector insisted that they should all ride to the churchyard, and once there bound Sir Kay by oath to tell him how he had come by the sword. Sir Kay then admitted that Arthur had given it to him. Sir Ector turned to Arthur and said, "Was the sword not guarded?"

"It was not," Arthur replied.

"Would you please thrust it into the stone again?" said Sir Ector. Arthur did so, and first Sir Ector and then Sir Kay tried to remove it, but both were unable to. Then Arthur, for the second time, pulled it out. Sir Ector and Sir Kay both knelt before him.

"Why," said Arthur, "do you both kneel before me?"

"My lord," Sir Ector replied, "there is only one man living who can draw the sword from the stone, and he is the true-born King of Britain." Sir Ector then told Arthur the story of his birth and upbringing.

"My dear father," said Arthur, "for so I shall always think
of you—if, as you say, I am to be king, please know that any request you have to make is already granted."

Sir Ector asked that Sir Kay should be made Royal Seneschal, and Arthur declared that while they both lived it should be so. Then the three of them visited the Archbishop and told him what had taken place.

All those dukes and barons with ambitions to rule were present at the tournament on New Year’s Day. But when all of them had failed, and Arthur alone had succeeded in drawing the sword from the stone, they protested against one so young and of ignoble blood, succeeding to the throne.

The secret of Arthur’s birth was known only to a few of the nobles surviving from the days of King Uther. The Archbishop urged them to make Arthur’s cause their own; but their support proved ineffective. The tournament was repeated at Candlemas and at Easter, and with the same outcome as before.

Finally at Pentecost, when once more Arthur alone had been able to remove the sword, the commoners arose with a tumultuous cry and demanded that Arthur should at once be made king. The nobles, knowing in their hearts that the commoners were right, all knelt before Arthur and begged forgiveness for having delayed his succession for so long. Arthur forgave them, and then, offering his sword at the high altar, was dubbed first knight of the realm. The coronation took place a few days later, when Arthur swore to rule justly, and the nobles swore him their allegiance.

King Arthur’s first task was to re-establish those nobles who had been robbed of their lands during the troubled years since the reign of King Uther. Next, to establish peace and order in the counties near London. Meanwhile he appointed Sir Kay as Seneschal; Sir Badouin of Brittany, Constable; Sir Ulfius, Chamberlain; and Sir Brastius, Warde of the North, from the river Trent upward.

The most formidable of King Arthur’s enemies lived in the north and west of Britain; and toward the end of a year, King Arthur rode with his retinue to Caerleon, in the west. There he proclaimed a tournament on Pentecost to celebrate the first anniversary of his reign.

It was reported that six kings were approaching with retinues varying from four to seven hundred knights. They were: King Lot of Louthian, King Uryns of Gore, King Nentres of Garlot, the King of the Hundred Knights, King Carados, and the young King of Scotland. Arthur was pleased and sent messengers with gifts to greet them.
crossing the water in her bark. She comes from her castle, which is hewn in the rock, and more beautiful than any earthly dwelling. You must address her courteously, and do as she directs you.

The Lady of the Lake appeared before them. “My lady,” said Arthur, “I beg you to make me a gift of the sword Excalibur.”

“King Arthur,” she replied, “Excalibur shall be yours, if you consent now to granting me whatever gift I shall ask of you in my own time.”

“I swear,” said Arthur, “whatever gift is in my power to grant.”

“Even so,” said the Lady of the Lake. “Now use my bark and row yourself to the sword, and take it, together with the scabbard.”

Arthur and Merlin tethered their horses to two trees, and boarded the bark. When Arthur had taken the sword and scabbard the arm disappeared into the water.

On the homeward journey they repassed King Pellinore’s pavilion, and Arthur asked Merlin why King Pellinore was not there. “He has been fighting Sir Egglame, and has chased him nearly all the way into Caerleon,” Merlin replied.

“What a pity!” said Arthur. “Because now that I have this beautiful sword I should like to fight him again, and perhaps this time have my revenge.”

“That you shall not do,” said Merlin. “King Pellinore is already tired from his fight with Sir Egglame. To win would bring you no honor, to lose would be to increase your shame. And lose you might, because he is still stronger than you are.”

“I will do as you advise,” said Arthur, as he examined his sword once more, admiring its beauty and temper. “Tell me,” said Merlin, “do you prefer the sword or the scabbard?”

“The sword,” said Arthur.

“You are a fool,” said Merlin. “The scabbard is worth ten of the sword, because while you wear it, regardless of how seriously you are wounded, you will lose no blood.”

They were drawing close to Caerleon when they passed King Pellinore; he appeared not to see them. “Why,” asked Arthur, “did King Pellinore not speak to us?”

“Because he did not see us,” Merlin replied. “I cast a spell over him; had he done so, you would not have escaped so lightly.”

When Arthur and Merlin arrived at the court, they were questioned eagerly on all that had happened; and when the story was told, Arthur’s knights rejoiced in the boldness of their king.

Meanwhile, a messenger had arrived from King Roys of West Britain. King Roys claimed to have fringed a mantle with the beards of the kings he had defeated; the fringe required but one half-grown beard to complete it: namely, Arthur’s. Arthur could yield it, or otherwise have his whole kingdom laid waste, and himself be beheaded.

“Surely,” said Arthur, “this is the most barbaric and despicable message ever sent to a king! Tell King Roys I owe him no homage and that before long he will be kneeling before us and begging for mercy.”

The messenger departed and Arthur asked if any of his knights knew King Roys. Sir Naram replied, “I have seen him. He is an intrepid warrior, but overbearing as a king.”

“Well,” said Arthur, “we shall soon discover him.”

On Merlin’s advice, in order to destroy his bastard son Modred, Arthur commanded that, on pain of death, all babies of the nobility born on May Day were to be brought to the court. Arthur then set them adrift in an unmanned vessel, which eventually foundered. However, the plan failed, for the wreck was discovered by a yeoman who clambered aboard and found a lone survivor, whom he took into his care; and this was the baby Modred.

Meanwhile, King Roys had received King Arthur’s reply, and prepared to fulfill his threat.

2. BALIN, OR THE KNIGHT WITH THE TWO SWORDS

King Roys of West Britain, upon receiving Arthur’s indignant refusal to pay homage, had raised a large army, and was now marching on Arthur and laying waste all before him. Arthur was in London when he received news of the invasion; at once he let cry a general call to arms, and summoned his nobles to Camelot for a council of war. The council was interrupted by a young noblewoman who had begged admittance to Arthur, claiming that she had a message for him from the Lady of Avalon.
The young noblewoman, as soon as she stood before Arthur, drew aside her gown and revealed a handsome sword and scabbard, hung from her girdle. "My lady," said Arthur, "a sword is hardly becoming to one of your sex. Please tell me why you wear it."

"Because of an enchantment," she replied, "the sword can be drawn only by a knight of matchless courage and virtue, and such am I seeking. Lately I was at the court of King Royns, but every one of his knights failed. Now I have come to you, because your knights are praised for their excellence even above his."

"I will set an example to my knights by being the first to make the attempt," said Arthur, "though I make no claim myself to such excellence."

Seizing the hilt of the sword in one hand and the scabbard in the other, Arthur strained to his utmost to draw them apart, but to no avail.

"The sword will be drawn without effort by the knight I am seeking," said the young noblewoman. "But there is one further condition: that both his mother and father shall be of noble lineage."

"Very well," said Arthur, "let come forward who will!"

But Arthur's knights hung back. None felt that he could fulfill these exacting conditions, and none wished to be shamed by failure; so they all remained in their places. The young noblewoman burst into tears. "Surely," she said, "amongst yours, the most celebrated knights in Christendom, there is one who is worthy?"

"I am ashamed that none will come forward," said Arthur.

There was one knight present, however, who had been released from jail to witness the unusual scene; and this was Sir Balin, whom Arthur had imprisoned six months earlier for killing a cousin of his while jousting. Sir Balin was raggedly dressed and dared not reveal himself before the assembly, so he waited until the young noblewoman, still weeping, had left the hall and passed into the courtyard; there he addressed her.

"My lady," he said, "I ask you not to judge me by the poverty of my attire, but to allow that it may serve to conceal a knight who is not unworthy. In short, will you try me in drawing the sword?"

"And why should you succeed where others have failed?" she retorted. "But then, since none here has had the courage even to try, I suppose you may as well."

Balin seized the hilt of the sword, and lightly withdrew it from the scabbard. He examined the sword and rejoiced; it was the most beautiful that he had ever held.

Meanwhile King Arthur and his nobles had gathered around, astonished at Sir Balin's success, and several of the nobles were secretly envious. "Sire," said the young noblewoman to Arthur, "this knight will become famous before he dies," and then to Sir Balin: "Sire, please give me the sword again."

"Now that I have won this sword," said Sir Balin, "nothing will part me from it."

"It is for your sake and not mine that I ask you," said the young noblewoman. "If you keep it you will fight to the death with the man you love most."

"Still, I would rather chance my fate," said Sir Balin; and so the young noblewoman departed sorrowfully.

Sir Balin had sent his squire for his horse and armor, and was preparing to leave the court, when Arthur spoke to him: "Sir Balin, you must be angry with me for having imprisoned you; I understand now that I was wrongly informed. If it pleases you, remain at the court, and I will advance you to the barony."

"Sire, I thank you," Sir Balin replied. "I could not ask for a better liege. No praise of mine could equal your generosity; but still I beg you to let me go."

"As you will, then," said Arthur, "although it saddens me to lose you. Please know that if you return, my offer remains."

Overhearing this conversation, several of the barons muttered angrily among themselves that Sir Balin had won the sword by a trick, and was not worthy of such distinction. Just then, however, the Lady of Avalon, mounted on a richly harnessed palfrey, rode up to Arthur.

"Sire," she said, "I now demand the gift you swore to when I gave you the magic sword."

"My lady," said Arthur, "what is the name of the sword?"

"Excalibur."

"Then name the gift."

"I demand the head of the knight who won the sword just now, or the head of the woman who gave it to him. Either will do, for he killed my brother, and she was the cause of my father's death."

"Since I am a Christian king I may grant you neither," said Arthur, "so please ask me for something else."

"I will accept nothing else," the lady replied. Thereupon Sir Balin, who had witnessed the conversation, swiftly drew his sword and beheaded her.
"You criminal!" Arthur shouted, "this lady was our benefactress. How dared you kill her in my presence, in my court, where—whatever her demands—she was entitled to my protection?"

"Sire," said Balin, "I considered that. But our benefactress not only caused my mother to be burned to death, in addition she enticed many an innocent knight to a shameful death by means of her magic."

"Whatever your reasons, you should have forborne in my presence," said Arthur. "Now understand that you are exiled from this court forever."

Taking the lady's head, Sir Balin called his squire, mounted, and rode from the court; his squire followed.

"Now," said Sir Balin to his squire, "take this head and ride with it to my kinsmen in Northumberland. Tell them my news; how I was released from prison, won the sword, and killed my deadliest enemy."

"I am troubled that you treated King Arthur as you did," said the squire.

"What I shall do," Sir Balin replied, "is to ride to King Royns of West Britain and challenge him: if he does not kill me first, I shall kill him. He is King Arthur's greatest enemy, and in that way I shall regain his friendship."

"And where shall I meet you next?" asked the squire.

"At King Arthur's court." So they parted.

Meanwhile Arthur buried the Lady of Avalon, and mourned for her. Then Sir Launcelot, a vain and boastful knight from Ireland, who had long been jealous of Sir Balin, approached Arthur and offered to avenge his wrong on Sir Balin. Arthur gave his assent.

Then Merlin appeared at the court. Arthur told him all that had happened, and Merlin replied: "It grieves me that Sir Balin won the sword, because he is a noble-hearted knight who will yet render you good service. The young noblewoman is utterly evil: by mischance her brother killed her betrothed so she begged from the Lady of Avalon an enchanted sword such that it could be drawn from its sheath only by a courageous knight, who, under the enchantment, would challenge and kill her brother, and then himself be destroyed."

Sir Launcelot overtook Sir Balin as he was riding through the hills of the borderland.

"I have come to avenge the wrong you did to King Arthur," he said, "so defend yourself!

"You may repent it," Sir Balin replied as he couched his spear.

They rode at each other: Sir Baner's shield was splintered by Sir Launcelot's spear, but his own spear drove clean through Sir Launcelot's shield, through his hauberk, and into his body; Sir Launcelot fell from his horse's cropper, and was dead before he reached the ground.

Not realizing that he was dead, Sir Balin had leaped from his horse, drawn his sword, and was standing over him thus, when a young noblewoman appeared on a slender palfrey. The moment that she saw Sir Launcelot lying dead, she dismounted and threw herself upon him, uttering the most heartbroken cries.

"You have killed two hearts with one body, two bodies with one heart," she said, and then, seizing Sir Launcelot's sword, pierced her breast and fell dead next to her lover.

Greatly moved, Sir Balin mounted his horse, and was heading for the forest when he saw his brother, Sir Balan, riding toward him. As soon as they met, they flung off their helmets and kissed.

"How fortunate!" Sir Balan exclaimed. "I heard from a knight at the Castle of the Four Stones that you had been released from prison, and I was coming to meet you."

Sir Balin told his brother all that had happened, and they both grieved over the death of the lovers.

"Since you are going to challenge King Royns," said Sir Balan, "I will come with you. Being your brother, it is right that I should throw in my lot with yours."

In the meantime a dwarf from King Arthur's court had noticed the dead bodies. "Whose work was this?" he asked the brothers.

"Mine," said Sir Balan.

"King Arthur will never forgive you," said the dwarf, "and the knight's kin will search you out and revenge him, no matter how far you flee."

"I do not fear them," said Sir Balin, "but I curse my fate, that by ill chance I should once more have caused offense to King Arthur. Because of the maiden, I shall forever put the service of her sex foremost."

While they were talking, King Mark of Cornwall rode by, and seeing the knight and the maiden, also asked for their story. When he had heard it, he declared that he would search for a tomb worthy of them.

Sometime later, when King Mark had returned with a tomb, Merlin appeared. "On this spot," he said, "will occur the most
desperate battle between the two most ardent lovers of all time, namely Sir Launcelot du Lake and Sir Tristram; but they will not kill each other.” He then inscribed their names on the tomb in letters of gold.

“You must be a prophet,” said King Mark, “and yet you look strangely uncouth. Please tell me, who are you?”

“When Sir Tristram has found his paramour,” Merlin replied, “you shall know my name, and learn from me many matters which will not be to your liking.” Then Merlin spoke to Sir Balin. “It is a disaster that you were unable to save the maiden.”

“Alas!” said Sir Balin, “she was too quick for me.”

“In consequence, you will strike the most fateful blow since that struck at our Saviour: three kingdoms will be laid waste for twelve years, and an honorable king incurably wounded.”

“If this is true,” said Sir Balin, “I would prefer to take my life now, to prevent it . . .”

But Merlin had vanished; so the two brothers took their leave of King Mark, who asked Sir Balin his name.

“Call him the Knight of the Two Swords,” Sir Balin replied.

King Mark departed for Camelot; Sir Balin and Sir Balan were heading west for King Royne’s, when they were again confronted by Merlin, who in another disguise deceived them both until he told them where they were going, for what purpose, and offered them his advice. Merlin then led them to a wood where they rested until midnight.

“Now,” said Merlin, “you will need courage: King Royne is approaching with a bodyguard of sixty knights; he has sent another twenty in advance to warn Lady de Vauze that tonight he will sleep with her.”

As the party drew close to them, Sir Balin whispered to Merlin: “Which is King Royne?” and Merlin pointed with his staff.

“There,” he said.

Drawing their swords, Sir Balin and Sir Balan rushed out from their ambush and attacked King Royne with such force that before long he sank to the ground, severely wounded. The bodyguard set on them from all sides, but proved no match for the brothers’ skillful swordplay: forty were killed and the remainder fled. Returning to the wounded king, Sir Balan dragged off his helmet while Sir Balin stood over him with raised sword, prepared to cut off his head.

