

# Tales from the Old French

translated by

Isabel Butler

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# The Lay of the Bird



nce upon a time, a hundred years and more agone, there lived a rich villein; his name I know not for certain, but he was rich as beseemeth a great lord in woodland, stream and meadow, and in whatsoever else longeth to a puissant man. And to tell you the sum thereof, his manor was so goodly no town, or burg, or castle hath its like, for to tell you true, in all the world is none other so fair and delectable; and if any were to show you its form and fashion, the tale would seem to you but fable, for none, methinketh, could ever make such a keep, or so mighty a tower. Round about it ran a river, encircling all the close, that the orchard, which was of great price, was all walled in by wood and water. Wise was the gentle knight who contrived it, but from him it went to his son, who sold it to this villein; so passed it from hand to hand: and wit ye well, an ill heir oftentimes bringeth thorpe and manor into dishonour.

Fair as man can desire was that orchard, and therein grew many an herb whose name I know not; yet may I tell you of a truth there were roses and flowers that gave forth a strong and pleasant fragrance; and such manner of spices grew there that if any creature, suffering from sickness and infirmity, were brought thither in a litter, and lay in that orchard but for the space of a single night, he would go forth healed and strong; so rich it was in goodly herbs. And the meadow was so level even that in it was neither hill nor hollow, and all the tree-tops were of one height; no other orchard close so fair was there in all the world. Ask ye not of its fruit, for none such shall ye find; but in the garden they ripened in every season. Wise was he who contrived it, and by enchantment he wrought it, whereof within was many a proof.

Full great was the orchard and wide, like a round ring in its form; and in its midst was a fountain whose waters were clear and fresh, and

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ran so swiftly they seemed to boil in fury, yet was it colder than marble. A goodly tree gave shade there, wide reaching were the branches and cunningly trained; good store of leaves there were, for in the longest day of summer, when came the month of May, ye could not see a ray of the sun, so leafy was it. Full dear should that tree be held, for its kind was such that it kept its leaves in all seasons, and neither wind nor storm had might to strip its bark or its branches.

Pleasant and delectable was that green tree; and to it twice each day, and no more, came a bird to sing, in the morning namely, and again at eventide. So wondrous fair was the bird it were over long to tell you all its fashion. More small it was than the sparrow, yet somewhat greater than the wren, and it sang so sweetly and fairly that know ye of a sooth, not nightingale, nor merle, nor mavis, nor starling, methinketh, nor voice of lark or calender, were so good to hear as was its song. And it was so ready with refrains and lays and songs and new tunes, that harp, or viol, or rebec were as nought beside it. So wondrous was its song that never before was its like heard of living man, for such was its virtue that no man might be so sorrowful, but if he heard it sing, he must straightway rejoice, and forget all heaviness and grief; and though he had never before spoken of love, now was he kindled by it, and deemed himself worshipful as king or emperor, though he were but villein or burgess; and even had he passed his hundredth year, if, as he yet lingered in the world, he heard the song of the bird, he deemed himself then but as a youth and a stripling, and so comely, he must be loved of ladies and maids and damsels. But yet another wondrous virtue had it; for that orchard might not endure, if the bird came not thither to sing its sweet refrain; for out of song issueth love, which giveth their virtue to flower and tree and coppice; whereas, if the bird were gone, the orchard would straightway wither, and the fountain run dry, for that they kept their virtue only by reason of the song.

Now it was the wont of the villein, who was master there, to come twice each day to hear this sweetness. So on a morning, he came to the fountain beneath the tree to wash his face in the waters; and from the branches the bird sang to him loud and clear a song of most delectable

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cadence; good was the lay to hear and ensample might one draw therefrom whereby one were bettered at the last. For in his language the bird said: "Listen ye to my song, both knight and clerk and layman, all ye who have to do with love, and suffer his torments; and to ye likewise I speak, ye maids fair and sweet, who would have the world for your own. And I tell you of a sooth, ye should love God before all things, and hold his law and his commandments; go ye with good heart to the minster, and give heed to the holy office, for to hear God's service cometh not amiss to any man; and to tell you true, God and love are of one accord. For God loveth honour and courtesy, and true Love despiseth them not; God hateth pride and treachery, and Love likewise holdeth them in despite; God giveth ear to sweet prayer, and from it Love turneth not away; and above all else God desireth largesse, for in him is nought of ill, but good only. The misers are the envious hearted, and it is the jealous who are the covetous; the churlish are the wicked, and the traitors are the vile; but wisdom and courtesy, honour and loyalty uphold Love; and if ye hold to this ye may have both God and the world." So sang the bird his lay.

But when he saw the churl, who was cruel and envious, sit listening beneath the tree, then sang he in another manner: "Flow ye no more, O river; waste to ruin, ye donjons; and towers, fall ye down; fade, ye flowers; dry and wither, ye herbs; bear no more fruit, ye trees; for here, of old, clerks and knights and ladies were wont to give ear to me, who held the fountain full dear, and drew delight from my song, and loved the better par amors; and by reason of it they did much largess, and practised courtesy and prowess, and upheld chivalry; but now am I heard only by a churl, who is full of envy, and to whom silver and gold are more dear than the service of Love; the knights and ladies came to hear me for delight, and for Love's sake, and to lighten their hearts, but this man cometh only that he may eat the better and drink the better."

And when the bird had so sung it flew away; and the churl, who yet lingered there, bethought him if he might not take it; easily might he sell it full dear, or, if he could not sell it, he would shut it up in a cage that it might sing to him early and late. So he contrived a device, and arranged

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it; he sought and looked and spied until he made sure of the branches whereon the bird sat oftenest; then he maketh a snare and spread it,—well hath he contrived the thing. And when eventide came, the bird returned again to the orchard, and so soon as it lighted on the tree was straightway taken in the net. Thereupon the villein, the caitiff, the felon, climbeth up and taketh the bird. “Such reward hath he ever that serveth a churl, methinketh,” saith the bird. “Now ill hast thou done in that thou hast taken me, for of me shalt thou get small ransom.” “Yet shall I have many a song of this capture,” quoth the Villein; “before, ye served according to your own will, but now shall ye serve after mine.”

“This throw is evilly divided, and the worsor half falleth to me,” saith the bird. “Of old, I had field and wood and river and meadow, according to my desire, but now shall I be prisoned in a cage; never again shall I know joy and solace. Of old, I was wont to live by prey, now must I, like any prisoner, have my meat doled out to me. Prithee, fair, sweet friend, let me go; for be ye sage and certain never will I sing as prisoner.” “By my faith, then I will eat you up; on no other terms shall ye escape.” “Poor victual shall ye find in me, so small and slight am I; and if ye kill so frail a thing, in no wise shall your worship be increased. To slay me were very sin, but it were a good deed to set me free.” “By my faith, ye speak idly, for the more you beseech me the less will I do.” “Certes,” saith the bird, “ye say well, for so runneth the law; and often have we heard it said that fair reasoning angers the churl. But a proverb teacheth and showeth us that necessity is a hard master; here my strength may not avail me, but if you will set me free, I will make you wise with three wisdoms that were never yet known to any man of your lineage, and which would much avail you.”

“If I may have surety thereof, I will do it, straightway,” saith the villein. “Thereto I pledge you all my faith,” the bird made answer; and forthright the villein let him go.

So the bird that had won his freedom by ready speech, taketh flight to the tree; all spent he was, and ruffled, for he had been rudely handled, and all his plumage turned awry. With his beak as best he might, he smoothed and ordered his feathers; but the churl, who was

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fain of the three wisdoms, admonished him to speak. Full of craft was that bird, and he saith: "If thou givest good heed, great lore shalt thou learn: Set not thy trust in all thou hearest." But the villein frowned in anger: "That knew I already," quoth he. "Fair friend, henceforth hold it well in mind, and forget it not." Quoth the churl: "Now in sooth may I look to learn wisdom! He who biddeth me bear this in mind, doth but jibe; but certes, when you escape me again, no man else shall you mock:—but I brag over late. Wherefore, now tell me the next wisdom, for this one I know well."