“Good knights, spare me, I beg you!” said King Royne. “By my death you will gain nothing; alive I am worth a good ransom.”

“Very well,” said Sir Balin; and then the brothers bound him firmly to a horse litter.

The following day King Royne was conveyed by Sir Balin and Sir Balan to the palace guard, and by the palace guard into the presence of King Arthur. King Arthur had been forewarned by Merlin of King Royne’s capture.

“Welcome to our court!” said King Arthur to King Royne.

“Pray tell me: how have you come?”

“A painful way,” said King Royne from his litter. “I was captured by the two hardiest knights living. They are brothers, and one of them is known as the Knight of the Two Swords.”

“I am greatly indebted to them,” said Arthur. “I wonder who they could be.”

“Sir Balin and Sir Balan,” Merlin replied.

“I certainly did not deserve this from Sir Balin,” said Arthur, “whom I exiled from my court forever.”

“He will serve you yet,” said Merlin. “But tell me, is your army in readiness to meet an invasion? King Nero, King Royne’s brother, is now advancing upon you in strength, and tomorrow you will have to give battle.”

King Arthur, with only ten battalions, met King Nero’s huge army on the plain of Terraby. However, King Arthur’s commanders, Sir Kay, Sir Hervy, Sir Balin, and Sir Balan, fought with such verve that his men were inspired, and defeated King Nero, killing the greater part of his army on the field. King Arthur himself killed twenty knights and maimed another forty.

While the battle was in progress, Merlin appeared before King Lot on the Island of Orkney and, knowing that King Lot had pledged his aid to King Nero, and that in the next battle between King Arthur and King Lot one of them was destined to die, beguiled him with stories until a messenger arrived reporting the defeat of King Nero.

“You have tricked me, Merlin,” King Lot exclaimed. “What shall I do now? Make a treaty with Arthur, or attack him?”

“Attack him,” said Merlin, knowing that King Lot would now be the one to die.

King Lot’s grievance against Arthur had been aggravated by the birth of the bastard Modred, resulting from Arthur’s union with Lot’s wife. So he now advanced upon Arthur, determined to accomplish his revenge at last. His army was led by the eleven kings who had been his allies in the battle of
Bedgrayne, and they too were bent on revenge. Meanwhile, King Pellinore, as well as Sir Balin and Sir Balan, had volunteered to fight for Arthur.

When battle was joined, both sides fought for many hours with equal determination, and neither was able to gain the advantage. Then King Pellinore attacked King Lot and killed him, by first spearing his horse so that he fell, and then splitting his helmet and skull with his sword. The eleven kings and their armies were severely shocked, and some of King Lot's men started to flee from the field. Taking advantage of their weakness, King Arthur led an attack which ended in the massacre of the eleven kings and their entire army.

Arthur buried the eleven kings together in one tomb, and King Lot in a separate one, in the church of St. Stephen at Camelot. King Lot's widow attended the burial with her four sons, Gawan (who was later to avenge his father's death), Gaheris, Aggravayne, and Gareth; King Uryens and his wife, Morgan le Fay, were also present at the burial.

At King Arthur's request, Merlin made bronze candle-holders, overlaid with gold, each representing one of the eleven kings in an attitude of defeat; and then one of Arthur, brandishing his sword in an attitude of victory, to be set above those of the eleven kings. The candles were to burn in the church, night and day.

When Merlin had completed the work, he prophesied to Arthur the extinction of the candles after Arthur's death, which was to be at the hands of Sir Modred in the Battle of Salisbury; the accomplishment of the quest of the Holy Grail by knights of the Round Table; the forthcoming theft of Arthur's sword by the woman he trusted most; and in the immediate future, the fateful blow to be struck by Sir Balin. Finally the birth of King Uryens' son Sir Bagdemagus, who would be Arthur's cousin-german.

"And where are King Pellinore, Sir Balin, and Sir Balas now?" Arthur asked. "For I would wish to have such excellent knights always by me."

"King Pellinore and Sir Balin you will see shortly, but Sir Balan has left your court forever," Merlin replied. A few days later, Arthur fell sick, and as he lay in his pavilion, a grief-stricken knight rode toward him. "Sir," said Arthur, "please tell me: what grieves you?"

"Nothing that you can cure," the knight replied, and rode on his way toward the castle of Meliot. Next, Sir Balin rode by, and seeing Arthur, dismounted and greeted him.
Sir Balin leaped from the castle wall, and was driving them off furiously, when one of the knights cried out:

"Sir, hold your hand for a moment: the lady of the castle is sick and can be cured only by receiving a silver basin full of the blood of a maiden princess. Hence it is our custom to draw blood from every young noblewoman who passes by."

Hearing this, the young noblewoman graciously offered her blood, which, however, failed to cure the lady (who was destined to remain sick until receiving blood from Sir Percivale's sister). Sir Balin and the young noblewoman rested overnight in the castle, and were entertained hospitably.

For three days and two nights they continued their journey without further incident. On the third night, however, while they were dining with a gentleman who had offered them hospitality in his comfortable manor, they heard strange cries issuing from another room. In answer to Sir Balin's inquiry, the host replied:

"It is my son: he has been wounded by Sir Garlot, a knight who rides invisibly; and I have been advised that he can be cured only by blood drawn from Sir Garlot's own body."

"Sir Garlot," said Sir Balin, "is the very knight for whom we are searching. Have you any knowledge of his whereabouts?"

"Yes," said the gentleman. "King Pellam of Lystenoyse has proclaimed a feast for fifteen days from now, which is to be attended by all the nobles of his realm, together with their ladies or betrothed; and at this feast you will find Sir Garlot."

"Then let us ride together to the feast," said Sir Balin, "and I can promise you the blood you need to cure your son."

Sir Balin, the young noblewoman, and the gentleman arrived at King Pellam's court on the day of the feast. They were cordially received, and ushered first to the cloakroom and thence into the banqueting hall. Sir Balin was requested to leave his sword in the cloakroom, but managed to excuse himself from doing so on the grounds that this was not the custom in the court from which he had come.

Once he had taken his seat at the banqueting table, Sir Balin asked his neighbor if he knew Sir Garlot by sight.

"I do," his neighbor replied. "He is the black-faced knight sitting on the far side of the table. He is the most remarkable knight living, because he rides invisibly."

Meanwhile Sir Garlot had noticed Sir Balin staring at him. He rose from his seat, and coming over to Sir Balin, slapped him across the face with the back of his hand.

"You are here to feast," said Sir Garlot, "so get on with it."

"Sir, this is not the first time you have wronged me," Sir Balin said quietly; and then, seemingly in one movement, sprang up from his seat, drew his sword, and效果图 Sir Garlot's head from crown to jaw. Next, taking the spear head from the young noblewoman, he plunged it deeply into Sir Garlot's body, and blood flowed from the wound.

"This spear looks better in the body of its owner than it did in the body of the innocent knight he murdered," said Sir Balin, and then to the gentleman, "and now you can take a cupful of blood to cure your son."

Meanwhile King Pellam and his knights had hastily armed, and were surrounding Sir Balin. "You have killed my brother," said King Pellam, "and surely you shall die for it."

"Avenge him yourself," Sir Balin replied.

King Pellam struck at Sir Balin's head, Sir Balin raised his sword to ward off the blow, and the sword was sheared off at the hilt. Breaking free from his assailants, Sir Balin ran swiftly from room to room in search of a weapon, with King Pellam in close pursuit. He found none until he came to an empty room, richly furnished and containing a bed on which lay an embalmed corpse covered with a gold cloth. A finely wrought spear had been placed on a small, gold-topped table with silver legs. Sir Balin seized the spear just in time to strike King Pellam as he charged at him.

There followed a tremendous roaring sound as the walls of the castle collapsed, killing everyone within except Sir Balin and King Pellam, both of whom lay in a trance. The spear with which Sir Balin had struck King Pellam was the spear which had pierced the body of Jesus as He hung from the Cross: it had been brought to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea, whose corpse it had been that lay on the bed, and from whose kin King Pellam was descended. The result of this blow, as Merlin had prophesied, was that the three adjacent kingdoms were laid waste for a period of twelve years, and King Pellam's wound remained open until Sir Galahad, many years later, cured him.

Merlin appeared three days later and roused Sir Balin from his trance. "You must go from here," he said.

"And what of the young noblewoman?" Sir Balin asked.

"She is dead," Merlin replied.

Sir Balin said good-bye to Merlin, whom he was never to see again, and rode through the ruined landscapes and desolate cities of the three kingdoms. Everywhere people were dead or
dying, and those who were able to speak said accusingly: "Knight of the Two Swords, this is your doing; but vengeance will be done!"

At last Sir Balin rode clear of these lands, and eight days later came to a castle in a thickly wooded valley. In the castle grounds was sitting a grief-stricken knight.

"Sir," said Sir Balin, "tell me the cause of your grief, and perhaps I can find a remedy for it."

"Sir, please leave me to my grief," the knight replied.

Sir Balin withdrew a little, and as he did so overheard the knight saying to himself: "Alas, my lady, that you gave me this sword and failed to keep our tryst: for now I shall kill myself with it." As he drew the sword, Sir Balin ran back and stayed his hand.

"Who are you, that you cannot leave me in peace?"

"Sir Balin, the Knight of the Two Swords. But why not tell me where your lady is to be found, and we will seek her out."

"Then you are the most famous knight living! I will tell you, my name is Sir Garnys of the Mount. I was born of poor parents, and won my knighthood and my lands on the battlefield. My lord is the Duke of Harmel, whose castle lies six miles from here, and it is his daughter whom I love, and who, until now, loved me."

They rode together to the castle, and when they arrived Sir Balin offered to search for the duchess's daughter. He searched through every room in the castle without finding her, and then passing into the garden found a small arbor, where, lying beneath a laurel tree, was the young noblewoman, in the arms of the foulest-looking knight she had ever seen. They were both asleep, and covered by a cloth of green samite. He returned to Sir Garnys, told him what he had seen, and led him to the lovers.

Sir Garnys was unable to control his grief when he saw them, and broke into violent sobs; then, drawing his sword, beheaded them both with a single blow.

"Sir Balin, what you have shown me makes me more heartbroken than I was when I first decided to kill myself," he said.

"I hoped you would take courage when you saw how your lady had betrayed you, and harden your heart against her, for that is how I should have felt."

"I loved her more than my life," said Sir Garnys, and driving his sword through his own body, fell dead beside them. Not wishing to be held responsible for the three dead bodies, Sir Balin rode swiftly and sadly away.

Three days later he came to a stone cross bearing an inscription in gold letters:

IT IS FOR NO ENJOYMENT ALONE TO RIDE TOWARD THIS CASTLE.

However, Sir Balin rode on, and then a gray-bearded old man appeared. "Sir Balin, turn back! You will overreach yourself," he warned him, and then vanished. After this there was a dismal horn blast. "That horn sounds for me," thought Sir Balin. "So be it if it is my fate; I am not dead yet."

He was welcomed at the castle by a hundred knights and ladies, amid dancing, song, and revelry. Then the lady of the castle greeted him: "Knight of the Two Swords, you have to fight the Knight of the Island, for that is our custom here."

"A sorry custom," said Sir Balin.

He armed wearily, and as he was doing so a knight brought him a shield. "Take this shield," he said; "it is larger than yours and you will need it." Sir Balin took the shield, but when he had reached the island and was mounting, a lady whispered, "Sir, it is a shame your shield has no device; your friends will not recognize you."

"And I should be ashamed to turn back now," Sir Balin replied.

A knight in red armor, with red harness to match, was riding across the tournament field toward Sir Balin. For a moment Sir Balin thought that it was his brother, Sir Balan, but then, noticing that his shield bore no device, supposed he was wrong.

They charged and thundered together, and both men and horses were stunned by the collision. The Red Knight was the first to recover, and rushed at Sir Balin with drawn sword. Sir Balin rose just in time to defend himself. A fierce battle ensued.

By the second respite, the armor and hauberk of both had been hacked to pieces, and blood was flowing abundantly from their wounds. Sir Balin glanced up at the tower, and noticed that the ladies of the castle had crowded to the windows and were watching them eagerly.

They resumed the fight. Many hours had elapsed since they started, and they were now ablaze and slashing at each other's half-naked bodies, and even the hardest of the spectators was aghast at their terrible endurance. At last the Red Knight collapsed, mortally wounded, and, immediately after him, Sir Balin.
"Sir," Sir Balin gasped, "you are the most formidable knight I have ever fought. Please tell me: what is your name?"

"Sir Balan, brother to Sir Balin," the Red Knight replied.

"Alas!" said Sir Balin, and fainted.

Sir Balan crawled up to him and pulled off his helmet, but his brother's face was so  wounded and bloody as to be unrecognizable.

Sir Balin came to. "My dear brother," he said, "we have killed each other, and our story will be told after we are both dead."

"When I came to this castle," said Sir Balan, "I too had to fight the Knight of the Island. I won and was forced to take his place. The same would have happened to you: so whichever of us had come first, the result would have been the same. There was no hope for us."

The lady of the castle came up to them, accompanied by four knights and six ladies, and Sir Balin told her they were brothers, and begged that they should be buried in the same tomb. The lady promised to do this, and both she and her companions wept when they heard their story. Sir Balin died after both received extreme unction, and his brother a few hours later, at midnight. The lady kept her promise and buried them in the same tomb, but only Sir Balan's name was inscribed, since Sir Balin's was not known.

Merlin appeared on the morning after the burial, and first completed the inscription:

HERE LYETH SIR BALIN LE SAVAGE: KNIGHT OF THE TWO SWORDES WHO STRUCK THE DOLOROUS STROKE.

Then he made an enchanted bed, which was to drive every sleeper out of his wits, until Sir Launcelot lay on it and broke the spell. Next he made a new hilt for Sir Balin's sword, and handing it to a nearby knight, asked: "Sir, would you please draw this sword from its scabbard?" The knight tried, but was unable to do so. Merlin laughed.

"This sword is enchanted," he said, "and will be drawn only by Sir Launcelot and his son Sir Galahad. Sir Launcelot will kill the man he loves most with it, as Sir Balin did, and the man will be Sir Gawain."

Merlin took the sword again, and inscribed his prophecy on the hilt. After this he built an enchanted iron bridge from the island to the mainland, which only knights of unexampled  purity would be able to cross. He then set the scabbard of the sword on the mainland, and the sword in a marble block, midstream, with the blade and hilt rising above the surface of the water. Sir Galahad was to discover first the scabbard, and then the sword, when it had floated downstream to Camelot, where he was to win it.

Merlin then returned to King Arthur, and told him what had befallen Sir Balin and Sir Balan.

"Alas!" said Arthur, "those two brothers were the finest knights I have ever known."

3. TURRE AND PELINORE

It was natural that King Arthur, having sought Merlin's advice during the early years of his reign, while enforcing his sovereignty over the petty kings of the north and west of Britain who had challenged his right to the succession, should again seek Merlin's advice in the matter of marriage, which his loyal barons were urging upon him now that peace had been established.

"Certainly a king should marry," said Merlin. "But tell me, is there already a lady who has captured your heart?"

"There is," Arthur replied. "The daughter of my friend King Lodegareane of Camylarde. I mean, of course, the incomparably innocent and beautiful Gwenevere."

"She is certainly as beautiful as one could wish, and if indeed you are set on making her your queen, I suppose that you must do so, although many more as beautiful, and more happily destined, could be found."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because Gwenevere is destined to love Sir Launcelot, and he her, and many disasters will result from their love. However, provide me with a royal escort and I will go to King Lodegareane and tell him that you are in love with Gwenevere and would like to marry her."

King Lodegareane was overjoyed when Merlin disclosed the purpose of his visit. "What greater honor could I receive," he said, "than that so illustrious a king as Arthur should choose my daughter for his queen?"

Instead of the usual lands or riches for a wedding gift, King
his sword, knowing that if he tried to retrieve it Sir Tristram would behead him.

"How now?" asked Sir Tristram. "It is now you who are at a disadvantage as I formerly was. But it shall not be said that I am less generous than you; therefore take your sword and we will call the battle at an end."

"Sir Tristram, for myself I would gladly have done with this battle, for I do not believe that my offense is so great that we may not be reconciled. You are offended by my love for Queen Iseult, but you must allow that I have at all times dealt honorably with her, and offered no disrespect to her person. For my offense to you, surely I am sufficiently punished by the wounds I have received today; and likewise your offense to me is annulled. Therefore, I pray you, forgive me, and at the next church I shall confess and be chrismated, after which we could ride together to King Arthur's court."

"Very well, we shall do as you suggest, and may God forgive the ill will I have borne you. Take your horse and we will ride to Carlehylle, which lies only three miles hence, and you shall receive the sacrament from the bishop there."

Sir Galleon accompanied Sir Tristram and Sir Palomides to Carlehyll, where the bishop filled his holy vessel with water, blessed it, and then confessed and baptized Sir Palomides. Sir Tristram and Sir Galleon were his godfathers.

The three knights then rode to Camelot, where they were received joyfully by King Arthur, Queen Gwynerever, and the fellows of the Round Table, and Sir Palomides was congratulated on his baptism.

And it was at this feast that Sir Galahad first came to Camelot and sat at the Siege Perelous. Afterward all the knights dispersed. Sir Tristram returned to Queen Iseult at the Joyous Gard, and Sir Palomides rode off in pursuit of the Questing Beast.

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The Tale of the Sangreal

1. THE DEPARTURE

One Pentecost when King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table had assembled at Camelot, heard mass, and were about to start their feast, a young noblewoman rode into the hall, dismounted, and knelt before Arthur. She had ridden fast and her horse was sweating copiously.

"God bless you, my lady!" said Arthur.

"Sire, I pray you, tell me if Sir Launcelot is here."

"My lady, he is," said Arthur, and pointed him out to her. The young noblewoman went up to him.

"Sir Launcelot, on behalf of King Pelles, I greet you; and I request that you will accompany me into the forest."

"My lady, whence do you come, and for what purpose do you require me?"

"My lord, I come from King Pelles' castle. When we reach our destination you shall know for what purpose you are required."

"My lady, I shall accompany you."

Sir Launcelot commanded his squire to bring him his horse and armor, and then Queen Gwynerever spoke to him:

"Sir Launcelot, must you really abandon us at the feast?"

"Madam," said the young noblewoman, "Sir Launcelot shall return to you by tomorrow dinner time."

"Sir Launcelot shall incur my displeasure if he is away any longer," said the queen.

Sir Launcelot accompanied the young noblewoman through the forest and into a wide valley, where they came to a nunnery. They dismounted and were welcomed. Then Sir Launc-
lot was led to the abbes’ chamber, where he disarmed. Asleep on a bed lay his two cousins, Sir Bors and Sir Lyonel; he awoke them and they greeted each other joyfully.

“How is it that you have come here, instead of attending the feast at Camelot?” asked Sir Bors.

“I was brought here by a young noblewoman, but for what purpose I am as yet unaware.”

Just then Galahad entered the chamber, escorted by twelve nuns, all of whom were weeping. Galahad was remarkable for his nobility of bearing and comeliness of person.

“Sir,” said one of the nuns to Sir Launcelot, “we bring you this child who hitherto has been our charge, and pray that now you will confer upon him the order of knighthood, for you alone are worthy to do so.”

Sir Launcelot thought he had never seen a young man of such extraordinary physical beauty and dovelike modesty.

“Is it his own wish that he should be knighted?”

“My lord, it is,” said the nuns, and Galahad assented.

“Then in honor of the high feast he shall be knighted,” said Sir Launcelot.

Sir Launcelot spent the evening companionably, and at dawn knighted Galahad.

“May God make you as virtuous as He has made you beautiful!” said Sir Launcelot. “Now, I pray you, will you accompany me to the court of King Arthur?”

“Sir Launcelot, at this time, no,” Sir Galahad replied.

Sir Launcelot, Sir Bors, and Sir Lyonel rode together to Camelot, where they met the king and queen and fellows of the Round Table returning from morning mass, and were welcomed by them.

When they came to seat themselves at the Round Table for dinner they discovered a number of fresh inscriptions in gold letters round the Siege Perelous:

HE OUGHT TO SITTE HERE

and:

HERE OUGHT TO SITTE HE

and:

FOUR HONORE WYNTRIR AND FOUR AND FIFTY ACOMPLOYSSED
APRTER THE PASSION OF OUR LORDE JESU CRIST OUGHTE THIS
STEGE TO BE PULFYLL

“Here indeed is a miracle!” said all the knights as they beheld it.

“Surely,” said Sir Launcelot, “this means that today the appointed knight shall sit at the Siege Perelous?”

Then the king commanded that the place should be covered with a silk cloth, and they all took their seats for dinner.

“Sire,” said Sir Kay the Steward, “is it right that we should break our ancient custom by sitting down to dinner before a miracle has occurred?”

“Surely not!” said Arthur. “My pleasure at the return of Sir Bors and Sir Lyonel put it out of my mind for a moment.”

Just as the king was saying these words, a squire came up to him:

“Sire, I bring news of a miraculous happening.”

“What is it?” asked Arthur.

“Sire, where the river passes your castle a stone is floating, and into the stone a sword has been thrust.”

“I will go and see it,” said the king.

The king, accompanied by his knights, walked down to the river, where they saw a block of red marble floating in the water. Into the marble had been thrust a finely made sword, the jeweled hilt of which bore an inscription in gold letters:

NEVER SHALL MAN TAKE ME HENCE BUT ONLY HE BY
WHOSE SIDE I OUGHT TO HONOR AND HE SHALL BE THE BEST
KNIGHT OF THE WORLDE.

When the king had read the inscription he said to Sir Launcelot: “Sir, surely as you are the best knight in the world, so is this your sword.”

“Sire, I know that this is not my sword and that I am not the best knight in the world. Further, if any but the rightful owner should touch the sword, he will receive it from a wound from which he may never recover. And with the coming of the best knight in the world will start the quest of the Holy Graal.”

“My good nephew,” said the king to Sir Gawain, “I pray you, try the sword.”

“Sire, I beg to be excused,” Sir Gawain replied.

Sir Gawain, as you love me, I command you to try.”

Sir Gawain grasped the sword by the hilt and tugged at it, but he could not move it.

“Thank you,” said the king.

“Sir Gawain,” said Sir Launcelot, “you shall now receive from this sword a wound for which even the finest castle in the realm would be an insufficient reward.”

“Sir Launcelot, it was not for me to disobey my liege.”

King Arthur repented of his command, and asked Sir Percivale.

“Sir Percivale, for the love that you bear me, would you try the sword?”
Sir Percivale, out of a feeling of fellowship for Sir Gawain, was willing enough to try. He tugged at the hilt, but like Sir Gawain, was unable to move the sword. No other knight could be persuaded to make the attempt.

"Sire," said Sir Kay, "now that you have witnessed a miracle, you may go to dinner."

King Arthur and his companions returned to the Round Table. When they were seated, and the younger knights had served them, the doors and windows of the hall suddenly closed, as if of their own accord, and yet the hall remained light. All were silent, and then the king spoke:

"My lords, today we have already witnessed one miracle; now it would appear that another is to follow."

An ancient and holy man entered the hall. He was dressed in white, and accompanied by a young knight who was clad in red armor and carried a scabbard, but no sword, and no shield.

"My lords, peace be with you!" said the old man, and then to King Arthur:

"Sire, I bring to you this young knight. He is of royal blood both through his father and through his mother, and he is descended from Joseph of Arimathea, and he shall accomplish the greatest undertaking of your realm."

"Sire, you are welcome to this court; and so is the young knight," Arthur replied.

The old man removed the young knight’s armor, and then gave him a mantle trimmed with ermine to wear above his red silk tunic.

"Sire, accompany me," said the old man, and leading the knight to the Siege Perilous, he removed the cloth which covered it. A fresh inscription had appeared:

**THYS IS THE SYGE OF SIR GALAHAD THE HAWTE PRYNC.**

"Sire Galahad, this is your seat," said the old man.

Sir Galahad sat down, and then spoke:

"Sire, I pray you, go your way now, for you have fulfilled your commands to the letter. And I ask you to recommend me to my grandfather, King Pelles, and to my lord, King Erecchere, and to say that I shall visit them as soon as I may."

The old man left the hall, and accompanied by twenty squires, rode from the castle.

The knights of the Round Table all marvelled at the appearance of Sir Galahad, and at his intrepidity at sitting in the Siege Perilous. But they assumed that it must be in accordance with God’s will.
has been proved by the miraculous sword that there is now a knight who is greater than you are. This is what I have come to tell you, and what you must remember." 

"My lady, I have always known that I am not the greatest knight," Sir Launcelot replied. 

"My lord, of sinful knights you are still the greatest," said the young noblewoman; then to the king: 

"Sire, Nacien the hermit sends you this message: that you are to be vouchsafed the greatest honor of any British monarch, for today you and your fellowship shall savor the Holy Grail." 

With those words the young noblewoman galloped away. 

"My lords," said the king, "never again shall our complete fellowship be assembled at this castle, for soon you shall depart on the quest of the Holy Grail, from which some of you shall not return. Therefore let us go to the jousting field and hold our last tournament, so that when we are dead, men shall remember us by it.

King Arthur had also a secret reason for calling this tournament. He supposed that Sir Galahad was unlikely to return from the quest of the Holy Grail, and he wished to test his powers by matching him against his fellows of the Round Table. 

At the request of the king and the queen, Sir Galahad entered the field clad in a jazerant and helmet, and carrying a spear; but he refused a shield. Sir Galahad overthrew all but two of his opponents, the two being Sir Launcelot and Sir Percivale. Then the queen asked him to raise his visor so that she could examine his features. 

"Now I can believe that he is Sir Launcelot's son," she said, "because of the striking resemblance of their features; hence his prowess at arms should not surprise us." 

"Madam, should Sir Galahad really be so great a knight?" asked one of the ladies-in-waiting. 

"He should, for he is of royal blood on both sides, and through Sir Launcelot eight generations from our Saviour, through Princess Elaine, seven."

That evening the Holy Grail passed through Camelot. After hearing evensong at the great monastery, King Arthur and his knights had sat down at the Round Table for supper. Suddenly they were disturbed by peals of thunder which shook the whole castle, then they were all struck dumb by a dazzling sunbeam, seven times brighter than any they had seen before. The spirit of the Holy Ghost descended upon them, and each was beautified. Then the Holy Grail entered the hall. It was covered with white samite and none could discern the maid who bore it, but each smelt the fragrant odor of spices; and miraculously, before each knight appeared the meat and drink of his own choice. The Grail disappeared as inexplicably as it had appeared, and the knights found that they were able to speak again. King Arthur offered up a prayer of thanksgiving and then addressed the fellowship: 

"Surely we should thank our Lord Jesu Christ for the blessing He has bestowed upon us this day at the high feast of Pentecost."

"My lords," said Sir Gawain, "by virtue of the Sangreal each has received the meat and wine of his choice, but none has seen the Grail itself. Therefore I make this vow: to set off in search of the Holy Grail tomorrow and not to return for at least a year and a day without seeing it more clearly, but to accept it as in accordance with God's will if this is not vouchsafed me."

When Sir Gawain had finished speaking, many of the knights of the Round Table made similar vows, and King Arthur was deeply distressed. 

"Alas!" he said to Sir Gawain, "what have you done? Shall not our fellowship of the Round Table be irretrievably broken? A fellowship I have loved better than my own life, and one which is surely unique for its peerless knights, many of whom will now ride away in search of the Holy Grail, never to return! How can I be reconciled to the dissolution of so close a fellowship, and of the ancient customs by which we have been held?"

The king wept as he spoke, and Sir Launcelot tried to comfort him. 

"My liege, in the end death must claim us all; then how more gloriously could we die than on such a quest?"

"Sir Launcelot, it grieves me to hear you talk so!" said the king. 

When the news reached the queen and the ladies of the court, they too were utterly dismayed, for many besides the queen had their lovers among the knights of the Round Table, and feared to lose them forever. 

"Alas! that my lord the king should allow them to go," said the queen. 

Many of the ladies resolved to accompany their knights, and this was agreed among them, but then the hermit Nacien came to the court with an announcement that destroyed their hopes. 

"My lords, those of you who have sworn to go on the quest
of the Holy Grail must leave your ladies behind you. For this high purpose each of you must labor alone, and I warn you that none who is not cleansed of his sins shall behold the mysteries of our Saviour.”

When the hermit Nacien had gone the queen spoke to Sir Galahad:

“Sir Galahad, is it true that Sir Launcelot is your father?”

Sir Galahad did not reply.

“You need not be ashamed, for is not Sir Launcelot of royal blood, and the greatest knight living? The resemblance between you is certainly striking.”

“Madam, if you, as many others, are aware that Sir Launcelot is my father, why do you ask me?” Sir Galahad replied.

That night Sir Galahad was given the honor of sleeping in King Arthur’s bed. The king himself could not sleep for sorrow, and at dawn went to Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawain, who had risen to attend early mass.

“Sir Gawain,” said the king, weeping, “have you not betrayed me? For now our whole fellowship is to disperse, and yet you will never pity me as I do you who are to ride forth on this quest. And you, good Sir Launcelot, I pray you, advise me, for I would that this quest were at an end.”

“My liege, your knights could not be expected to break their vows.”

“I know it well, and yet there is no joy that could now lighten my sorrow.”

The king and queen went to mass. They were followed by Sir Launcelot, Sir Gawain, and the fellows of the Round Table, who went in full armor except for their helmets and their shields. When mass was over they all returned to the castle, and it was to be seen that every one of the hundred and fifty knights of the Round Table was to pursue the quest of the Holy Grail. There was much weeping and lamentation as they prepared for their departure.

In order that her sorrow should not be seen, Queen Guinevere had retired to her chamber, whither Sir Launcelot came after searching unsuccessfully for her in the hall.

“Sir Launcelot, have you not betrayed me? For I shall surely die if you leave me thus,” she said.

“My lady, I pray you, do not be displeased with me, for I shall return to you as soon as I may honorably do so.”

“Alas, I sigh for you! But may He who died on the Cross for all mankind protect you and your whole fellowship!”

Sir Launcelot returned to his companions, who awaited him, and together they rode through the streets of Camelot, which were lined with people of all estates who wept as they watched their departure.

That evening Sir Launcelot and his companions arrived at a city and were given hospitality by Sir Vagon of Vagon Castle, an elderly knight who made them welcome. In the morning the fellows bade adieu to one another, and each set off in the direction of his own choice.

2. THE MIRACLES

Sir Galahad, still without a shield, rode for four days through the forest without meeting any adventure, and then came to an abbey built of white stone. The monks greeted him respectfully and led him to a chamber where he was saluted by two of his fellows of the Round Table, King Bagdemagus and Sir Uwayne. When he had disarmed they went together down to supper.

“My lords, may I ask what brought you here?” said Sir Galahad.

“Sir, we were told of a shield which is kept here, and which no knight may bear but at his peril. Tomorrow I shall ride forth with it.”

“For the love of God!” Sir Galahad exclaimed.

“Sir, if I fail, will you bear the shield after me?”

“Sure, I will, for I have no shield.”

In the morning when the three knights had heard mass, a monk took the shield from behind the altar and gave it to King Bagdemagus. It was white, and the device a red cross.