"Give good heed," saith the bird, "fair and goodly is the second: Weep not for that thou hast never had." Then the churl could not hold his peace, but answered all in anger: "Thou hast belied thy pledge to me; three wisdoms thou wert to teach me—so thou didst promise me—that were never yet known to any of my kin; but every man knoweth this, for there is none so foolish, or ever was, that he would weep for what was never his. Sorely hast thou lied to me." Thereupon the bird made answer: "Wouldst thou that I say them over to thee lest thou forget them? Ye are so ready of speech I fear for thy memory; methinketh ye will not bear the wisdoms in mind." "I know them better than you yourself," quoth the churl, "and long ago knew them. Foul fall him who shall ever thank you for showing him that in which he was already wise. By my head, I am not so untaught as ye deem me, and it is but because ye have escaped me that ye now mock me. But if ye hold by your covenant with me, ye will tell me the third wisdom, for of these two I have full understanding. Now speak out at your will, in that I have no power over you; tell me its substance, of and I will give heed to it."

"Listen well, and I will tell you: the third is of such a nature that whosoever knoweth it will never be a poor man." Greatly the churl rejoiced when he heard the virtue of that wisdom, and saith: "This I needs must know, for riches I dearly desire." Lo, how he urgeth the bird, and saith: "It is time to eat, so tell me now speedily." And when the bird heard him, it maketh answer: "I warn thee, churl, that ye *Let not fall to your feet that which you hold in your hand.*" All angry was the villein: for a long time he spoke not, and then he asketh: "And is there nought else?"



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These are the sooth-sayings of children, for well I ween that many a man poor and in want knoweth this, even as thou knowest; ye have duped me and lied to me, for all that ye have shown me I was wise in before."

Then the bird maketh answer: "By my faith, and if thou hadst known this last wisdom, never wouldst thou have let me go, for if thou hadst killed me as thou didst think to do, never, by my eyes, had there dawned a day ye had not been the better for it." "Ha, in God's name, what good had ye been?" "Ahi, foul churl, ill son of an ill race, thou knowest not what hath befallen thee; thou hast sorely miscarried. In my body is a gem of great worth and price, and of the weight of three ounces; its virtue is so great that whoso hath it in his possession may never wish for aught, but straightway he hath it at his hand."

Now when the churl heard this, he beat his breast, and tore his garments, and rent his face with his nails, and cried out woe and alas. But the bird, who watched him from the tree, had great joy thereof. It waited until he had torn all his raiment, and wounded himself in many a place; then it said to him: "Wretched churl, when thou didst hold me in thy hand I was smaller than sparrow, or tit, or finch, which weigheth not so much as half an ounce." And the villein who groaneth in anger, saith: "By my faith, ye say true." "Churl, now mayest thou see well I have lied to thee concerning the gem." "Now I know it of a sooth, but certes, at first I believed thee." "Churl, now have I proved to thee on the spot thou knewest not the three wisdoms; and, for what thou didst say to me, that no man is, or ever was, so foolish he would weep for that he had never had, now, meseemeth, thou thyself makest lament for what was never thine and never will be. And when you had me in your snare, then did you cast down to your feet that which you held in your hand. So have you been brought to shame by the three wisdoms; henceforth, fair friend, hold them in mind. Good it is to learn goodly lore, for many a one heareth yet understandeth not, many a one speaketh of wisdom who is yet no whit wise in thought, many a one speaketh of courtesy who knoweth nought of the practice thereof, and many a man holdeth himself for wise who is given over to folly.

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Now when the bird had so spoken, it took flight, and departed, never to return again to the garden. The leaves fell from the tree, the orchard failed and withered, the fountain ran dry, whereby the churl lost all his delight. Now know ye one and all that the proverb showeth us clearly that he who covets all, loses all.

explicit Li LAIS DE L'OISELET.

Marie de France

The Woful Knight



ladly would I call to remembrance a lay whereof I have heard men speak; I will tell you its name and its story, and show you the city whence it sprang. Some call it The Woful Knight, but many there are who name it The Four Sorrows.

At Nantes in Bretaine dwelt a lady who was rich in beauty and wisdom and all seemliness. And in that land was no knight of prowess who, and if he did but see her, straightway loved her not and besought her. She could in no wise love them all, yet none did she wish to renounce. And better it is to love and woo all the ladies of the land than to rob one fool of his motley, for he will speedily fall to fighting over it, whereas a lady doth pleasure to all in fair friendliness. And though it be not her will to hearken to them, yet ought she not to give them ill words, but rather hold them dear and honour them, and render them service and thanks. Now the lady of whom I would tell you was so besought in love by reason of her beauty and worth that many a one had a hand therein.

In Bretaine, in those days, lived four barons; their names I cannot tell you, but though they were young of age, yet were they comely, brave, and valiant knights, generous, courteous, and free-handed; of gentle birth were they in that land, and held in high honour. These four loved the lady, and strove in well doing for her sake; and each did his uttermost to win her and her love. Each sought her by himself, and set thereto all his intent; and there was not one but thought to succeed above all the rest.

Now the lady was of right great discretion, and much bethought her to inquire and discover which it were best to love; for all alike were of such great worship that she knew not how to choose the best among them, And in that she was not minded to lose three for one, she made

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fair semblance to each, and gave them tokens, and sent them messengers; of the four not one knew how it stood with other, and none could she bring herself to reject. So each one hoped by entreaty and loyal service to speed better than the rest. And wheresoever knights come together, each wished to be the first in well doing, if that he might, to thereby please his lady. All alike called her their love, each one wore her favour, whether ring or sleeve or pennon, and each cried her name in the tourney.

And she on her part loved them all, and bore them all in hand, until it fell that after an Easter time, a tournament was cried before the city of Nantes. To learn the worth of the four lovers, many a man came from other lands,—Frenchmen and Normans, Flemings and Angevins, and men of Brabant, and of Boulogne, and likewise those from near at hand; all alike came thither with good will, and long time sojourned there. And on the evening of the tourney they joined battle full sharply.

The four lovers had armed themselves and issued out of the city: and though their knights followed after, on them fell the burden. Those from abroad knew them by their pennons and shields, and against them they sent four knights, two Flemings and two Hainaulters, ready dight for the onset; not one but was keen to join battle. And the four lovers on their part, when they saw the knights come against them, were of no mind to give back. At full speed, with lowered lance, each man chooseth his fellow, and they come together so stoutly that the four out-landers are brought to ground. No care had the four comrades for the horses, rather they let them run free, and they took their stand above the fallen knights, who anon are rescued by their fellows. Great was the press in that rescue, and many a blow was struck with sword.

The lady, meantime, was on a tower, whence she might well behold her men and their followers; she seeth her lovers bear themselves right bravely, and which among them deserveth best she knoweth not.

So the tourney was begun, and the ranks increased and thickened; and many a time that day before the gate was the battle renewed. The four lovers did right valiantly, that they won praise above all the rest, till evening fell and it was time to dispart. Then far from their men, too

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recklessly they set their lives in jeopardy; dearly they paid for it, for there three were slain, and the fourth hurt and so wounded in thigh and body that the lance came out at his back. Right through were they smitten, and all four fell to ground. They who had slain them threw down their shields upon the field; unwittingly had they done it, and right heavy were they therefor. So the noise arose and the cry; never was sorrow heard like unto that. They of the city hasted thither, for no whit did they fear those outlanders. Two thousand were there that for sorrow for the four knights unlaced their ventails, and tore their hair and their beards. All alike shared that grief.