“My lords,” said the monk, “I must warn you that this shield is intended only for the greatest knight on earth, and that any other knight who bears it does so at his peril.”

“I do not suppose that I am the greatest knight on earth,” said King Bagdemagus, “but I shall adventure forth with the shield, and perhaps it will please Sir Galahad to remain here until he has news of me.”

“Sure, I will abide here,” said Sir Galahad.

King Bagdemagus set off, accompanied by a squire who was to report his adventures to Sir Galahad. They rode for two miles and entered a valley in which stood a hermitage. A knight
in white armor, and riding a white horse, galloped toward them with leveled spear. King Bagdemagus encountered him, with the result that he broke his spear, was wounded deeply in the shoulder, and flung from his horse. The white knight dismounted and took King Bagdemagus' shield.

"Sir," he said, "you suffer from your own foolhardiness; this shield can be borne only by a knight who is without peer." Then he spoke to the squire:

"I pray you, take this shield to Sir Galahad, whom you left at the abbey, and give it to him with my greetings."

"Sir, what is your name?" asked the squire.

"It is not for any man on earth to know my name."

"Then for the love of our Lord, I pray you, tell me why no man may bear this shield but at his peril."

"This shield belongs to Sir Galahad alone."

The squire asked King Bagdemagus if his wound was serious.

"In truth, I do not know whether I shall escape with my life," the king replied.

The squire helped him to mount, they rode slowly back to the abbey, and the king was put to bed, where, it is said, he lay for a long time recovering from his wound.

"Sir Galahad," said the squire, "the knight who wounded King Bagdemagus commanded me to give you his greeting, and to give you the white shield, which belongs to you alone."

"Blessed is my fortune!" said Sir Galahad.

When Sir Galahad had armed, mounted, and slung the shield about his neck, Sir Uwayne asked if he could accompany him.

"Sir Uwayne, I must go unaccompanied, except by the squire."

They parted. Sir Galahad rode to the hermitage, where he exchanged greetings with the white knight.

"Sir, I pray you, tell me the history of this shield," said Sir Galahad.

"Sir, thirty-two years after the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, Joseph of Arimathea, who had taken our Lord down from the Cross, set forth from Jerusalem with a large party of his kinamen, and traveled to the city of Sarras. At the time, King Evelake was about to fight a decisive battle against his cousin King Tholome le Feynis, who, at the head of his Saracens, had invaded his lands.

"Joseph went to King Evelake, and after revealing to him the mysteries of the Holy Trinity, persuaded him that only by adopting the True Faith could he hope to gain the victory in the forthcoming battle.
“And so it is that in the same abbey where you found this shield lies Nacien the hermit.”
And with those words the white knight vanished.
Then the squire dismounted and knelt before Sir Galahad and begged that he might be allowed to accompany him until he was made a knight.
“Were I permitted a companion, it would be you,” Sir Galahad replied.
“Sir Galahad, I pray you then, will you make me a knight now? And I swear by the grace of God that I shall prove a worthy one.”
Sir Galahad agreed to do so, and they rode back to the abbey, where they were greeted joyfully.
Then one of the monks asked Sir Galahad to accompany him to a tomb wherein was a fiend. Sir Galahad, in full armor except for his helmet, accompanied him, and as they approached the tomb a voice cried out from within:
“Sir Galahad, servant of Jesus depart, otherwise I shall have to return whence I came.”
Sir Galahad approached fearlessly and lifted the cover of the tomb. Dense smoke issued forth, and then the fiend leaped out. He was a terrifying figure, in the likeness of a man. Sir Galahad crossed himself, and the fiend spoke again:
“Sir Galahad, I see that you are encircled by angels and that I may not touch you!”
Then Sir Galahad saw in the tomb the body of a man in full armor, with a sword by his side.
“Good brother,” he said to the monk, “let us remove this body from the graveyard, for surely he was a heretic.”
This was done. They all returned to the abbey, where Sir Galahad disarmed, and then another of the monks came up to him and explained what had happened.
“Sir Galahad, the figure which lay on the body represented the reign of evil on earth. There was a time when sin was manifest, when even father and son did not recognize each other, and then it was that the Almighty God descended in the living flesh of a virgin.”
“I believe you,” Sir Galahad replied.
The next morning Sir Galahad knighted the squire who had accompanied him to the hermitage. When he had done so he asked him his name and lineage.
“Sir, I am called Melias de lyle, and I am the son of the King of Denmark.”
“Then in honor of your royal blood, let your conduct be a mirror to all chivalry.”

“Truly, sir. And since it is you who have knighted me, it is seemly that I should ask you for my first gift.”
“Ask, Sir Melias, and it shall be granted.”
“Sir Galahad, I pray that I may accompany you on the quest of the Holy Grail.”
“Sir Melias, you shall,” Sir Galahad replied.
Sir Melias ordered his men to bring him his horse and arms, and when he was ready he set off with Sir Galahad. They rode together for a week, and then came to a stone cross where bore the following inscription:
NOW YE KNIGHTES ARRAUNTE WHICH GOTH TO SEEK KNIGHTES ADVENTURYS, SE HERE TWO WAYS: THAT ONE WAY DEFENDETH THE THAT THOU NE GO THAT WAY, FOR HE SHALL NOT GO OUT OFE THE WAY AGAYNE BUT IF HE BE A GOOD MAN AND A WORTHY KNIGHT, AND IF THOU GO ON THE LYFTTE HONDE THOU SHALL NAT THERE LIGHTLY WYNNE PROUJYES, FOR THOU SHALT BE SOME ASSAYDE.
“I pray you, Sir Galahad, allow me to take the route to the left, for I would prove my strength.”
“Sir Melias, I believe that my own chances of surviving those perils would be greater.”
“My lord, I pray you, allow me to take that route.”
“In the name of the Lord, do so if you will,” Sir Galahad replied.
Sir Melias followed the route through the forest for two days and then came to a meadow, where he found a timber lodge. Within the lodge he could see a chair on which rested a finely wrought gold crown, and beside the chair the ground had been spread with a cloth upon which were set many kinds of meat.
Sir Melias was not hungry, but he coveted the crown, so he took it and rode on his way. However, he had not ridden far when a knight came galloping up to him.
“Sir, relinquish the crown, and defend yourself!”
“Ah Jesu defend thy newly made knight!” said Sir Melias.
The two knights encountered at full gallop and Sir Melias was flung from his horse with a wound in the left side. His opponent picked up the crown and rode off with it, while Sir Melias lay on the ground, unable to rise. Then, by chance, Sir Galahad rode by.
“Sir Melias, you are wounded? Surely you should have taken the other route!”
“Sir Galahad, I pray you, do not leave me to die in this meadow, but take me to an abbey where I may receive extreme unction.”
“Sir Melyas, I will do so. But who wounded you thus?”
At that moment a voice cried out from the forest:
“Knight, defend yourself!”
“Sir, charge at your peril!” Sir Galahad replied.

Two knights attacked Sir Galahad in rapid succession. The first Sir Galahad unhorsed, wounding him in the shoulder and breaking his spear as he did so. The second he met with his sword; and when the knight had broken his spear on his armor, Sir Galahad cut off his left arm. Both knights fled, and Sir Galahad turned once more to Sir Melyas.

The spear shaft was still buried in Sir Melyas’ side, so Sir Galahad lifted him onto his own horse, mounted behind him, and rode gently to the nearest abbey. The monks led him to a chamber, laid him on a bed, and gave him extreme unction.

Then he spoke to Sir Galahad:
“Now I can accept death when God wills it.”
So saying, he withdrew the spear shaft and fainted. An old monk, who formerly had been a knight, examined him carefully.

“By the grace of God I can cure him in seven weeks,” he said.

Sir Galahad rejoiced, and remained at the abbey for three days, after which Sir Melyas assured him that he would recover.

“Then I will leave you, for I, like all my fellows, must proceed on the quest of the Holy Grail.”

“Sir Melyas,” said one of the monks, “it was out of pride that you set forth in search of the Holy Grail, and out of pride that you parted from Sir Galahad at the stone cross and chose the left-hand route. It is written that the left-hand route is for sinners, and the right-hand route for the righteous, and soon you fell: when you coveted the crown and stole it. The wound that you received was in punishment for your sins of pride and covetousness. Both sins were embodied in the two knights who attacked Sir Galahad, but, because he is without sin, he overthrew them, so you must remember in future not to disgrace the high order of knighthood.”

“My lord Sir Galahad, as soon as I have recovered I shall search for you,” said Sir Melyas.

“May God speed your recovery!”

Sir Galahad departed, and for many days rode hither and thither, uncertain which direction he should take. Then he came to a deserted chapel on a mountainside, and not having heard mass that morning at Abblasowre, where he had stayed overnight, he decided to enter and offer up a prayer for guidance. When he had prayed, a voice answered him:

“Go now, adventurous knight, to the Maidens’ Castle, and change their evil customs.”

Sir Galahad thanked God and rode on again. Before long he came to the valley of the Severn; beside the river he saw a strong, well-moated castle. While he was looking at the castle an old man came by, and after they had exchanged greetings Sir Galahad asked him what the castle was called.

“Sir, it is the Maidens’ Castle, and it is of evil repute, therefore I advise you to turn back.”

“Sir, I may not turn back,” Sir Galahad replied.

After checking his arms and putting his shield before him, Sir Galahad rode on toward the castle. He was met by seven young noblewomen.

“Sir, you ride at your peril, for you will have to cross the water,” said one of them.

“My ladies, why should I not cross the water?” said Sir Galahad, and rode on again. Then he was met by a squire:

“Sir, the knights in the castle defy you to enter, unless you first tell them your purpose.”

“My purpose is to change their evil customs.”

“Sir, you undertake too much.”

“So be it. Now go your way,” Sir Galahad replied.

The squire entered the castle, and then seven knights emerged; they were brothers.

“Sir, defend yourself, for we promise to kill you,” said one of them.

“My lords, do you all intend fighting me at once?”

“We do!”

Sir Galahad met their charge with his spear and sent the first knight flying out of the saddle. The remaining six broke their spears on his armor. Then Sir Galahad drew his sword and struck out with such force that they all fell from the field.

An old man in a monk’s habit came up to him: “Sir, here are the keys of the castle.”

Sir Galahad opened the gates and entered. The passages were crowded with people, all of whom acclaimed him loudly.

“Welcome to our deliverer!” they shouted.

Then a lady came up to him: “My lord, I must warn you that the knights who fled from you will return tonight and resume their evil customs.”

“My lady, what should I do?” asked Sir Galahad.

“Sir, you must blow on this horn, which can be heard two
miles away and which summons all those knights whose lands are held by the castle, and you must make them swear to revert to the customs which they held before these evil times."

The lady gave Sir Galahad the horn, which was of ivory inlaid with gold, and departed. Sir Galahad blew on the horn, and then sat down to wait.

Before long a priest came up to him: "Sir, it is seven years since the seven brothers came to this castle and killed the Duke Lyanowre, who owned it, and his eldest son. Then they made free not only with the castle treasure and trinkets, but also with the duke's daughter. She prophesied that one day a knight would come who would destroy the castle, and so they have since imprisoned or killed every visiting knight, and violated every visiting maiden. That is why it is known as the Maidens' Castle."

"I pray you tell me, is the duke's daughter still here?"
"Sir, she died three nights after she was violated. Since then they have made free with her young sister, who has suffered much, as have so many young noblewomen here."

Meanwhile the knights had assembled in answer to the horn summons. Sir Galahad made them swear allegiance to the duke's younger daughter, and to revert to the customs of former times. Then a messenger arrived with the news that Sir Gawain, Sir Gareth, and Sir Uwayne had killed the seven brothers.

"That is good," said Sir Galahad, and armed and departed.

When Sir Gawain had ridden away from Camelot on the quest of the Holy Grail, he came by chance to the abbey where Sir Galahad had found his shield. He followed in his footsteps to the abbey where Sir Melys was wounded, and when he heard of Sir Galahad's adventures, decided to ride in search of him. "Sir," said one of the monks, "he will never accept your fellowship."

"Why not?" asked Sir Gawain.
"Because you are wicked and he is blessed."

While they were talking Sir Gareth rode up to the abbey and exchanged joyful greetings with Sir Gawain. They left the abbey and before long met Sir Uwayne. The three knights rode on together, and Sir Uwayne declared that so far he had met with no adventures.

"Neither have we," said Sir Gawain.

By chance they rode toward the Maidens' Castle and were observed by the seven brothers whom Sir Galahad had just put to flight.

"Since we have been put to shame by one of King Arthur's knights, let us revenge ourselves on these three knights, who are also of King Arthur's court," said one of the brothers.

Sir Gawain, Sir Gareth, and Sir Uwayne met the charge of the seven knights and killed every one of them. Then they rode on to the Maidens' Castle, but finding that Sir Galahad had already left, decided that each should search for him separately.

Sir Galahad came to a hermit at evensong and asked him for his blessing. The hermit gave it to him, and then asked him who he was.

"I am Sir Gawain of King Arthur's court, and I am riding on the quest of the Holy Grail."

"Sir, I pray you, tell me, are you in a state of grace?"

"Lately I was told by a monk that I am wicked."

"Sir, I can believe you," said the hermit. "For many years now, since you were first knighthed, you have followed the path of sin; otherwise you and your two companions would not have killed the seven knights. Sir Galahad, who is a virgin and without sin, overcame them all singlehanded, but without killing them, which his virtue forbids unless it is really necessary."

"You must understand that the Maidens' Castle represents the imprisonment of souls before the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the seven knights the seven deadly sins which held sway at that time. And in his deliverance of those within the Maidens' Castle, Sir Galahad was acting in the likeness of our Lord Jesus, who in taking upon himself the sins of the world delivered the souls of men to heaven. Now, Sir Gawain, for your sins you must do penance."

"Father, what penance shall I do?"

"As I shall direct you."

"No, good father, for a knight in the course of his adventures surely suffers enough in body and in soul."

"As you will," said the hermit, and thereafter held his peace. In the morning Sir Gawain blessed the hermit and left him. He had not ridden far when he met Sir Gryfflet and Sir Aggolvale. They rode together for four days without meeting any adventure, and on the fifth day each took a separate route.
knocked him off his horse, and would have killed him had not the sword swerved on the inner core of the helmet.

The jousting had taken place not far from the dwelling of an elderly recluse, and when she saw what had happened, she cried out to Sir Galahad:

"God be with you, peerless knight! I believe that if Sir Launcelot or Sir Percivale had recognized you they would not have been so anxious to challenge you."

Sir Galahad spurred his horse and galloped away, not wishing to be discovered by Sir Launcelot or Sir Percivale, both of whom followed him a short way, but were unable to catch him.

"Let us return to the recluse," said Sir Percivale; "perhaps she can tell us which way he is going."

"Do as you will," said Sir Launcelot.

Sir Percivale rode back to the recluse. Sir Launcelot galloped away, and rode at random across the waste lands until nightfall, when he came to a stone cross which, in the failing light, he thought to be of marble. Hard by the stone cross was an old chapel. Sir Launcelot tethered his horse to a tree, and in the hope of finding company, walked up to the chapel. The door, although partly broken, held fast and he could not enter. Inside, he could see an altar covered by a fresh silk cloth, on which stood a silver candlestick with six candles all burning. Sir Launcelot longed to go into the light, but he could not, so he returned to his horse and unharnessed it. Then he disarmed himself and lay down on his shield to sleep.

Between waking and sleeping he saw two white palfreys approach the cross and stop by it. The palfreys bore a litter on which lay a wounded knight, and Sir Launcelot heard him say:

"Sweet Jesu, when shall I see the Holy Grail and be cured? Surely, lying on this litter, I have suffered for long, for a trespass which was not great."