Then each of those four was laid upon a shield, and carried into the city to the lady who had loved them, and so soon as she heard the adventure, she fell down on the hard ground in a swoon. When she recovered her wit, she made sore lament for each by name. "Alas," saith she, "what shall I do? Never more shall I know gladness. These four knights I loved, and each by himself I desired, for of great worship were they, and they loved me more than aught else that liveth. By reason of their beauty and prowess, their valour and generosity, I led them to set their thoughts on love of me, and I would not lose all three by taking one. Now I know not which I should pity most; yet can I not feign or dissemble herein. One I see wounded and three slain; nothing have I in the world to comfort me. Now will I let bury the dead; and if the wounded knight may be healed, gladly will I do what I may herein, and fetch him good doctors of physic." So she made him be carried into her own chambers. Then she directed that the others be made ready; richly and nobly she appareled them with great love. And to a rich abbey, wherein they were buried, she made great gifts and offerings. Now may God grant them sweet mercy.

Meantime she had summoned wise leeches, and had set them in charge of the knight, who lay wounded in her own chamber until he began to mend. Often she went to see him, and sweetly she comforted him; but much she regretted the other three, and made great lament for them.

## The Woful Knight

And one summer day after meat, when she was talking with the knight, she remembered her of her great sorrow, and bent low her head. So she fell deep in thought, and he, beginning to watch her, perceived her thoughtfulness. Courteously he addressed her: "Lady, you are in distress. What is in your thoughts? Tell me, and let be your sorrow. Surely you should take comfort." "Friend," saith she, "I fell a-thinking, and remembered me of your comrades. Never will any lady of my lineage, however fair and worthy and wise she may be, love another such four, or in one day lose them all, as I lost all,—save you alone, who were wounded and in sore jeopardy of death. And in that I have so loved ye four, I would that my griefs were held in remembrance, wherefore of you I will make a lay, and call it The Four Sorrows." When he had heard her, quickly the knight made answer: "Dame, make the new lay, but call it The Woful Knight. And I will show you why it should be so named: the other three long since died, and spent all their worldly life in the great torment they endured by reason of the love they bore you. But I, who have escaped with life, all uncounselled and all woful, often see her whom I love most in the world come and go, and speak to me morning and evening, yet may I have neither kiss nor embrace, nor any joy of her, save that of speech only. A hundred such sorrows you make me endure; rather had I suffer death. For this reason shall the lay be named for me; The Woful Knight shall it be called, and whosoever termeth it The Four Sorrows will change its true name." "By my faith," saith she, "this pleaseth me well; now let us call it The Woful Knight."

Thus was the lay begun, and thereafter ended and spread abroad; but of those that carried it through the land some called it The Four Sorrows. Each of the names suiteth the lay well, for the matter demandeth both; but commonly it is called The Woful Knight. Here it endeth and goeth no farther; more there is not so far as I have heard or known, and no more will I tell you.

Marie de France

The Two Lovers





In Normandy, of old, there fell an adventure oft recounted; 't is a tale of two children who loved one another, and how both through their love died. Of this the Bretons made a lay and called it "Les Dous Amanz."

Know ye that in Neustria, which we call Normandy, is a great mountain marvellous high, and on its summit lie the two lovers. Near to this mountain on one side, a king with great care and counsel built him a city; lord he was of the Pistreis, and because of his folk he called the town Pitres. Still has the name endured, and there to this day may ye see houses and city; and all that region, as is well known, men call the Vale of Pitres.

This king had a daughter, a fair damsel and a courteous; no other child had he, and much he loved and cherished her. She was sought for in marriage by many a great lord, who would gladly have taken her to wife; but the king would give her to none, for that he could not bear to part with her. No other companion had he, but kept her with him night and day, for since the death of the queen she was his only solace. Yet many a one held it ill done on his part, and even his own household blamed him for it. And when he knew that men talked thereof, much it grieved and troubled him; and he began to bethink him how he might so contrive that none would willingly seek his daughter. And he let it be known far and wide, that whosoever would have the maiden, must know one thing of a sooth: it was decreed and appointed that her suitor should carry her in his arms, with no stop for rest upon the way, to the summit of the mountain without the city. When the news thereof were made known and spread abroad through the land, many a one assayed the feat but none might achieve it. Some there were who with much striving carried her midway up the mountain; then they could go no

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farther but must needs let be. So for a long space the damsel remained unwedded, and no man would ask her in marriage.

In that same land was a damoiseau, son to a count he was, and full fresh and fair; and much he strove in well doing that he might have praise above all others. He frequented the king's court and often sojourned there; and he grew to love the king's daughter, and oftentimes besought her that she would grant him her favour, and love him with all her love. And in that he was brave and courteous, and much praised of the king, she granted him her grace, and in all humility he rendered her thanks therefor.

Often they held speech together, and loyally each loved the other, yet they concealed it as best they might, that none should know thereof. Grievous was this time to them, but the youth bethought him that it was better to endure this evil than to make haste over much only to fail; yet was he brought to sore anguish through love. And it fell on a time that the damoiseau who was so fair and valiant came unto his love, and speaking, made her his plaint. Piteously he besought her that she should flee thence with him, for he could no longer endure his pain; yet he knew full well that were he to ask her of her father, he loved her so much he would give her to none who did not first bear her in his arms to the top of the mountain. Then the damsel made answer: "Dear heart, I know full well you could not carry me so far, for your strength is not great enough; yet were I to flee with you my father would suffer so great dolour and grief it were torment for him to live; and of a sooth I hold him so dear and love him so much I would not willingly bring him sorrow. Other counsel must you find, for to this I will not hearken. But in Salerno I have a kinswoman, a rich dame and a wealthy; more than thirty years has she dwelt there, and she is so practised in the art of physic that she is wise in medicines and healing. So learned is she in herbs and roots, that if you will but go to her, taking with you letters from me, and tell her all your plight, she will give you help and counsel. Such electuaries will she prepare for you, and such cordials will she give you that they will comfort you and renew your strength. When you return again to this land, seek ye my father. He will deem you but a child, and will show you

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the covenant whereby he will give me to no man or take thought of none, save him who shall carry me in his arms to the top of the mountain, without once resting by the way; and ye shall freely agree with him that only in such wise may ye win me."

The youth hearkened to the words and the counsel of the damsel; full glad was he thereof, and gave her his thanks. And thereafter he asked leave of her; and straightway returned into his own land, and speedily gathered together money and rich stuffs, palfreys and sumpters; and took with him such of his men as were most worthy of trust. So he goeth to Salerno, and seeketh speech with the aunt of his sweet friend, and giveth her the letter. And when she had read it from end to end, she kept him with her till he had told her all his plight. Thereafter she strengthened him with medicines, and gave him such a draught that were he ever so weary and spent and fordone, it would yet refresh all his body, alike his bones and his sinews, that so soon as he had drunk it, he would have his full strength again. Then, bearing the draught in a phial, he returned to his own country. joyous and glad of heart was the damoiseau when he was come again to his own land; yet he lingered not in his domain, but went straightway to the king to ask of him his daughter, and that he might take her and carry her up the mountain. The king did not deny him, yet he deemed it but folly, for the youth was young of age and many a sage and valiant man had assayed the feat, yet none might achieve it. But he named and appointed a day, and summoned all his friends and vassals, and all those whom he could assemble together, nor would he suffer any to disobey his call. So, for the sake of the king's daughter and the youth who would assay the adventure of carrying her to the top of the mountain, they came from all the country round about. The damsel on her part prepared herself, and to lighten her weight oft she fasted and forebore from meat, for she would fain help her friend.

On the appointed day, of all those that came thither the damoiseau was the first, nor did he forget his draught. Then into the meadow beside the Seine, among all the great folk there assembled, the king led forth his daughter; no garment wore she save her shift only. And so the

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youth took her in his arms; and in that he knew she would not betray him, he gave her the phial that contained the potion, to carry in her hand. Yet I fear it will avail him nought, for he hath in him no measure.

With the damsel in his arms he set off at a swift pace, and climbed midway up the mountain, and for the joy that he had of her he took no thought of his draught. But she felt that he was growing weary, and said: "Dear heart, I pray you drink. I know that ye are weary; drink and renew your strength." But the youth made answer: "Sweet, I feel my heart strong within me; for no price would I stop long enough to drink, while I am yet able to go three steps. The folk would cry out to us, and their noise would confound me, and so might they hinder us. I will not stop here." But when he had gone two thirds of the way, he was near to falling. Ofttimes the maid besought him, "Dear heart, drink now the potion." But he would not heed or hearken to her, and in sore pain he yet pressed forward. Thus he came at last to the top of the mountain, but so wearied and spent was he that there he fell down and rose up no more, for his heart failed within him.

The maid as she looked on her love deemed him in a swoon; so she knelt down at his side, and sought to give him the drink. But he could speak no word to her, and so he died even as I tell you. With great outcry she lamented him, and she cast from her the vessel containing the potion that it was scattered abroad. By it the mount was well sprinkled, whereby all the land and country was much bettered, for many a precious herb hath been found there that sprang from that potion.

But now speak we again of the damsel. Never was she so woful as now in losing her love. She lieth down beside him, and taketh him in her arms and straineth him close, and many a time she kisseth him on eyes and mouth, till her grief for him pierceth her heart. There died the maid who had been so valiant, wise and fair.

Now when the king and those that were awaiting them saw that the twain came not again, they followed after and found them. And there the king fell to the ground in a swoon; and when he recovered his speech he made great lament, and so did all the stranger folk. Three days they kept the twain above earth; and caused two coffins of marble to be

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brought, and in them they laid the two lovers, and by the counsel of all, buried them upon the top of the mountain; and then they all went their ways.

Because of the adventure of these twain the mountain is still called by the name of Les Deux Amants. So it fell, even as I have told you, and the Bretons turned it into a lay.

Marie de France

Eliduc



ow will I tell you all the matter and story of a most ancient Breton lay, even as I have heard it, and hold it for true.

In Bretaine dwelt a knight, brave and courteous, hardy and bold; Eliduc was his name, methinketh, and in all the land was no other man so valiant. And he had for wife a woman wise and honourable, of high parentry and goodly lineage. Long they lived together, and loyally they loved one another; but at length it fell that by reason of strife the knight went to seek service abroad, and there he grew to love a maid, daughter to a king and queen; Guilliadun was the name of the damsel, and she was the fairest of that realm. Now Eliduc's wife was called among her own folk Guildeluëc, and from these twain the lay hath taken the name of Guildeluëc and Guilliadun—of old it was called Eliduc, but now is its title changed, in that the adventure from which the lay is drawn turneth upon the two dames. Now even as it befell so will I recite it, and tell you all the truth thereof.

Eliduc had for liege lord the king of Britain the Less, who showed him much love and favour, and to whom he gave faithful service. Whenever the king must needs be absent, it was given to him to guard the land, and hold it by his prowess. Yet even better fortune befell him, for he was made free to hunt in the king's forest, nor was there any forester therein so bold he dared gainsay him, or speak him grudgingly. But as often falleth through other men's envy of our fortune, he was estranged from his lord, and so slandered and belied, that without hearing he was banished from the court, though on what grounds he knew not. Ofttimes he besought the king not to give ear to calumny, but to show him justice, in that he had long served him with right good will; yet ever the king would give him no answer.

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Now when Eliduc saw he could win no hearing, he must needs depart. He went back to his own house, and called all his friends together, and told them of the wrath of the king, his liege lord, whom he had served as best he might,—never should the king have borne him hate. But as the villein saith in proverb when he chideth his plowman, “Lord’s love is no fief”; so is he wise and discreet who keeps faith with his liege lord, yet spendeth his love on his good friends. Now the knight was minded to abide no more in that land, but would, he said, cross the sea and go into the kingdom of Logres, to solace himself there for a space. His wife he would leave in his domain, and bade his friends and liegemen that they guard her loyally.

So he abode by this judgment, and prepared him full richly for the journey; but his friends were right sorrowful that he should depart from them. He took with him ten knights, and his wife conducted him on the way. At parting with her lord she made exceeding great dole, but he assured her he would keep good faith with her. With that she left him, and he held straight on his way till he came to the sea, and passed over it, and came into Totness.

In that land were divers kings, and between them was war and strife. One dwelt near Exeter, full puissant, but an old man and an ancient. No heir male had he, but only a daughter yet unwedded; and in that he would not give her in marriage to his neighbor, that other made war upon him, and laid waste all his land, and besieged him in his castle; nor was there among those within any man who dared issue out to risk onset and battle. When Eliduc heard thereof, he was fain to go no farther, but to abide in that land wherein was war, and to seek service with, and help as best he might, the king who was so harried and hard pressed and beset. Wherefore he sent messengers thither, and by letter showed the king how he had issued out of his own land and stood ready to his aid; furthermore, he prayed him to make known his pleasure herein, and if he would have none of him, to grant him safe conduct through the land, that he might seek service elsewhere.

Now when the king saw the messengers, he looked on them kindly and made them good cheer. He called his constable to him, and bade him



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straightway make ready an escort to bring thither the knight, and prepare a hostel where he and his men might lodge, and furthermore, bade give and grant them as much as they would spend for a month. The escort made them ready, and set out to fetch Eliduc; and he was received with great honour, for right welcome was he to the king. He was given lodging in the house of a burgess full discreet and courteous, who gave up to his guest his own fair tapestried chamber. Eliduc bade the board be well set forth, and invited all needy knights that lodged in the town to share his victual. And moreover, he commanded his men that none be so forward that he take either gift or denier for the first forty days.

Now three days after his coming, a cry arose in the city that their enemies were upon them, and overspread all the land thereabouts, and pressed up to the very gates, for that they would assail the town. Eliduc heard the noise of the folk, who were sore dismayed, and forthright he armed himself, and his comrades likewise.

Now though many a man had been slain and many a one made prisoner, fourteen mounted knights were yet left in the town, and when they saw Eliduc get him to horseback, they hastened to their lodgings to arm themselves; and with him they issued out of the gate, without waiting for summons. "Sir," they cried to him, "we will go with thee, and what thou dost we likewise will do." "Gramercy," he made answer. "Now is there none among you who knows of some hidden way or ambush where we may take them unawares? If we await them here, it may be we shall do battle with them, but to no purpose, if any have better counsel." And they made answer: "In faith, sir, near this wood through a bed of reeds runneth a narrow cart-road, whereby they are wont to take their way back. When they have won their booty they will repair thither; oftentimes they ride there unarmed upon their palfreys, and so put themselves in jeopardy of speedy death; right soon could we do them damage, and hurt and annoy." And Eliduc answered them: "Friends, I give you my word, he who doth not often venture where he thinketh to lose, will never win much, nor achieve high honour. Ye are all the king's liegemen, and ye should keep good faith with him. Come with me where I shall go, and what I do, do ye in likewise; I pledge you my

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faith, ye shall suffer no hurt so long as I can help you in aught. And if it chance we win somewhat, the damage we do to the foe will be turned to our praise." Thereupon they all made pledge, and thereafter drew towards the wood.