Thereupon the silver candlestick with the six candles moved mysteriously toward the cross, and at the same time a silver table bearing the Holy Grail appeared before the knight. Sir Launcelot recognized the Grail, having seen it before in King Pelles' castle. The wounded knight lifted both hands and spoke again:

"Sweet Lord, I pray you that as you are present in this Holy Vessel, so will you cure me of my malady!"

So saying, he knelt before the Holy Grail and kissed it, and thereupon was cured.

"My Lord, I thank You for Your mercy," he said.

Sir Launcelot wished that he too could rise up and kiss the Holy Grail, but because he was in mortal sin he was powerless to do so. He repented bitterly of his failure, and subsequently was to be despised for it by his fellows. The Holy Grail, the silver table, and the silver candlestick all moved away as mysteriously as they had come, and then the knight who had been healed kissed the stone cross and was helped into his armor by his squire.

"My lord, are you healed?" asked the squire.

"I thank God that I am, through the power of this Holy Vessel. But I wonder that this sleeping knight should remain powerless when such a miracle has been vouchsafed."

"Probably because he is in mortal sin," the squire replied.

"Then he is indeed ill-fated, for I think he is one of the knights of the Round Table, all of whom have set off on the quest of the Holy Grail."

"Sir," said the squire, "your armor is complete except for the helmet and sword. Should you not take those belonging to this knight?"

The knight took Sir Launcelot's helmet and sword, also his horse, which was better than his own, and rode away.

When they had gone Sir Launcelot awoke thoroughly and wondered if he had not been dreaming; then he heard a voice:

"Sir Launcelot, you are harsher than a stone, more bitter than wood, and more barren than a fir tree. Go hence, for you are not worthy of this holy place!"

These words pierced Sir Launcelot to the very heart, for he knew them to be true. He arose, weeping and cursing, and when he found that his sword and helmet and horse were no longer by the cross, he knew that he had not been dreaming.

"So am I brought to shame!" he said to himself. "When I sought only worldly fame, none could gain me, whether my quarrel was right or wrong; but now that I search for holy things, by my sins I am disqualified."

Sir Launcelot sat sorrowing until the first cockcrow, and then, feeling somewhat comforted, rose and walked to the cross. Before long he came to a hermitage. The hermit was hearing mass, and when it was over Sir Launcelot knelt before him and begged him to hear his sins.

"I will do so willingly," said the hermit, and then asked Sir Launcelot if he were not of King Arthur's court.

"In truth I am. My name is Sir Launcelot du Lake, and hitherto my name has been honored. But now all that has changed, and I am the most wretched of knights."

"Sir, surely you have greater cause to give thanks to God
than has any knight living; for has He not given you strength, beauty, and seemliness in excess of any knight living? To God you owe your worldly fame, and yet you have presumed to enter His precincts and to discover His mysteries when you are in a state of mortal sin. He does not appear in the flesh and blood in the Holy Grail before sinful eyes, unless it is to shame the beholder. Therefore be warned: 'God is against you, and against Him none can avail!'"

Sir Launcelot wept when he heard these words.

"Good father, what you say is true."

"Then I pray you, my son, confess your sins."

"Father, for fourteen years I have committed a sin of which I have never been cleansed; now to my shame I will confess it."

Then Sir Launcelot told the hermit of his love for Queen Gwenevere.

"For all these years," he continued, "I have loved her, and fought for her alone, caring nothing for God, and failing to thank Him for my victories. I wished only to win the queen's love and praise. I ask you now to counsel me."

"Sir, in honor of your knighthood, you must foreswear the queen forever."

"By the faith of my body I will do so," said Sir Launcelot.

"Sir, if your heart is in accord with your speech, you shall win greater renown than ever before."

"Good father, I pray you, expound the meaning of the words spoken to me at the cross."

"Sir, you are one of the most gifted of men, and one of the most sinful. God, in His love for you, has granted you these gifts; but you, in the hardness of your heart, have not returned that love. You have not used those gifts in the furtherance of His glory; no, you have used them only in the furtherance of your sin. Therefore you are harder than stone: neither water nor fire can soften your sin, nor may the Holy Ghost enter you."

"As well as courage and beauty you have intelligence: you can distinguish between good and evil; you know well what conduct is pleasing to God, and how His love could enfold you. But you shun that love, by your sins you shut Him out, and in sin there is no sweetness; therefore you are more bitter than wood."

"When our Lord Jesus preached to the people in Jerusalem He found that they were hardened in their sins and would not allow His love to enter them. He wandered out of the town and came to a fig tree whose leaves grew copiously but which was barren of fruit. He cursed that tree for its likeness to the people whose souls were made barren by sin. And so it was with you, Sir Launcelot: In the presence of the Holy Grail His mysteries were denied you, for in soul you are as barren as that fig tree."

"Father, I shall repent my sins," said Sir Launcelot.

The hermit gave Sir Launcelot penance and bade him remain at the hermitage until the following day, when, he promised him, he should be given his horse, helmet, and shield.

3. SIR PERCIVALE

When Sir Launcelot galloped away across the waste lands in search of Sir Galahad, Sir Percivale returned to the hermitage and knelt before the window in order to ask the recluse if she had any news of him. The recluse opened the window and asked him what he wanted.

"Madam, I am a knight of the Round Table, and my name is Sir Percivale de Galys."

The recluse smiled, for she was his aunt, and welcomed him in. They spent the evening companionably, and in the morning Sir Percivale asked her about Sir Galahad.

"Why do you ask about him?"

"Madam, I wish to accomplish my revenge, for he overthrew me in jousting."

"It would appear that you are as anxious to meet your death as was your father."

"Madam, do you know me?"

"I do, I am your aunt. Do not be deceived by my present poverty, for I can tell you that I am far happier now than I was as the possessor of great riches and known as the Queen of the Waste Lands."

Sir Percivale wept.

"My dear nephew, have you news of your mother?"

"Madam, I dream of her often, but I do not even know whether she is alive or dead."

"Shortly after you left her, your mother shrove to the priest and died."

"God rest her soul! I suppose that death must come to us all sooner or later. But I pray you tell me about the knight
that he had only once sinned in the flesh, when he got with child the daughter of King Brandegorius. Sir Bors donned the garment, which was a red coat to be worn until he had accomplished the quest, armed, and took his leave of the hermit.

He had not ridden far when he saw a large bird perched on a withered tree. Below it were its young, starved and about to die. The parent bird plunged its beak into its breast, and as the blood flowed from the wound the young birds drank and their life was renewed. Then the parent died. The meaning of this was clear to Sir Bors and he rode on his way.

At evensong he came to a well-kept castle which boasted a fine tower. He was received by an ardent and beautiful young noblewoman, who entreated him to sup with her. Sir Bors accepted, and a splendid supper was served, with a variety of choice meats and wines. But Sir Bors, in remembrance of the holy man's instructions, called for bread and water, made sops, and ate only that.

"My lord, does the meat not please you?" asked his hostess.
"My lady, I am forbidden it."

Not wishing to discomfort him, the young noblewoman refrained from further comment, and after supper they talked of different matters. Then a squire appeared.

"Madam, your sister warns you that tomorrow you shall forfeit your castle and estates to her unless you can find a knight who will encounter her champion, Sir Prydam le Noyre."

"Alas!" said the young noblewoman, "must I lose the last of my inheritance, without justice and without cause?"

"My lady, may I protect you?" said Sir Bors.

"My lord, I will tell you. At one time King Anyause was our overlord. He fell in love with a gentlewoman older than myself, and of evil nature. When he granted her estates, she began to abuse his power and put to death many of my own kinsmen. The king came to hear of this and dispossessed her, and granted the estates to me. But then he died; and from that time, this gentlewoman has conducted a war of conquest on what is properly my demesne. She succeeded in killing the greater number of my men, and in turning the rest against me. Now I have only this castle; and it seems that tomorrow, for want of a champion, I must lose this too."

"My lady, what manner of man is Sir Prydam le Noyre?"

"My lord, he is the most dreadful warrior in the land."

"My lady, I pray you send him word that I accept his challenge. On behalf of God and of yourself, I will defend your just cause."

When the squire had departed with this message, Sir Bors and his hostess talked pleasantly until it was time to retire. In accordance with the vows he had taken when he started on his quest, Sir Bors slept on the floor instead of on the bed; and that night he was vouchsafed a vision: He saw two birds, one large and white as a swan, one smaller and black as a raven. The white bird spoke first:

"Good knight! Sustain me and I shall yield to you the greatest riches on earth; and in my own likeness you shall be made white."

The white bird vanished and the black bird spoke:

"Good knight! Serve me, and my blackness shall prevail against all that is white."

The black bird departed. Then he found himself in a chapel in which a chair had been set. On one side of the chair grew a rotten tree, on the other two flowers, like white lilies, but they grew so close that they seemed to struggle each other, and their brightness was fading. A holy man walked up and touched both flowers so that they sprang apart. Immediately each flower multiplied and then bore fruit. The holy man spoke:

"Succor is given to the flowers, for they can be saved, but not to the tree, for that is already rotten."

"Sir, it seems that the tree has perished," said Sir Bors.

"Good knight, you must be on your guard when like circumstances befall you," said the holy man, and vanished.

When Sir Bors awoke he crossed himself; dressed, and went to mass at the chapel, where he met his hostess. After mass he armed, and she begged him to take some breakfast.

"My lady, not until I have done with the battle."

Sir Bors mounted and rode with the lady and her suite to the field where her antagonist awaited her.

"Madam, you have done wrong to usurp the lands which King Anyause gave to me; and yet I should prefer that our champions did not fight."

"Madam, you shall not choose, unless it is to withdraw your champion."

An agreement was made that the lady whose champion prevailed should take possession of all the disputed lands. Then Sir Bors and Sir Prydam drew apart for the combat.

They charged together and both broke their spears and were deeply wounded. At the second encounter their horses collapsed beneath them and they continued the battle on foot with their swords.

Sir Prydam was a brave and skillful fighter, and both had
received many grave wounds before he began to feel faint. Sir Bors redoubled his blows, and when Sir Prydam fell to the ground, tore off his helmet and beat his bare face with the flat of his sword, urging him meanwhile to yield.

"Gentle knight, for the love of God do not kill me, and I will swear allegiance to your lady."

Sir Bors granted him his life, and then the old gentlewoman and her followers fled from the field. Next, Sir Bors summoned all those nobles whose lands were held by the castle and obliged them too to swear allegiance to the lady. When all was set to rights the lady offered Sir Bors a reward for his services, but he refused it and departed.

He rode all day, and that night lodged with a lady of his acquaintance. Early the next morning he set off again, and at noon met with an adventure. Coming to a crossroads in the forest, he saw his brother Sir Lyonel bound naked to a horse and being beaten with thorns by two knights. Sir Lyonel suffered his torment in silence, although blood was trickling from more than a hundred wounds.

Sir Bors was about to go to his rescue when he saw a young noblewoman being dragged into the thick of the forest by a knight. The young noblewoman was crying out piteously, "O Holy Virgin, I pray you protect your own!" Then she saw Sir Bors:

"Good knight, as you believe in our Saviour, and as you honor your knightly vows, I pray you deliver me!"

Sir Bors wept when he saw her, and raised his eyes to heaven. "Alas!" he said to himself, "must I suffer my own brother to be killed, or this maid to be violated? Either way leads me to unendurable shame! O Jesus, whose creature I am, I pray you guide me, and if I deliver the maid, grant that my brother shall not be killed!" Then, riding up to the knight, he said:

"Sir, on pain of death, deliver the maid!"

The knight set down the young noblewoman and dressed his shield. Sir Bors charged at him and drove his spear through the knight's shoulder and sent him tumbling to the ground; then, as he withdrew his spear, the knight fainted.

"My lady, your deliverance!"

"My lord, I pray you accompany me to my castle."

Sir Bors did so.

"My lady, who was this recreant?" he asked.

"Sir, he is my cousin. A fiend must suddenly have possessed him, for never before have I had cause to charge him with treachery. But I thank you for your deliverance, else we should have been stigmatized, and the lives of five hundred knights would have been forfeited."

While they were talking they were met by twelve of the lady's knights. She described to them how Sir Bors had rescued her, and they urged him to be presented to her father.

"My lords, I thank you, but my quest leads me elsewhere," Sir Bors replied.

He rode off at once in search of his brother, but for a long time could find no trace of him. Then he met a man appareled in a priest's frock, and riding a pitch-black horse.

"My lord, for what do you search?" he asked.

"Sir, I seek my brother whom I saw being beaten by two knights."

"Sir Bors, do not repent, but your brother is dead."

Whereupon the priest led Sir Bors to a corpse which lay in the undergrowth, and which, mutilated as it was, resembled Sir Lyonel. Sir Bors fell to the ground in a faint, where he lay for a long time before coming to.

"My dear brother, now you are dead and never again shall there be joy in my heart! From Him whom I serve I must ask guidance."

So saying, Sir Bors lifted the corpse onto his horse, and then asked the priest to lead him to a chapel where he might bury him.

"Come, there is one nearby," said the priest.

They buried Sir Lyonel in a marble tomb in a small, crumbling chapel which had been built beneath a strong tower.

"We will hold the burial service tomorrow; let us now repair to our lodging," said the priest.

"Sir, are you a priest?" asked Sir Bors.

"I am."

"Then I pray you, explain to me a dream which I had last night," said Sir Bors, and recounted it.

"Sir, I shall explain part today and part tomorrow. The white bird betokens a lady who loves you dearly for what you are and for what you have done; neither for the love of God nor for fear of your own scruples should you refuse her. To win her would not be to lose your virginity, for that is already lost, nor to achieve fame, for that you have already won, but to win her for her own sake, and thereby to release Sir Launcelot from peril. Because you rescued a maid who was nothing to you, your noble brother has died; now Sir Launcelot is endangered, so it behooves you to
consider painstakingly the choice that lies before you."

"Father, there is nothing on earth I would not yield in order that Sir Launcelot should be saved."

"My son, the choice lies with you."

They rode to the tower and there they were received hospitably by many fine knights and ladies. Sir Bors was disarmed and given to wear a mantle trimmed with ermine. In the warmth of his welcome Sir Bors began to forget his sorrow, and then he was presented to the lady of the castle. She was of striking beauty, and more richly clothed and prinked than Queen Guinevere herself.

"Sir Bors," said one of the courtiers, "this is the lady to whom we have sworn allegiance; and surely she is the most wealthy and the most beautiful heiress on earth. We would have you know that she chooses you alone for her paramour."

Sir Bors was abashed. The lady overwhelmed him with protestations of her love, and of the earthly riches which would be his if he accepted her. With much difficulty Sir Bors refused her, bound irrevocably as he was by his vows of chastity.

"Alas my lord! you would refuse me?" asked the lady.

"Madam, there is no lady but that I should refuse her; and just now, while my brother lies dead, surely it is unkind to entreat me."

"My lord, for your strength and your comeliness I have loved you long and ardentely, and now I cannot believe that you will refuse to accompany me to my bed!"

"Madam, I cannot."

"Sir Bors, you refuse, and my life must be forfeit! Come, and I will show you."

So saying, the lady led twelve of her gentlewomen up to the battlements, where they stood on the very edge, prepared to leap.

"Sir Bors, good knight! have mercy upon us! Yield to our lady or else we must all leap to our death, and surely you will be shamed forever."

Sir Bors was aghast at the sight, for these ladies were all beautiful and richly clothed; and yet he was not without prudence, and determined that rather they should lose their souls than he his.

All at once they leaped, and Sir Bors crossed himself. Immediately there was a thunderous din as the castle collapsed and vanished, and wild fiends rushed hither and thither with shrill cries. Sir Bors raised his hands to heaven and prayed:

"Sweet Father, by Your grace I endure and am saved." Sir Bors rode forth once more; he heard a clock chime, and came to an abbey built within high stone walls. He was received kindly by the monks, who saw that he was a knight of the Round Table riding in quest of the Holy Grail. They led him to a chamber and disarmed him.

"My brothers, I pray you, let me consult a priest," said Sir Bors.

He was led to the abbot and described his adventures. "My son, I do not know who you are, yet you seem young to be of such strong faith. It is late now and you must repose yourself. Tomorrow I shall advise you."

The monks took good care of Sir Bors that night, and in the morning led him again to the abbot, to whom Sir Bors described the whole circumstances of his journey.

"My son, the Lord showed Himself to you in the likeness of a bird. His Passion and the bleeding from His heart were shown by the bird wounding its breast in order to succor its young. The withered tree was the world which bears fruit only as God wills it.

"Then the Lord was represented by King Anyazure, and His church by the young noblewoman for whom you fought against the champion of the old church—the old woman who constantly assaults us with the powers of darkness and evil.

"The black bird was the power of the new church, which shall prevail in the end; the white bird was the old church: white without and corrupt within, for the servants of the devil are hypocrites.

"The priest on the black horse was a fiend in disguise. He censured you for saving the virgin and he lied to you in saying that your brother had died, for he lives still. Then, knowing your tender heart, he led you to the castle where Lucifer himself was disguised as the beautiful heiress who tried to tempt and then to coerce you into sin. Above all, the devil wished to circumvent your achievement of the Holy Grail.

"Now you must understand that the rotten tree in the chapel was your brother Sir Lynel, who is a murderer and one who has desecrated his vows to the high order of knighthood. The two white lilies whose closeness threatened their sheen were the knight and the maid, both virgins whom you rescued from sin.

"Hence in turning from the rotten tree to the maid you did as one should in the true service of our Lord."
The abbot blessed Sir Bors, who departed. That night he was lodged by an old lady, and the next morning rode on until he came to a castle which stood in a valley. A yeoman came galloping by and Sir Bors greeted him.

"Pray tell me, shall I meet with any adventure in these parts?"

"Sir, you shall. A tournament is to be held beneath this very castle."

"Who will the combatants be?"

"The Earl of Paynas is to lead a party against Sir Hervyn, who is nephew to the lady of the castle."

Sir Bors hoped that his brother or at least some of his fellows of the Round Table might be present at the tournament. He rode to a hermitage on the edge of the forest to ask for lodging, and found, sitting at the chapel door, his brother Sir Lyoneel.

Sir Bors dismounted and greeted him joyfully.

"Good brother! How did you come here?"

"Sir Bors, surely no knight was ever so heartlessly deserted by his own brother. For all the love that you bear me, I might have been beaten to death! And why? To protect the virtue of a young noblewoman whose name you did not know, and who could have meant little to you. But now I shall punish you as you deserve, so defend yourself!"

Sir Bors knelt before his brother and begged for mercy.

"Mercy you shall not have; rather shall I kill you as I would any common felon or traitor. You are unworthy of our noble father King Bors de Ganis, and of all who come from his house. Now mount your horse, otherwise I shall not scruple to trample you underfoot."

Sir Bors, although not frightened of Sir Lyoneel, felt that as he was his elder brother, he should love and respect him, so once more he knelt down.

"Good brother, for the sake of the love that is between us, I pray you have mercy and do not kill me."

Ignoring his words, Sir Lyoneel, who was now mounted, galloped straight over him, trampling him underfoot as he had threatened. Sir Bors was seriously wounded and collapsed. Sir Lyoneel leaped off his horse and was about to behead him with his sword when a hermit came running out of the chapel and threw himself between them.

"Good knight, have mercy on your noble brother, and save yourself from sin!"
"Good brother, if we kill each other, surely God will punish us for our sin?" said Sir Bors.

"So God help me, you shall have no mercy!" Sir Lyonel replied.

Sir Bors rose to his feet and drew his sword:

"Sir Lyonel, I do not fear you; I fear only God. But now you have killed a gentle hermit and a noble knight, I pray that God will forgive me for defending myself in this unseemly quarrel."

Sir Bors was about to strike his brother when a voice from nowhere cried out: "Sir Bors, fly from your brother, otherwise he shall die at your hands." Then a brilliant flame burned between them, scorching their shields, and both brothers fell to the earth in a faint. When they came to, the voice spoke again:

"Sir Bors, go hence; leave your brother, for Sir Percivale awaits you."

Then Sir Bors spoke: "For the love of God, forgive me if I have trespassed."

"May God forgive you, and I shall gladly," Sir Lyonel replied.

Sir Bors rode to an abbey which lay hard by the sea. He was received by the monks and led to a chamber where he lay down to rest. Then he heard a voice that said, "Go to the sea." Sir Bors crossed himself, armed, and made his way out of the abbey through a break in the wall. When he came to the sea he saw a ship with awnings of white samite, at rest on the strand.

With an inward prayer for guidance, he boarded the ship, which slid miraculously into the waters and seemed to fly over the waves, but it was too dark for Sir Bors to see, so he lay down and slept until morning.

When he awoke he saw Sir Percivale lying beside him, in full armor except for his helm. He woke him and Sir Percivale was astonished and asked him who he was, and how he came to be there.

"Sir Percivale, do you not know me?"

"Sir, I do, but surely it was a miracle that brought you here."

Sir Bors took off his helmet and they embraced. Then each recounted to the other the story of his temptations, and how he came to board the ship.

Meanwhile the ship sailed on and they comforted each other, and spent much of their time in prayer. Then Sir Percivale said:

"Now only Sir Galahad is missing."
came to a castle which lay near to the sea at Collybye. The walls of the castle were high, strongly built, and encircled by running water. They were welcomed by the lady of the castle.

"My lady, will you and your companion remain with us until tomorrow?"

"No, madam, only until my lord has dined and slept a little."

When Sir Galahad awoke he armed by torchlight, and before leaving was presented by the lady of the castle with a richly made shield. The young noblewoman led him to a ship which lay to at the shore, and where they found Sir Percivale and Sir Bors already aboard.

"Welcome, Sir Galahad, for long have we awaited you!"

Taking with them their briddles and saddles, but leaving their horses, Sir Galahad and the young noblewoman crossed themselves and boarded the ship. Mysteriously, the ship slid into the sea, the wind rose, and they were blown across the waters.

At dawn Sir Galahad removed his helmet and embraced his noble sister, and each related his adventures.

"God Himself must have led you through your temptations," said Sir Galahad, "and led you to this ship. For myself, I would never have found it but for the lady who led me here."

"Alas that Sir Launcelot is not with us! for with him we should feel complete," said Sir Bors.

"If God had willed it, it would have been so," said Sir Galahad.

By now they were many leagues from Logres and approaching two rocks where a natural whirlpool made landing impossible. Hard by lay another ship.

"Our quest now takes us to the second ship," said the young noblewoman.

The ship was deserted, but on the prow was an inscription:

"THOU MAN WHEREIN SHALT ENTER INTO THIS SHIPPE, BEWARE THAT THOU BE IN STEPFAST BELEEVE, FOR I AM PAYTHE, AND THEREFORE BEWARE HOW THOU ENTREST BUT IF THOU BE STEPPASTE, FOR AND THOU FAYLE THEROF I SHALL NOT HELPE THEE."

"Sir Percivale, do you know who I am?" asked the young noblewoman.

"My lady, surely I have not seen you before?"

"Then I will tell you: I am your own sister, daughter to King Pellinore, and you are the man I most love. Now I pray you, board this ship only if your faith in the Lord is absolute, for He will not suffer on board His ship any whose faith is not perfect."

Sir Percivale rejoiced within himself when he knew that it was his own sister who counseled him.

"Dear sister, I shall board the ship; and if my sins prove me false, I will gladly perish."

Sir Galahad crossed himself and embarked first, the young noblewoman followed, then Sir Bors and then Sir Percivale. They examined the ship closely and wondered at the marvelous craftsmanship with which it had been finished. Then Sir Galahad found a sumptuous bed on which lay a silken crown and a sword partly withdrawn from its sheath.

The pommel of the sword was of solid stone, gleaming with many colors, and in each color resided a particular virtue. The hilt was composed of two bones, one from a snake known as the Fiend's Serpent, a native of Calydon, with the power that no hand that ever held it should weary or receive any injury. The second bone was from a fish known as the Eranax, which is found in the Euphrates when it floods, and possessed the power that the holder could address himself to the matter in hand without thought of sorrow or joy in himself, and also without ever wearying. On the sword was an inscription:

"THERE SHALL NEVER MAN BEGYPTE ME, THAT YS TO SEY, THE HANDEL, BUT ONE; AND HE SHALL PASS ALL OTHER."

"In God's name, I shall try to grip the sword," cried Sir Percivale.

He tried but failed; likewise Sir Bors; then Sir Galahad tried and succeeded. Immediately a second inscription appeared on the blade in letters of blood:

"LAT SE WHO DARE DRAWE ME OUTE OF MY SHEET BUT IF HE BE MORE HARDIER THAN ANY OTHER, FOR WHO THAT DRAWETH ME OUTE, WERE YOU WELLE HE SHALL NEVER BE SHAMED OF HIS BODY OTHER WOUNDDED TO THE DETHE."

"I would draw this sword, but for fear of offense I shall not," said Sir Galahad.

"My lords," said the young noblewoman, "the withdrawal of the sword is forbidden to any but you. This ship and this sword were at Logres when King Labor and King Hurlemain were fighting an engagement at sea. King Labor was the father of the Maimed King; King Hurlemain was born a Saracen but later became a good Christian.

"King Hurlemain got the worst of the battle and fled to the ship. King Labor followed him, and as he boarded, King
Hurlaine picked up the sword and killed him with a blow that clove clean through the helmet.

"This was the Dolorous Stroke which brought a pestilence to both kingdoms. No grass or corn or fruit but withered and would not grow again, no waters but became empty of fish; and the two kingdoms together became known as the Waste Lands.

"However, when King Hurlaine discovered the sharpness of the sword, he returned to the ship for the scabbard, and when he found it, thrust the sword home. No sooner had he done so than he died at the foot of the bed, which proves that no man ever drew this sword but was maimed or killed. He lay here long, for no man would dare approach him; then a maid came and cast him out."

When the young noblewoman had done, the three knights examined the scabbard and girdle. The girdle was badly worn, and seemed unworthy of the sword and scabbard. The scabbard was of snake-skin, and bore an inscription in gold letters:

HE WHICHE SHALL WELDE ME OUGHT TO BE MORE HARDY THAN ANY OTHER, IF HE BEARE ME AS TRULY AS I OUGHT TO BE BORNE. FOR THE BODY OF HIM WHICH I OUGHT TO HANG BY, HE SHALL NOT BE SHAMED IN NO PLACE WHYKE HE IS GURDE WITH THE GURDILL. NOTHER NEVER NONE BE SO HARDY TO DO AWAY THIS GURDILL, FOR HIT OUGHT NAT TO BE DONE AWAY BUT BY THE HONDE OF A MAYDE, AND THAT SHE BE A KYNGS DUGHTER AND A QUEEN. AND SHE SHALL BE A MAYDE ALL THE DAYS OF HIR LYFF, BETH IN WYLL AND IN WOREK; AND IF SHE BREKE HIR VIRGINITE SHE SHALL BY THE MOSTE VILAYNES DETH THAT EVER DUD ONY WOMAN.

"Sir Galahad," said Sir Percivale, "I pray you turn the sword over so that we may see the inscription on the other side."

Sir Galahad did so; it was blood red in color and the inscription in black letters:

HE THAT SHALL PRAYSE ME MOSTE, MOSTE SHALL HE FYNDE ME TO BLAME AT A GRETE NEDDE, AND TO WHOM I SHOLDE BE MOST DEBONAYRES SHALL I BE MOST PELLE. AND THAT SHALL BE AT ONE TYME ONL.

"Good brother," said the young noblewoman, "forty years after the Passion of ou Lord Jesu, the hermit Nacien, brother-in-law to King Mordrayns, was born on the Ile of Turmance, which lay fourteen days' journey from King Mordrayns' realm.

"It happened that this ship lay in the rocky harbor which was Nacien's birthplace, and that he boarded the ship and found the bed and the sword which are before us now, and that he remained in the anchored ship for eight days. On the ninth a tempest drove the ship away to another rocky island where dwelled a terrible giant. As Nacien came ashore the giant attacked him, and he ran back for the sword which now lay naked by its sheath, grateful to have a weapon with which to defend himself. However, the sword broke as soon as he raised it.

"'Alas!' he said, 'that which I have most praised I must now most blame.'

"He threw down the pieces, leaped overboard, and attacked and killed the giant. He then returned to the ship and was blown away again, this time to the Porte of the Perelous Roche, where he met King Mordrayns in another vessel, where friends had been busy trying to draw him into evil.

"They greeted each other and described their adventures. Then the king told Nacien that he must have been in mortal sin for the sword to have broken in his grasp, and, taking up the pieces, placed them together so that the sword was made whole again. He put it on the bed and a voice spoke to them:

"'Leave this ship before you fall into deadly sin; otherwise you shall not escape it, and shall perish.'

"They transferred themselves to the other ship, but while they were doing so Nacien tripped, fell headlong on the deck, and was wounded in the heel by the sword. The voice spoke again:

"'This wound you shall suffer for your transgression; you have handled a sword of which you are unworthy.'"

"For the love of God!" said Sir Galahad, "you have certainly proved the truth of the inscription!"

"My lords," the young noblewoman continued, "the next to handle the sword was King Pelles, a righteous king and a true bulwark of the church.

"He lived in a castle near to the sea. One day when he was out hunting he lost all his hounds, and all his knights but one. Together they came to the sea and found the ship. King Pelles read the inscription on the prow and, because he was free of sin, embarked. His companion dared not follow him.

"When King Pelles found the sword, he drew it part way from the sheath, as you yourselves found it; then a spear came as from nowhere and wounded him in both thighs. Those
wounds have remained open to this day, and that is why King Pelles, your grandfather, is known as the Maimed King."

The three knights next examined the bed, and soon noticed that three of the spindles supporting the canopy were of different colors: blood red, snow white, and emerald green. These colors were natural to the wood and had not been painted on.

"My lord," said the young noblewoman, "when Eve gathered apples from the tree, for the eating of which both she and Adam were to be cast out of Eden, she also took one of the boughs, which delighted her for its freshness. Having no box in which to keep it, she planted the bough in the ground, and God willed that it should grow into a tree. And because Eve was a maid at the time, the tree grew white.

"Then God came to Adam and commanded him to love Eve and enter her in the flesh and procreate his kind. Adam took Eve as she lay beneath the tree which she had planted, and their son Abel was conceived. While Adam and Eve engaged in the act of love, the tree grew green, and for many years remained that color.

"Then, beneath the tree, Cain slew Abel, and the color changed again, this time to red, the color of Abel's blood.

"All the other plants withered and died but this tree alone, which grew large and strong and was the most beautiful tree in the land. So it remained until the time of Solomon, who was King David's son.

"Solomon was wise and knew the virtues of all the trees and all the stones, the courses of the stars, and many other things besides. But he was cursed with an evil wife, and because of her, wrote scornfully of women in his books. Then, one day Solomon heard a voice which said:

"'Solomon, do not succumb to the sorrow that a woman has brought to you, for of your own lineage shall be born a maid who will bring to men a hundred times greater joy than you have sorrow.'

"When Solomon understood these words he cursed himself for a fool, and before long was able to verify them in an ancient text. Then the Holy Ghost revealed to him the coming of the Virgin Mary, and Solomon asked if she would be of his lineage.

"'She shall not,' the voice replied, 'but the last of your lineage shall be a knight as holy as the Duke Josue, your brother-in-law, and he shall remain a virgin. Now have I dispelled your doubts.'

"Solomon rejoiced, and searched unceasingly for a text to support these tidings, but could find none. Then his wife came to him and he recounted the message spoken to him by the voice. His wife grew convinced that she would discover who the knight would be.

"'My lord,' she said, 'let us build a ship of the most durable wood of any tree on earth.'