Thus they took ambush near the roadside until those others should return; and Eliduc commanded his men, and showed and devised to them how they should cry out upon their foes, and how they should spur against them. So when the outlanders drew near to the pass... Eliduc cried his cry, and called to his comrades, and bade them do their best. Rudely they laid on with their swords, and spared no whit, that their enemies were all abashed,—speedily were they broken and scattered, and within short time vanquished. Their constable was taken, and likewise many another knight, and Eliduc's men gave them into the charge of their squires. Twenty-five were they of the town, and thirty they captured of those without; eagerly they seized upon the armour, and good booty had they therein. So they returned again, and glad were they in that they had well prospered.

The king was upon a tower, dread because of his men; and much he complained of Eliduc, who, he feared, had brought his knights into jeopardy through treason. And now they draw near, riding close ranked and laden with spoils. Many more were they at the return than at the outgoing, wherefore the king knew them not, but was full of fear and misgiving. He bade the gates be closed, and commanded his folk that they mount the walls to draw their bows and cast down missiles,—but of this there will be no need. Eliduc had sent before a squire spurring fast, who now made known the adventure to the king, and told him of Eliduc, how he had vanquished the besiegers, and how bravely he had borne himself; he had wounded many and slain many, and had taken captive their constable and nine-and-twenty more,—never was there such a knight. Great joy had the king of these tidings; he left the tower and rode out to meet Eliduc, and thanked him for his well doing. And Eliduc on his part gave over the prisoners to the king, and divided the armour among the knights; his own share he dealt out to the prisoners and other

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folk, nought kept he for his profit save three of the horses he had heard well praised.

After the deed whereof I have told you, he was loved and cherished of the king, who retained him in his service a whole year, and his comrades likewise. And Eliduc gave his oath to the king, and was made warden of the land.

Eliduc was wise and courteous, a comely knight, brave and free-handed. So it fell the king's daughter heard him named, and his valour recounted; and she sent one of her own chamberlains to him, to pray and entreat that he come to her for talk and for disport, that they might learn to know one another,—much she marveled that he had not yet sought her. Eliduc made answer he would go, gladly would he make her acquaintance. So he mounted his horse, and taking with him one knight, goeth forth to speak with the damsel. But when he was about to enter her bower, he sent the chamberlain before, and lingered somewhat, delaying until the man returned again.

Then with gentle bearing, frank courtesy, and right noble cheer he addressed Guilliadun that fair damsel, as one ready of speech, and gave her his thanks for that it had pleased her to call him to speak with her. The damsel hath taken him by the hand, and side by side they sat upon a couch, speaking of many things. The maiden looked at him long, at face and body and bearing, and to herself she said: "He hath in him no fault"; greatly she commended him in her heart. And love sent thither his messenger, who commanded her that she love the knight, and caused her to sigh and turn pale. Yet she would not speak her thought, lest he should misprize her.

He tarried there a long space, then asked leave to go away; sorrowfully she granted it, and he hath departed and returned again to his hostel. Heavy was he and full of thought, and sore disquieted by reason of the fair damsel, the daughter of the king his lord, for that she had so sweetly summoned him, and that she had sighed. Much it misliked him that he had been so long in the land, and yet had not often seen her; but when he had so thought, much he repented him, and he

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called to remembrance his wife, how he had pledged him to keep good faith with her, and to live loyally.

Now when the maiden had seen him she would fain have had him for her lover; none had ever seemed to her so goodly, and if she may she will bind him fast to her. Thus she lay awake all night long, and neither rested nor slept. On the morrow she rose early, and went to the window, and called to the chamberlain, and showed him all her thought. "By my faith," saith she, "it goes hardly with me, I have fallen into an evil plight, for I love the new man of arms, Eliduc, the good knight. No rest had I this night, nor once closed my eyes in sleep. If he will but love me in very love, and give himself to me, I will do all his desire, and he shall win great good thereby, for he shall be king of all this land. But if he will not give himself to me, I must die in great dolour, for love of his wisdom and courtesy." When she had said what she would, the chamberlain gave her true counsel,—let none blame him therefor. "Lady," saith he, "if you love him, send to him and tell him. And it were well done to give him a girdle, a ring, or a scarf; if he receive it gladly, and if he have joy of the sending, you may be sure of his love. There is no emperor under heaven who would not be rejoiced if you chose to love him." When she heard his counsel, the damsel made answer: "But how shall I know by my gift whether he hath desire to love me? I never yet saw knight who, whether he loved or hated, had to be prayed in like matter, or would not willingly keep the gift sent him. Much would it mislike me that he should scorn me. Yet none the less, can one learn somewhat from a look; so make yourself ready and go." "I am ready now," saith he. "Take him a ring of gold, and give him my girdle, greet him from me a thousand times!"

Thereupon the chamberlain set forth, but the damsel was in such a plight that well nigh had she called him back to her; yet none the less she let him go, and thus began to lament her: "Woe is me, how is my heart taken captive by a man from a strange land. I know not even if he be of high kindred, and belike he will go hence suddenly, and I shall be left unhappy. Foolishly have I set my heart. Never till yesterday did I speak with him, and now I would beseech his love. I fear lest he scorn me; yet

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if he be courteous, he will show me grace. Now have I set all at adventure, and if he desire not my love I shall be in an evil plight. Never in all my life shall I know joy."

Now while she made lament the chamberlain went on in all haste until he came unto Eliduc. Privately he gave him greetings from the damsel, and offered him the ring and the girdle. The knight said him thanks; the golden ring he put on his finger, and the girdle he bound about him. Nought else said he to the varlet, nor asked him aught, save that he offered him somewhat of his own treasure, but the youth would take nothing, and went his way and returned again to his lady. In her chamber he found her, and gave her the knight's greetings and thanks for her gift. "Say on," saith she, "and hide nought from me; will he love me in very love?" "So I believe," he answered; "but the knight is not light minded, rather I deem him to be wise and courteous, one who knoweth well how to hold his own counsel. I gave him your greetings and your gifts; your girdle he bound about him; tightly he girt it around his waist, and the ring he set on his finger. Nought else said I to him, or he to me." "And he did not take it for love? If this be so, I am undone." "By my faith," saith he, "I know not. Yet hear me; if he had not wished you well, he would have had nought to do with your gifts." "Ye speak folly," saith she, "I know right well he doth not hate me, for never have I done him any ill, save that I love him bitterly, and if he hate me for this, then is he worthy of death. Never again by you or any other will I ask him aught till I may have speech with him: I myself will tell him how I am constrained by love. But I know not if he is to abide here." "Lady," the chamberlain maketh answer, "the king hath bound him by oath to a year's loyal service. Thus you will have time in plenty to make known your pleasure to him."

When she heard the knight was to stay she rejoiced greatly, right glad was she of his sojourn. But nought knew she of the trouble he endured since seeing her; never knew he joy or delight save only as he thought of her. And for this he deemed himself given over to evil, in that before he left his own land he had promised his wife to love none save her only. Now is his heart in sore torment; he would fain keep faith, yet

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can he not withhold him from loving the damsel, Guilliadun, who was so fair to see and hold speech withal, to clip and kiss. Yet hath he resolved not to seek her love, deeming that dishonour, in that he would keep faith with his wife, and in that he was in the king's service. In sore distress was Eliduc. But now he tarries no longer; he mounts his horse, and calls his comrades to him, and goeth to the cast to speak with the king. And if he may he will see the damsel likewise; it for this chance he went.

The king had risen from meat, and entered into his daughter's chamber; and now he played at chess with a knight from over sea, and thereby taught his daughter who sat on the other side of the board. Eliduc came forward, and the king made him fair semblance, and gave him a place at his side. "Damsel," he saith to his daughter, "you should in truth know this knight, and do him great honour, for among five hundred you will find none better." Now when the maid heard her father's command, she was right glad; and she riseth and calleth to her the knight, and they sat together apart from the rest. Both were kindled with love; she dared not speak to him, and he feared to address her, save to thank her for the gift she had sent him, — none had he ever had so dear and goodly. She answered the knight that of this she was right glad, for she had sent him the ring and the girdle in token she had given herself to him, for she loved him with such a love that she longed to make him her lord; and if she might not have him, one thing she knew of a sooth, never would she have living man, — now let him make known his will. "Lady," said he, "grateful am I for your love, and great joy have I therein; that I am so prized by you maketh me dearly glad, and on my side there will be no withholding. Yet though I remain a year with the king — for I have given him my word not to depart until his war is ended — thereafter I must go back into my own land, for I would not longer remain here, if I may have my leave of you." "Friend, good thanks to you," the damsel maketh answer. "Before that time you, who are so wise and courteous, will well devise what to do with me; I love and trust in you beyond all living creature." Thus they came to good accord, and at that time spoke no more together.

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Eliduc goeth to his hostel glad at heart, in that he hath well prospered. Often may he have speech with his friend, and great is the love between them. And thereafter he so bestirred himself in the strife that he seized and captured him who had made war upon the king, and brought peace to all the land. Greatly was he honoured for his prowess, wisdom and largess; and high fortune was his.

Now in time already past, the king of Bretagne, his liege lord, had sent three messengers from out his land to seek him, in that he was beset and beleaguered and harried and pillaged; many of his castles were taken, and all his land laid waste. Right often he repented him that he had parted with Eliduc; ill counsel had been his when that he looked askance upon him. But now the traitors who had slandered and accused him had been banished from the land, and exiled forever; and now he conjured him by his great need, and summoned and besought him by the faith he owed as liegeman and by the oath of his vassalage, that he come now to aid him, for right great was his need.

Eliduc heard the message, and he was full heavy of heart because of the damsel, for he loved her sorely, and she him so much it might not be more. But between them was no lightness or folly or wrong doing, and their love showed itself only in speech and sweet customs and goodly gifts. Her hope and thought was that he should be wholly hers, and that she would hold him to her; for she knew nought of his wife. "Alas," saith he, "ill have I done; too long have I tarried in this region, and on an ill day saw I this land. Here have I loved a maiden, Guilliadun the king's daughter, right sorely, and she me. If I needs must part with her, one of us will die, or both mayhap. And yet it behooves me to go; my liege lord hath sent for me by letter, and conjured me by my oath, and so hath my wife likewise. Now it beseems me to have care. I may not longer abide here, but must needs depart. Were I to marry my love, christianity would not suffer it; all paths lead to ill; on all sides lieth sorrow. God! how she feareth the parting. But I will deal fairly with her, let whoso will blame me; I will do her will, and act according to her counsel. The king her father hath fair peace; no man, I think, will again make war upon him; and so because of my liege lord's need, I will ask leave of him

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before the day of the term set for my service, and I will go to the damsel and make known to her this matter; she shall tell me her desire herein, and I will fulfil it as well as in me lieth."

The knight tarried no longer, but goeth to ask leave of the king. He speaketh and telleth all the story, and showed and read him his liege lord's letter that had summoned him at need. The king heard the summons, and that the knight would abide there no longer, and he was right grieved and sorry. He offered him good share of his havings, the third part of his heritage, and what was left of his treasure. "If you will but abide here," he saith, "I will do so much for you that you will thank me all the days of your life." "In God's name," saith the knight, "in that my liege is so hard pressed, and hath sent to me from afar off, I must go to him in his need; nor will I in any wise abide here at this time; but if you again have need of my service, I will gladly return unto you, and with good force of knights." For this the king gave him thanks and sweetly granted him leave. And the king further made him free of all the goods of his household, gold and silver, horses and dogs, and stuffs of silk goodly and fair; and of all these he took in measure.

Then he said courteously to the king that with his leave he would gladly go speak with his daughter. "Right willingly," the king made answer, and sent with him a damsel to open the chamber. So Eliduc goeth to speak with the maiden, and so soon as she saw him she called him to her, and gave him greeting a thousand times. He showed her his affair, and briefly maketh known to her his going; but before he had told her all, or had asked leave of her, she lost her colour, and swooned for very sorrow. Now when Eliduc saw her swoon, he began to make lament; many times he kissed her on the mouth, and weepeth right tenderly; and he took her and held her in his arms until she recovered her senses. "In God's name, sweet friend," saith he, "suffer me to speak to you for a little; you are my life and my death, and in you lies all my comfort, wherefore now I would take counsel with you because of the faith that is between us. 'Tis for dire need that I return into my own land and have asked leave of your father; yet will I do your pleasure herein, whatsoever may befall me." "Take me with you," saith she, "sith ye will



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not remain here; or if you will not have it so, then will I slay myself, for without you never shall I know joy or gladness." Eliduc answered her gently, for much he loved her with true love: "Fair one, I am of a truth pledged by oath to your father's service until the day when our term was set, and if I take you with me now I shall belie my faith. But truly I swear and promise you that if you will grant me leave, and appoint a respite, and name a day when you would have me return to you again, nothing in the world shall keep me from you if I be a living man and sound. My life is wholly in your hands." When the damsel heard his great love, she appointed a term, and named a day when he should come and take her away with him. Great sorrow they made at parting; they exchanged rings of gold, and sweetly each kissed the other.

Then Eliduc rode down to the sea. The wind was fair and the passage short; and when he was come into his own land again, his liege lord rejoiced and made merry. So did his friends and kinsmen, and other folk likewise, but more than all others his good wife who was so fair and wise and valiant. But always he was sad because of the love by which he was held captive, and never for any thing he saw would he show joy or gladness; never will he be of good cheer till he see his sweet friend again. Well he guarded his secret and ever he kept his own counsel. His wife was grieved at heart and knew not what it might mean, and to herself made great lament. Often she asked him if he had heard any say that she had misdome while he was out of the land; willingly would she clear herself before his people, whensoever it should please him. "Lady," saith he, "none hath accused you of fault or misdeed. But in the land where I have been I have given oath and pledge to the king that I will return to him again, for that he hath right great need of me. If the king my lord were at peace I should not abide here eight days. Sore travail must I endure before I can return thither, and never shall I know joy or gladness until I have so done, for I would not belie my oath." Thereafter the dame let be.

Eliduc, meantime, was with his lord; much he aided and strengthened him, and the king acted ever after his counsel and maintained all the land. But when the term drew near that the damsel had appointed, he set

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himself to make peace, and brought all his enemies to accord. Thereafter he made him ready to set forth, together with such folk as he desired to take with him,—his two nephews whom he greatly loved, his squire, and one of his chamberlains, who was in the counsel of those twain and carried their messages. He had no care for other folk, and these he made swear and promise to keep his counsel.

He tarried no longer, but took the sea, and speedily won the other shore, and came into the country where he was so sore desired. Eliduc was right cunning, and took lodging far from the haven, for that he desired not to be seen or known or discovered. He made ready his chamberlain and sent him to his love, and made known to her that he had come, well had he obeyed her commandment; and he bade her that night, when all was dark, that she should issue out of the city, together with the chamberlain, and that he would meet her. The messenger changed his garments and set forth on foot in all haste; straight to the city he went where dwelt the king's daughter, and he so sought and contrived that he entered into her chamber. He gave greeting to the damsel and told her that her love had come. When she heard the news she was sore abashed and shaken, full softly she wept for joy, and many a time she kissed the messenger. He told her how at dusk she was to go with him; and all day they were together and devised well concerning their going. At night when it was wholly dusk, the youth issued out of the city and the damsel with him, and none other save those two only. She was dressed in stuff of silk but scantily broidered with gold, and all wrapped about in a short mantle; in great fear was she lest she be seen.