"Solomon summoned his shipwrights and commanded them to build the ship. When it was done, his wife spoke to him again:

"'My lord, in honor of the knight who is to be your scion and to surpass all other knights in the virtues of chivalry, let us prepare for him the sword which is the sharpest of all swords, namely, that which belonged to your father King David, and which at present is kept in the temple. For this sword let a new pommel be made, of precious stones so subtly wrought that they shall appear as one stone of many brilliant colors. Then let it be fitted with hilt, sheath, and girdle, all of great splendor. The girdle I myself shall make.'

"Solomon commanded that this should be done, and when the ship and the sword were ready his wife gave orders for a bed covered with rich silk coverings to be placed in the ship. On this she placed the sword, the sheath, and the girdle, which she herself had made from hemp.

"When the king came to see it all, he was greatly disturbed:

"'Surely we have nothing as worthy as this, and yet how shall we know what knights a maid shall bring hither?'

"Solomon's wife next ordained an imperishable cloth for the ship's awnings, and then summoned a carpenter to the tree beneath which Abel had been slain.

"'Carve out of this tree as much wood as you will need to make a spindle,' she commanded.

"'Madam, this is the tree planted by Eve, the first mother.'

"'Do as I command, or else you shall be killed.'

"Blood oozed from the tree as the carpenter cut it. He faltered, but the queen commanded him to continue, and when he had taken a sliver she commanded him to take slivers from the white tree and from the green tree. These were shaped into spindles to fasten the canopy to the bed, and then Solomon was brought to see the work.

"'No man on earth, only God, shall know the secret of this wonderful work; but as yet we have to discover the meaning thereof.'
not, for I should die holding her who is the most precious Virgin of all time. And you, my lady, by whose convening we have come so far, I shall serve hereafter.”

Sir Galahad and his companions then returned to their former ship. A wind arose and the ship flew across the waves once more. All night they sailed, and were without food. In the morning the ship ran ashore off the coast of Scotland, opposite the castle of Carteloys. As they landed they were greeted by one of the ladies of the castle:

“My lords, if you come from King Arthur’s court, take warning: you shall soon be attacked.”

They continued toward the castle, and were met by a squire:

“My lords, are you from King Arthur’s court?”

“We are.”

“Then you shall repent of it.”

As they approached the castle they heard a horn blast from within, and a young noblewoman came up to them:

“My lords, turn back! For in this castle death awaits you.”

“My lady, we shall not turn back. He whom we serve, and who delivered us from the rocks, shall deliver us from all evil,” said Sir Galahad.

Meanwhile, ten knights had appeared, and dressed their spears against them:

“My lords, yield or you shall die!” they shouted.

“Our yielding shall cost you dear,” said Sir Galahad.

The ten knights from the castle charged. First Sir Percivale, and then each of his companions, struck a knight to the ground and mounted his horse; the three of them then chased their assailants into the hall of the castle, where they dismounted. A tremendous battle followed, in which Sir Galahad and his companions were attacked on all sides by the numerous knights of the castle. Miraculously they defended themselves, and before long all the knights of the castle lay dead on the floor. When it was over, each of the three knights fell awed by the carnage.

“I believe,” said Sir Bors, “that God would not have given us the strength to kill them had He wished them to live.”

“I too believe that He must have made us the instruments of His wrath; for such power surely did not come from ourselves,” Sir Galahad replied.

A priest, bearing a vessel of holy wine, entered the hall from one of the castle chambers. The three knights removed their helmets and knelt before him.
“Father, do not fear us; we are from King Arthur’s court,” said Sir Galahad, and then described the battle to him.

“My sons, you might have lived for as long as the world shall endure, and not have accomplished so much.”

“Father, I repent that we have killed them inasmuch as they were Christians,” said Sir Galahad.

“My son, do not repent, for they were not Christians. When Earl Hernox, the lord of this castle, first came here, he brought with him his three sons, who were all knighted, and his beautiful daughter. The three sons grew lustful of their sister and, despite her protests, each one of them forced her to lie with him incestuously. The daughter complained to her father, and the three sons all but killed him and then threw him into prison. One of his cousins managed to save his life.

“The three sons turned to veritable Antichrists. They killed all men of holy office and burned down chapels and churches so that the word of God should not be spoken. I confessed the father, and he told me it had been vouchsafed to him that three servants of the Lord should come and mete His vengeance upon those within the castle, and deliver him.

“Therefore, my sons, you have acted only as His servants.”

“Father, we could never have killed so many of His enemies without His aid,” said Sir Galahad.

The Earl Hernox was released from his cell; and when he came into the hall, by divine revelation he recognized Sir Galahad and spoke to him:

“Sir Galahad, for long have I awaited your coming! Now, I pray you, take me in your arms, for I wish that my soul should leave my body in the arms of a noble knight as you are.”

“My lord, full gladly,” Sir Galahad replied.

Then a voice was heard:

“Sir Galahad, you have avenged the Lord on His enemies. Now go to the Mained King, for you shall heal him.”

The Earl Hernox died, and was buried with the proper rites.

Then Sir Percivale’s sister and the three knights rode into the wilderness and found four lions leading a white hart. They followed the lions, who led them into the chapel of a hermitage built in a valley. The hermit was in his priestly vestments and saying mass.

First the hart changed into the form of a man and sat on a pew by the altar. Then three of the lions changed form: one to an eagle, one to an ox, and one to a man; and all four sat by the man who had been a hart. Then they all passed through the window of the chapel, but the window was not broken, and again a voice was heard:

“In such fashion did the Son of God enter the womb of the Virgin Mary, which neither perished nor was hurt.”

The three knights and the young noblewoman fell down in a faint, and when they came to, each felt an extraordinary clarity. They asked the hermit to expound their vision.

“Pray tell me, what have you seen?” asked the hermit, and they told him.

“My lords, you are welcome, for you are the knights who will accomplish the quest of the Holy Grail. The Lord has revealed Himself to you in the vision of the hart, which by virtue of its white skin is ever renewed, from old to young again. So did the Son of God enter into the sinful flesh through the Holy Virgin, and in the flesh perish, only to rise again in the spirit.

“The four lions were the four evangelists who set down a part of our Lord’s doings when He was on earth. Many times before has our Lord appeared to men in the guise of the white hart, but none before you was vouchsafed to know Him. And probably you shall not see Him again.”

Sir Galahad and his companions rejoiced when they understood their vision, and remained with the hermit overnight. They left in the morning after hearing mass. As they were riding past a castle a knight galloped up to them:

“My lords, I pray you tell me, is the lady who accompanies you a maid?”

“My lord, I am,” Sir Percivale’s sister replied.

The knight took her horse by the bridle.

“So God help me, then, you shall not pass without yielding first to the custom of this castle,” he said.

“Sir, hold off! Understand that wheresoever a maid shall go she shall not be touched,” said Sir Percivale.

Meanwhile a dozen knights had galloped up to them from the castle, and with them a lady who held a silver dish.

“My lords,” said the lady, “the young noblewoman must submit to the custom of the castle.”

“Madam, what custom do you speak of?” asked Sir Galahad.

“We require that the maid shall fill this dish with her blood, which we shall take from her right arm.”

“My lords, this is a savage custom! And while I am alive I shall not sanction it,” said Sir Galahad.

“Neither shall I!” said Sir Percivale.

“Nor I!” said Sir Bors.

“Then you shall die, for there are no knights on earth who are a match for us.”
Sir Galahad and his two companions drew their swords, and when the twelve castle knights charged, killed every one of them.

Sixty more knights galloped out of the castle.

“My lords, for your own sakes, fly from us!” said Sir Galahad.

“Not so! It is you who should fly, for you shall not escape us, nor shall the maid escape our custom.”

They fought until nightfall. Sir Galahad, wielding the Sword of the Straunge Gurdy, appeared to be everywhere at once, and every knight from the castle who encountered him was struck to the ground as though by divine wrath. Sir Percivale and Sir Bors were likewise inspired and their assailants fell before them, fatally wounded or killed outright.

At nightfall another knight came from the castle to deliver a message:

“My lords, we pray you accept the hospitality of our castle; you have our warrant that your persons shall not be molested. And when you have heard the story of our custom you may be persuaded to respect it.”

“My lords, let us go!” said Sir Percivale’s sister, “and do not fear for me.”

“As you command, my lady,” said Sir Galahad.

They were greeted warmly at the castle, and were told the origin of the custom:

“My lords and my lady, this is the truth. Many years ago the lady of this castle, whom we all serve, fell ill, and eventually passed into a coma. No physician could find a remedy for her. Then one came and said that she could be cured only by the blood of a virgin princess. Hence it is our custom to draw blood from every virgin who passes our castle.”

“My lords, I shall yield my blood to the good lady,” said Sir Percivale’s sister.

“Alas! you will die,” said Sir Galahad.

“A death worthy of my lineage, and one which, I trust, will bring to an end the bloodshed in this castle.”

Sir Percivale’s sister and the three knights were treated as guests of honor that night, and all were relieved that a further battle had been avoided. In the morning, after mass, Sir Percivale’s sister was brought before the lady.

“Who will let my blood?” she asked.

One of the lady’s women came forward and made an incision in her arm. The blood flowed freely, and when the dish was full Sir Percivale’s sister blessed the woman and spoke to the lady:

“Madam, I am bleeding to death in order that your life shall be saved; I ask you in your prayers to commend me to our Lord.”

Then she fainted. The three knights lifted her up and tried to stanch the wound, but the loss of blood was too great to allow of her recovery. She regained consciousness for a few moments and spoke to her brother.

“Sir Percivale, my good brother! I pray you, when I am dead, do not bury me near this castle, but put my body in a barge at the next harbor and set it adrift. When you come to the city of Sarras to conclude the quest of the Holy Grail, you will find the barge in the most below the tower. Bury me in the castle which is our spiritual abode, and where subsequently you, Sir Galahad, and Sir Bors shall all be buried.”

Sir Percivale wept and promised to fulfill his sister’s wish. Then a voice spoke to them:

“Tomorrow at dawn the three knights shall part, until providence brings them together before the Maimed King.”

Sir Percivale’s sister received extreme unction and gave up the ghost; at the same time the lady of the castle recovered. Sir Percivale wrote an account of his sister’s death and placed it in her hand before carrying the body to the barge as she had wished. He covered the barge with a black silk cloth and the onlookers saw it blown out to sea.

As the three knights returned a sudden tempest broke upon them, and, with thunder, lightning, and rain, had carried away more than half the castle by evensong. Then a wounded knight rode up to them, followed by another knight who was accompanied by a dwarf.

“Sweet Jesus! give me succor, for now is my hour of need,” cried the wounded knight.

“Slay, for you shall not escape me!” cried his pursuer.

The wounded knight raised his hands and prayed; then Sir Galahad spoke: “For the love of Him whom He has called upon, I shall give him succor.”

“Sir Galahad, I pray you allow me to go to his aid, for he is but one knight,” said Sir Bors.

“I grant you your wish,” Sir Galahad replied.

Sir Bors mounted and set off in pursuit of the two knights. Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale returned to the castle chapel, and prayed all night that Sir Bors might bring his adventure to a successful conclusion. In the morning they left the chapel...
and found the castle in ruins and all the inmates dead. Then they heard a voice:

"Behold the vengeance of the Lord for the shedding of maidens' blood."

They returned to the chapel and found in the graveyard, which like the chapel was undisturbed by the tempest, sixty graves of young noblewomen who had been killed in order that the lady of the castle should be saved. From the inscriptions they discovered that twelve of them had been princesses. Then they left the chapel and rode into the forest.

"The time has come for us to part," said Sir Percivale, "but I pray that we shall meet again soon."

Both took off their helmets and kissed and then wept as they parted.

8. THE CASTLE OF CARBONEK

When Sir Launcelot came to the turbulent waters of Morayse he felt himself to be in great peril, and in the hope of receiving divine guidance, lay down to sleep. In his sleep a voice spoke to him:

"Sir Launcelot, arise now, arm yourself, and board the first ship that you see."

Sir Launcelot started out of his sleep, and at once felt about him a marvelous clarity. After offering up a short prayer of thanksgiving he armed and set off along the shore. Soon he came upon a ship which was without either sail or oar, but which gave forth an odor of surpassing sweetness.

"Sweet Jean, surely this surpasses all earthly pleasures!" said Sir Launcelot, in wonder.

He boarded the ship and lay on the deck and slept until morning. When he awoke he saw the body of Sir Percivale's sister lying on a handsome bed where Sir Percivale had set her. He took from her hand the letter which Sir Percivale had written and read the account of her birth and of her death.

For a month he remained on the ship, and if you would ask how he lived—as the people of Israel, stranded in the desert, received manna from the Lord, so Sir Launcelot was sustained by the grace of the Holy Ghost.

Then one night as he wandered along the shore, having grown weary of the ship, he heard a horseman approaching. He returned to the ship and a knight galloped up to him, removed the trappings from his horse, and also boarded the ship. They exchanged greetings.

"Sir, I pray you tell me who you are, for my heart warms to you," said the strange knight.

"Sir Launcelot du Do,"

"My lord, you were my beginning on this earth."

"Sir Galahad!"

"Truly."

Father and son embraced, and no tongue could describe how they rejoiced in each other. Sir Galahad recognized Sir Percivale's sister at once and praised her, and then each described to the other his adventures since he had left Camelot. When Sir Launcelot heard the story of the Sword of the Strange Gyrulde he begged Sir Galahad to draw it from the sheath, and when he saw it he kissed it.

"That is a wonderful story," said Sir Launcelot.

For six months Sir Launcelot and Sir Galahad remained by the ship, living piously and occasionally wandering abroad, where they had many strange encounters with the wild beasts of those regions. Then one Monday a well-mounted knight, clad in white armor and leading a white horse, rode up to them, greeted them in the name of the Lord, and addressed Sir Galahad:

"Sir, the time has come for you to leave your father and the ship and accompany me on the quest of the Holy Grail."

Sir Galahad kissed his father tenderly.

"Good father, I do not know when I shall see you again; I know only that I am moving toward the body of our Lord."

"Pray to the Father that I may still be permitted to serve Him," said Sir Launcelot.

Sir Galahad mounted, and a voice was heard:

"Take heed! You shall not meet until the day of doom."

"Sir Galahad," said Sir Launcelot, "if it is so, let us pray for each other."

"Sir Launcelot, no prayers could touch me so nearly as yours," Sir Galahad replied, and then galloped with his companion into the forest.

A wind rose and blew Sir Launcelot's ship out to sea, and for many months he sailed, not knowing whether he was going, but praying constantly that he might be vouchsafed the pres-
ence of the Holy Grail. Then one midnight the ship ran ashore just below where a castle had been built. In the clear moonlight Sir Launcelot was able to see a postern which stood open and which was guarded by two lions. Then a voice spoke to him:

"Sir Launcelot, leave your ship and enter the castle, where in part your prayers shall be granted."

Sir Launcelot armed, and as he approached the postern, drew his sword in case the lions should molest him. Suddenly a dwarf appeared and struck the sword out of his hand, and the voice spoke again:

"Faithless knight! How shall your sword and armor prevail against the will of the Lord?"

Sir Launcelot prayed: "Lord Jesu, I thank You for the re-proof and I thank You for showing me that I may yet be one of Your servants."

After sheathing his sword Sir Launcelot crossed himself and walked between the lions, which threatened but did not molest him, and into the castle.

The gates of the castle were open and the hall deserted. Sir Launcelot passed through the hall and through several empty chambers until he came to one which was closed. He listened, and from within came the sound of a voice singing with unearthly sweetness:

"Joy and honor be to the Father of Heaven!"

Sir Launcelot knelt down and prayed, knowing that he had come to the Holy Grail at last.

"Sweet Jesu, I pray You forgive my many sins! And I pray You take pity on me and reveal to me what is within."