A bow's shot from the gate was a wood enclosed by a goodly paling, and beside it her friend awaited their coming. Thither the chamberlain brought her, and the knight lighted down from his horse and kissed her; great joy was theirs at being together again. Then he set her upon his horse, and mounted likewise, and took the reins and rode off in all haste. They came unto the haven of Totness, and entered into the ship forthright; no other company was there save only Eliduc's followers and Guilliadun his friend. The wind was fresh and fair and the weather serene.

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But when they were about to come to land, there was a storm upon the sea, and a head wind arose that drave them far from the haven, and broke and splintered their masts, and tore all their sails. They called devoutly upon God and Saint Nicolas and Saint Clement, and Our Lady, Saint Mary, that she beseech aid of her son, that he save them from destruction and suffer them to come into the haven. Now forward and now back, so are they driven along the shore; right sore was their peril. Then one of the shipmen cried aloud: "What can we do? Sir, here within you have with you her by reason of whom we perish; never shall we reach land. You are married to a loyal wife, yet besides, you carry with you this other, against God and the law, against right and faith and justice. Let us cast her into the sea, then shall we straightway come to shore." Eliduc heareth what he saith and is well nigh burnt with anger. "Dog," he saith, "foul traitor, say not so a second time. If I could leave my love I would make you pay dear." But even then he was holding her in his arms, and was giving such comfort as he might against the sickness she had from the sea, and for that she had heard her lord had a wife other than herself in his own land. She turned all pale and fell down in a swoon, and so she remained, and neither revived nor breathed forth even a sigh. And those who helped her friend bear her thence thought of a truth that she was dead. As for him he made great sorrow; and sprang to his feet and ran swiftly towards the sailor who had spoken, and struck him with an oar that he felled him flat, then he seized him by the leg and cast him over the ship's side that the waves bore away his body. Then after he had cast him into the sea he took the helm, and so guided and directed the boat that he brought her into the haven and came to land; and when she rode safe, they lowered the bridge and cast anchor.

But Guilliadun still lay in a swoon and seemed as one dead. Eliduc made right great sorrow and was full fain of death likewise. He asked of his companions what counsel they could give him as to where he might carry the damsel, for he would not part with her, and she should be buried in holy ground with great honour and high estate, in that she was a king's daughter, and such was her right. But his comrades were all abashed and could in no wise counsel him. So Eliduc set himself to think

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to what spot he should bear her. His house was so near the sea he might be there at the hour of meat, and round about his house lay a forest a good thirty leagues of length. Therewithin dwelt a hermit, and near his cell he had a chapel; forty years had he dwelt there, and Eliduc had oftentimes spoken with him. To him, he saith, he will bear the damsel, and bury her there in the chapel, and he will give of his land enough to found an abbey, and to establish there a convent of monks and nuns and canons, who every day shall pray for her that God grant her sweet mercy. Then he let bring the horses, and bade all mount, but first he had them all give oath that they would keep his secret. Thereafter they set out, and he himself bore his love before him on his palfrey.

They followed the highroad so long that they entered into the forest and came to the chapel; there they knocked and called, but found none to answer or open to them, and at last the knight sent one of his men forward to unbar the door. Eight days before, the holy hermit, that perfect one, had died, and within they found the new made tomb. Right sorry was Eliduc and sore troubled; his comrades would fain have made ready a grave wherein he might lay his friend, but he thrust them back, saying: "This shall not be until I have taken counsel with the wise folk of the land how I may sanctify this place with abbey and minster. Meanwhile, we will lay her before the altar and commend her to God."

So he let bring his cloak, and straightway a couch was made whereon they laid the damsel, and left her as one dead. But when the knight came to depart he thought to die of sorrow. He kissed her eyes and face: "Fair one," saith he, "may it not be God's will that I bear arms henceforth, or live the life of the world. Fair friend, on an ill day did you set eyes on me, and on an ill day you followed me, sweet love. Fair one, a queen you were, and the love with which you loved me was loyal and true. Right sore is my heart for you, and that day whereon I shall bury you I will receive the order of monkhood; and each day will I lay my sorrow upon your tomb." Therewith he departed from the damsel and shut behind him the door of the chapel.

He sent a messenger to his house, and let his wife know he was coming, but was weary and spent. When she heard the tidings she was

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right glad thereof, and made herself ready against his coming. Right fairly she received her lord, but little joy had he thereof, for he made no good cheer, nor said any fair word; and no one dared ask him aught. Two days he spent in the house in this manner: early in the morning he heard mass, and then set forth on the highway, and rode to the chapel in the wood where lay the damsel. He found her ever in the swoon, and ever she gave forth no sigh, nor revived, nor recovered her wit; yet it seemed to him a great marvel that she was still so red and white, and save that she was a little pale had not changed colour. Right bitterly he wept for her, and prayed for her soul; and when he had made his prayer, he returned home again.

One morning as they came from mass his wife had him watched by one of his servants, and she promised the varlet if he rode far, and saw whither her lord went, she would give him horse and arms. The youth did her commandment; he entered into the wood, and followed after the knight in such wise that he should not be seen. Well he watched, and saw how he entered the chapel, and heard the lament he made there; but before Eliduc issued forth, he returned again to his lady. All he had heard he told her: the grief, the noise and the outcry her lord had made in the chapel hermitage. All her heart was moved thereby, and she saith: "Let us go straightway, and seek through the chapel. My lord, methinketh, will ride forth soon, for he goeth to the court today to speak with the king. The hermit died a while ago, and I know that my lord loved him well, yet never for him would he make such sorrow." So at that time she let the matter be.

That same day past noon, Eliduc goeth to bold speech with the king, and his wife setteth forth with the varlet, who bringeth her to the hermitage; so she entered into the chapel, and saw the bed of the damsel who was like unto a fresh rose; she turned back the coverlet, and saw her slender body, her fair arms and white hands, and her long, smooth, delicate fingers. Now she knoweth the truth, and why her lord maketh such sorrow. She calleth to her the varlet, and showed him the wonder: "See now this woman who is like unto a gem for beauty. She is the love of my lord, and 't is for her he maketh such lament, and by my faith, I

## Eliduc

marvel not thereat, sith so fair a woman hath perished. What for pity and what for love, I shall never know joy again." Then she began to weep and make lament for the maiden.

Now as she sat weeping beside the bed, a weasel issued out from under the altar and ran thither, and in that it had passed over the body, the varlet struck it with his staff and killed it. He cast it aside, but before a man might run a league, its mate sped thither and saw the spot where it lay. The small beast ran about the head of its fellow, and stirred it gently with its foot, and when it failed to rouse that other, it seemed to make great sorrow, and issued out of the chapel and sought among the herbs of the wood. There it seized in its teeth a flower, all bright red of colour, and sped quickly back, and placed the blossom in the mouth of its dead mate, in such wise that, lo you, it forthwith came to life. The lady saw this and cried to the boy: "Stop it, throw your staff, good youth, let it not escape you." So the varlet threw and struck it, that it let fall the blossom. The lady riseth and taketh it, and speedily returneth again, and layeth the flower upon the lips of the maid who was so fair. And when it had rested there a little space, she breathed forth a sigh and revived, and thereafter opened her eyes and spake: "God! how I have slept," saith she.

Now when the dame heard her speak, she gave thanks to God, and asked the maid who she was; and she made answer: "Lady, I am of Logres, daughter to a king of that land. Greatly I loved a man of arms, Eliduc, the good knight. He carried me away with him, but he sinned in that he deceived me, for that he is married to a wife, yet never told me, nor made any sign thereof. When I heard speak of his wife I must needs swoon for the sorrow that I had; and churlishly he hath left me all uncounselled in a strange land; he hath betrayed me, yet wherefore I know not. Great is her folly who setteth her trust in a man."