The door opened and an intense ethereal light shone through the castle, more brilliant than all the torches on earth burning together. As Sir Launcelot started forward he heard the voice again:

"Sir Launcelot, enter and you shall repent of it!"

Sadly, Sir Launcelot withdrew, and looked into the chamber. In the center was a silver table, and on it the Holy Grail covered with a cloth of red samite. Above, angels were flying; one held a sacred cross, another a brilliant-burning candle. Before the Grail a priest was performing the consecration of the mass. It seemed to Sir Launcelot that above the priest were three men, and that two of them set the third to rest on the hands of the priest as he raised them, and that the priest held him aloft for the worshipers to behold. Then Sir Launcelot felt that the man must fall. He advanced to the door of the chamber and prayed again:

"Sweet Jesu, surely it will be no sin if I give succor to one who is in need of it?"

He walked toward the priest, but as he drew near to the table he felt himself suddenly burned by a fiery breath. It seemed that his whole head was on fire; he lost all sense of sight, hearing, and speech, and fell down in a swoon. Then he felt himself borne from the chamber, and it was supposed by all who saw him that he was dead.

The following day it was discovered from his pulse that Sir Launcelot was still living, but unable to stir. He was taken to another chamber and laid on a bed. Four days later a holy man came to see him.

"It is God's will that this knight shall live, and in due course He shall restore him. Meanwhile see that he is well tended."

For twenty-four days Sir Launcelot remained prostrate. On the twenty-fifth he awoke, his senses returned to him, and he wept:

"Alas! Why have you awakened me and brought me thus to my sorrow? O Jesu! Who should be so blessed that he could witness Your marvels so hidden from all sinners?"

"Pray, what have you seen?" Sir Launcelot was asked.

"I have seen such things as are beyond the power of the tongue to describe or the heart to recall; and had I not sinned I should have seen much more."

Sir Launcelot was told how he had lain as though dead for twenty-four days and twenty-four nights, and he understood that this must have been in penance for his twenty-four years of sin. Then, just by the bed he noticed the hermit's hair which he had worn for nearly a year, and he felt that his vow to the hermit had been broken.

"What cheer?" he was asked.

"By the grace of God I have recovered. But, I pray you, tell me where I am."

"In the castle of Carbonek, where your quest of the Holy Grail has come to an end, for you shall see it no more."

"I thank God that He has granted me so much; I have done all that an earthly knight could do to deserve it."

Sir Launcelot was brought a fine linen shirt; he put on first the hermit's hair, then the shirt, and on top a scarlet robe. At last his hosts recognized him.

"My lord, Sir Launcelot?"

"My lords, I am."

When King Pelles was told that the knight who had lain as though dead was Sir Launcelot, he came at once to greet him.
They made much of each other, and then the king talked of his daughter's death.

"Sire, I have rarely seen so young, noble, and beautiful a princess," said Sir Launcelot.

Sir Launcelot thanked King Pelles for his hospitality and remained at the castle for another four days. It happened on the last day, when they all took dinner together in the hall, that meat and wine appeared before them by a visitation of the Holy Grail. The doors and windows of the hall had miraculously closed, when a tremendous knocking was heard and a voice cried from without:

"Let me enter!"

The king strode over to the door:

"Sire, you shall not enter, for the Holy Grail is here. Go now to another castle, for surely you are not one who has sought the Grail, but one who has turned from the service of our Lord to the service of the devil."

The knight without stormed at the king's words.

"Sir, whence have you come?" asked the king.

"I am Sir Ector de Marys, brother to my lord Sir Launcelot."

"Alas! that I have so dishonored you," said the king, "for your brother is within."

"So are my shame and my sorrow doubled! And all this was foretold from our dreams by the hermit Nacien, when Sir Gawain and I visited him on the hill."

Sir Ector galloped away from the castle, and King Pelles told Sir Launcelot what had taken place. Sir Launcelot took up his arms and sadly bade King Pelles adieu, saying that now he would return to the realm of Logres.

After riding through many lands Sir Launcelot came to the white stone abbey where King Bagdemagus was buried. He was warmly received by the monks, and only in the morning, after hearing mass, did he notice the tomb whose inscription bore the name of King Bagdemagus and that of Sir Gawain, who had killed him, Sir Launcelot mourned for the dead king, and had he died at the hands of any other than Sir Gawain, would have sworn to avenge him.

"Alas! he will be missed at King Arthur's court," he said to himself.

Sir Launcelot rode next to the abbey where Sir Galahad had won his white shield with the red cross, and where he had exorcised the fiend in the tomb. Then he returned to Camelot.

He was received joyfully by King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, and he discovered that Sir Ector, Sir Gawain, and Sir

Lyoneel had already returned from the quest, but that more than half the knights of the Round Table had lost their lives. He then described his adventures, and those of Sir Percivale, Sir Bors, and his son Sir Galahad, as far as he knew them.

"For the love of God, I wish that those three were here now," said King Arthur.

"Sire, of those three one only will return; the other two you shall never see again," Sir Launcelot replied.

9. THE MIRACLE OF SIR GALAHAD

After much fruitless searching, Sir Galahad found the abbey where King Mordrayne lay wounded. The monks led him to the king when he had heard mass, and the king spoke:

"Sir Galahad, flower of all knighthood, whose coming I have awaited for so long, welcome! I pray you take me in your arms and hold me to your breast, for you alone, true servant of Christ that you are, possess the virginity of the white lily together with the virtue of the burning rose: qualities of the Holy Ghost, by which my flesh shall be made young again."

Taking the ancient king into his arms, Sir Galahad prayed: "Sweet Jesu, I pray You enter me!"

Sir Galahad's prayer was heard and the ancient king's flesh was made young again, before his soul departed from his body.

Sir Galahad gave King Mordrayne a royal burial and then rode forth into the wilderness, where he came to a burning well. It was the power of lust which had caused the water to boil, but the power of Sir Galahad's chastity was greater, and when he touched the well the waters cooled, and thereafter the well bore his name.

Sir Galahad rode next to the country of Gore and came to the abbey where King Bagdemagus lay buried, also the son of Joseph of Arimathea and Simeon. He discovered that in the crypt beneath the minster was a burning tomb, and he asked the brothers why it was so.

"Sir, this miracle shall be brought to an end only by the knight who surpasses all the knights of the Round Table."
They made much of each other, and then the king talked of 
his daughter's death.

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princess," said Sir Launcelot.

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crypt beneath the minster was a burning tomb, and he asked 
the brothers why it was so.

"Sir, this miracle shall be brought to an end only by the 
knight who surpasses all the knights of the Round Table."
"Brothers, I pray you lead me there."

"Willingly."

They descended the steps into the crypt, and as Sir Galahad approached the burning tomb the flames flickered and died. Then a voice was heard:

"Praise be to God! For now this soul is set free from earthly pain and may enter the joys of paradise. I am your kinsman and for three centuries have suffered this fire for my sin against Joseph of Arimathea."

Sir Galahad carried the body into the minster, and lay all that night in the abbey. In the morning he buried his kinsman by the altar, blessed the monks, and departed for the castle of the Slaughtered King, which he reached five days later.

Sir Percivale meanwhile was following in Sir Galahad's footsteps, only five days behind him, and as he progressed was told of his miraculous deeds. Then, riding out of the forest one day, he met Sir Bors. They embraced and recounted to each other their adventures.

"In eighteen months I have not slept more than ten times in the company of my fellow men," said Sir Bors. "For the rest I have been alone in the wilderness, in the thick of the forest, or up on the bare mountains. But God has always comforted me."

They rode together to the castle of Carbonek, where Sir Galahad had preceded them, and where King Pelles greeted them warmly as knights who were to complete the quest of the Holy Grail.

Then Prince Elyazar brought them the broken spear with which Joseph of Arimathea had been wounded in the thigh. First Sir Bors took the pieces, but swooned when he touched them; then Sir Percivale, but he likewise could not mend them, so he handed the pieces to Sir Galahad, saying:

"Surely you are the one knight on earth who might make this spear whole again."

Sir Galahad took the two pieces and set them together, and at once it was as if the spear had never been broken, so firmly were they forged. It was agreed that the spear should be given to Sir Bors in recognition of his unfailing faith and courage.

At evensong when all the knights of the court were seated in the hall for supper, the spear suddenly appeared above them, huge, and burning with such intensity that many of the beholders fainted. Then a voice was heard:

"Go hence, all those who are unfit to sup at the table of Jesus Christ our Lord; for His servants shall now be fed."
completed the mass he rose, kissed Sir Galahad, and bade him kiss his fellows. Then he said:

"Now, servants of Christ, you shall partake of the flesh which no earthly man has tasted before."

The bishop vanished and all at the table waited in awe for what should befall them, and prayed silently. The figure of our Lord rose from the Grail, made the signs of His Passion, bleeding openly before them, and then spoke:

"Good knights, my true servants, my children: you who have travailed from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit, from you I shall not hide myself, but reveal to you in part my hidden mysteries! And now you shall partake of the flesh which you have sought."

The figure of Christ took the Holy Grail and offered it in turn to Sir Galahad and to each of his fellows; and that of which they partook was of a holy and marvelous sweetness, such as no tongue could describe. Then the figure of Christ spoke to Sir Galahad:

"My son, do you know what I hold in my hands?"

"My Lord, I do not, unless You tell me."

"You see the dish from which I ate the lamb on Easter day, and this has been your heart’s desire. Tonight the Grail shall leave the realm of Logres forever, because the people here have sinned and are not worthy of it. But you shall see it even more clearly than you have seen it today, when you enter the Spiritual Palace in the city of Sarra. Therefore go, with your companions Sir Percivale and Sir Bors, take with you the Sword of the Strangel Gwyrthis, and ride until you come to a ship which you will find ready for you. Now, take some of the blood from the spear and anoint the Maimed King on the arms and on the legs, and he shall be healed."

"My Lord, shall not the remaining knights accompany us?"

"No, for I am about to leave you, and I wish that some of my apostles would be here and some in Sarra. I will tell you that two of you shall die in my service and the third bring tidings of what has happened to you."

Thereupon the figure of Christ blessed them and vanished.

Sir Galahad put his fingers on the bloody spear and then touched the Maimed King on the arms and on the legs, and he was healed. He clothed himself, rose from the bed, and uttered a prayer of thanksgiving. Subsequently he joined a monastery of white monks and died a holy man.

At midnight a voice was heard in the hall of the castle:

"My sons—those whom I have chosen, not those who are only my friends, or yet my enemies—go now as I have bidden you."

In all haste Sir Galahad, Sir Percivale, and Sir Bors took up their armor and prepared to depart. Before they left, the three knights from Gaul, one of whom was the son of King Claudus, begged them to commend them to Sir Launcelot, King Arthur, and his knights of the Round Table.

Sir Galahad and his companions rode for three days and then came to the shore where their ship awaited them. On board they found the silver table and the Holy Grail covered with a cloth of red samite. In reverence to these tokens they all knelt down and prayed, and it was then that Sir Galahad prayed that his soul might be freed from his body. A voice answered him:

"Sir Galahad, your prayer has been heard. Your body shall perish that your soul may live."

Half hearing the voice, Sir Percivale asked Sir Galahad what had come to pass.

"I will tell you: I have longed for the death of my body since we beheld the miracle of the Holy Grail, for then I knew such joy as no man on earth may know, and my soul craves for the Holy Trinity, and every day to behold the majesty of our Lord."

Sometime later Sir Galahad’s companions spoke to him again:

"Sir Galahad, are you not named to lie on this bed?"

Sir Galahad lay down on the bed and slept. When he awoke they had come to the city of Sarra, and as they landed they saw the ship bearing the body of Sir Percivale’s sister.

"In the name of the Lord! my sister has held her covenant," said Sir Percivale.

Sir Bors and Sir Percivale carried the silver table, and Sir Galahad followed them until they came to the city gates, where they saw a cripple. Sir Galahad commanded him, "Bear this heavy table."

"My lords, I have not walked without crutches for ten years," the old cripple replied.

"Arise in good faith, and forget that you have been a cripple," said Sir Galahad.

The cripple rose and was healed. Together with Sir Galahad he carried the table. News of the miracle spread swiftly through the city; and when the three knights had buried Sir Percivale’s sister with the proper rites, they were summoned to appear
before the king, whose name was Estorause, and questioned. They told him the true story of the Holy Grail.

King Estorause was descended from a long line of pagans, and was himself a tyrant. He commanded that the three knights be imprisoned in a dungeon.

By the mercy of the Lord, the Holy Grail appeared in the dungeon, and from it the three knights received succor throughout their imprisonment. At the end of the year the king was brought to his deathbed; he summoned the three knights and begged their forgiveness, and they granted it to him.

Thoroughly dismayed, the citizens of Sarras convened a council to appoint a new king. When they had all assembled they were addressed by an unknown voice:

"Citizens! appoint the youngest of the three knights your king, for he shall maintain you, both you and yours."

Sir Galahad was crowned king, on pain of death. When this was done he ordained a chest of gold, set with precious stones, to contain the Holy Grail; and every day at dawn he and his two companions knelt before it and prayed.

On the Sunday following the coronation they found a figure in the vestments of a bishop kneeling before the Grail and saying the mass of our Lady. About the figure angels were flying as they might have about Christ Himself. When the mass was over, the bishop spoke to Sir Galahad:

"Advance, servant of our Lord, and you shall see what you have most wished to see."

Sir Galahad advanced, and soon began to tremble before the unearthly vision. Then he raised his hands and prayed:

"Blessed Jesuf! I thank you for giving me what I have desired; and now, if it please you, I pray, may I leave this world?"

The bishop gave to Sir Galahad the Body of our Lord, and Sir Galahad received Him meekly.

"And now, do you know who I am?" the bishop asked.

"I do not," Sir Galahad replied.

"I am Joseph, the son of Joseph of Arimathea, and the Lord has sent me hither to bear you fellowship. I was chosen because you resemble me in two things: you have witnessed the marvel of the Holy Grail, and you are a virgin—as I was, and am."

Sir Galahad blessed and embraced Sir Percivale and Sir Bors and then spoke:

"My lords, I pray you greet my father Sir Launcelot for me, and bid him remember how ephemeral is this earth!"

Sir Galahad knelt down and prayed, and his soul was borne visibly to heaven by a company of angels. Then a hand appeared and took the Holy Grail and the spear and bore them also to heaven, and no man on earth has seen them since.

Sir Galahad was mourned by Sir Percivale and Sir Bors, both of whom would have been overcome by despair had not they been virtuous men. And he was also mourned by the citizens of Sarras.

Sir Percivale left the city, and adopting hermit’s weeds, lived a holy life for a year and two months, and then died. Sir Bors, who had remained in secular clothing, buried him beneath the Spiritual Palace next to his sister and to Sir Galahad, and then shipped to the realm of Logres.

Once in the realm of Logres, Sir Bors rode straight to Camelot, and was received at King Arthur’s court with the greatest possible joy. Then King Arthur summoned his scribes, and Sir Bors and Sir Launcelot recounted all their adventures, and those of their fellows, and they were recorded, and the book of the Holy Grail was placed in the library at Salisbury.

Then Sir Bors spoke to Sir Launcelot:

"Sir Galahad sends his last greetings, first to you, and then to all those of the court of King Arthur; and so does Sir Percivale. I buried them both with my own hands in the city of Sarras, and Sir Galahad’s last words for you were, ‘Remember how ephemeral is this earth!’ “

"That is true, and I trust to God that I may avail myself of his prayer.” Then Sir Launcelot took Sir Bors in his arms:

“Good cousin, you are most welcome! Please know that whatsoever I may do for you or your kin I shall do while the spirit still burns in this poor body; this I promise you faithfully. Also, dear cousin, while we live, let us two never be parted.”

“Sir Launcelot, as you will, so will I,” Sir Bors replied.