"Fair one," the dame answered her, "there is nought living in all the world that can give him joy,—this I can tell you of a sooth. He thinketh you to be dead, and he is so out of all comfort that it is marvel to see. Each day he cometh to look on you, and deemeth you lifeless beyond all doubt. I am his wife, and my heart is heavy for him; because of the grief

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he showed I wished to know whither he went, and I followed after him and found you; great joy have I that you are on live. I will take you with me and give you back to your friend. For my part I will cry him quit of all, and will take the veil." In this wise the dame comforted her, and led her away.

The lady made ready her servant and sent for her lord. The boy rideth until he findeth Eliduc; he greeted him courteously and told him all the adventure. The knight mounteth a horse, nor stayeth for any squire, and that same night he reached his own house. When he found his love living, right sweetly he thanked his wife. Full joyful was Eliduc, never on any day was he so glad; often he kissed the maid, and she him right sweetly, and together they made great joy. When his wife saw their countenance, she bespoke her lord, and asked and besought his leave that she might depart from him, for that she would fain be a nun and serve God. And she besought him that he give her part of his land whereon to found an abbey; and further, she bade him take to wife the maid he so loved; for it is not meet or seemly that a man maintain two wives, nor will the law suffer it. Eliduc accorded to her wish, and took leave of her in all gentleness, saying he would do her will in all things, and would give her of his land.

In a boscage, not far from the castle and hard by the chapel and the hermitage, she established her church and let build her houses; wide lands and goodly possessions her lord joined to these, that she may have good maintenance there,—well will she have wherewithal to live. And when all was well brought to an end, the lady let veil her head, and thirty nuns with her, and there took up her life and her order.

Eliduc wedded his love; with great honour and rich service was the feast held on the day he married her. Long they lived together, and right perfect was the love between them. Many deeds of goodness and of alms they did, until at last they turned them wholly to God. Then near the castle upon the other side, Eliduc let build a church, and added thereto the more part of his land, and all his gold and silver; and men of good religion he placed there to maintain the house and the order. And when

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all was made ready he delayed no longer, but he, together with his wife, surrendered themselves to the service of God omnipotent.

The lady whom he held so dear he placed with his first wife, who received her like a sister and did her great honour, and furthermore admonished her to serve God, and instructed her in the rules of the order. Together they prayed God for sweet mercy for their love, and he on his part prayed for them. Ofttimes he sent his messengers to know how it was with them, and what comfort each had. And all three strove to love God with good faith, and all made a right fair ending, by grace of God the true and holy.

In olden time, the Bretons of their courtesy made a lay of these three for remembrance, that of men they be not forgotten.



Melion



In the days when Arthur reigned, he who conquered lands and dealt out rich gifts to knights and barons, there was with him a young lord whose name, I have heard, was Melion. Full brave and courteous was he, and made himself beloved of all; and he was of right great chivalry and goodly fellowship.

The king had a full rich following, and throughout all the world he was famed for courtesy and prowess, and bounty and largess. Now on that day when all the knights made their vows—and know ye that well they held to them—this same Melion pledged him to one that thereafter brought him sore mischance. For he said he would never love any maid, howsoever noble and fair, who had ever loved any other man, or had been talked of by any. For a long time matters went on in this wise: those who had heard the vow spread it abroad in many places, and told it to the damsels, and all maids who heard it, had great hatred of Melion. And they who were in the royal chambers and served the queen, and of such there were above a hundred, held a council concerning the matter, and swore they would never love him, or hold speech with him. No lady desired to look on him, or any maid to talk with him.

Now when Melion heard this he was right heavy thereof; no more did he desire to seek adventure, and no will had he to bear arms. Full heavy he was and sorrowful, and he lost somewhat of his fame. Now the king had news of the matter and had great grief thereof, and he called the knight to him, and spoke with him. “Melion,” saith King Arthur, “what hath befallen thy wisdom and thy worth and thy chivalry? Tell me what aileth thee and conceal it not. If thou would have land or manor, or any other thing—so that it be in my realm—it shall be thine according to thy desire; for gladly would I lighten thy sorrow,” so saith the king to him, “if that I might. Now upon the sea shore I have a castle, in all the

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world is not such another; fair it is with wood and river and forest which are full dear to thee, and this castle will I give thee for thy cheer; good delight may ye find therein."

So the king gave it to him in fee; and Melion gave him thanks thereof, and went away to his castle, taking with him an hundred knights. Right pleasant was that country to him, and so was the forest that he held full dear; and when he had lived there a year through, he grew greatly to love the land, for he sought no disport but he found it in the forest.

Now on a day, Melion and his foresters rode to the chase; with him he took his huntsmen, who loved him with true love, inasmuch as he was their liege lord, and all honour was found in him. Soon they came upon a great stag, and forthright let loose the dogs upon him. Thereafter it fell that Melion drew rein amid a heath that he might the better listen for his pack. With him was a squire, and in his leash he held two greyhounds; and anon, across the heath, the which was green and fair, he saw come a damsel on a fair palfrey, and right rich was her array. For she was clothed in scarlet samite, laced full seemly, and about her neck hung a mantle of ermine, never did queen wear better. Well fashioned was she of body, and comely of shoulder; her hair was yellow, her mouth small and shapely, and red as any rose; gray-blue were her eyes, and clear and laughing; right fair was all her seeming, full winsome and gracious; and all alone without fellows came she.

Melion rideth to meet her, and courteously he greeted her: "Sweet, I salute you in the name of the Glorious One, of Jesus the King; tell me of what house you are, and what bringeth you hither." And the damsel maketh answer: "Even that will I tell you in all truth: I am of good parentry and born of noble lineage, and from Ireland have I come to you. Know ye that I am much your lover. Never have I loved any man save you only, and never will love any; so great praise have I heard of you that no other save you alone have I ever desired to love, and never shall I feel love for any other."

Now when Melion heard that his vows were fulfilled, he clipped her about the middle, and kissed her thirty times over. Then he called together his folk, and told them the adventure; and they looked upon the

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damsel, and in all the realm was none so fair. So Melion took her to his castle, and the people rejoiced greatly. He married her with great splendor, and made great cheer thereof, that for fifteen whole days the tourneys lasted.

For three years he dearly cherished her, and during those three years they had two sons, whereof he was right glad and joyful. And on a day he rode into the forest, taking with him his much loved wife, and a squire to carry his bow and arrows. He soon came upon a stag, and they pursued it, but it fled away with lowered head. Thereafter they came into a heath, and in a thicket the knight saw standing a right great stag; laughing, he looked down at his wife. "Dame," saith he, "if I would, I could show you a right great stag. Look ye, he is yonder in that thicket." "By my faith, Melion," said she, "know ye that if I have not the flesh of that stag never more will I eat morsel." Therewith she falleth in a swoon from her palfrey. Melion raised her up, but might not comfort her, and bitterly she began to weep.

"Dame," saith he, "mercy in God's name. Weep no more, I beg of thee. Here in my hand I have a ring; see it now on my finger. Two gems it hath in its setting, one white and one red, never were any seen of like fashion. Now hear ye a great marvel of them: if ye touch me with the white, and lay it upon my head when I am stripped naked, I shall become a great wolf, big of body; and for your love I will take the stag, and bring you of its flesh. But I pray you, in God's name, that ye await me here, and keep for me my garments. With you I leave my life and my death; for I shall have no comfort if I be not touched with the other gem, for never again shall I become man." There with he called his squire to take off his shoes; the youth stepped forward and unshod him, and Melion went into the wood and laid aside his garments, and remained wholly naked, save that he wrapped his cloak about him. Now when his wife saw him stripped of all his raiment, she touched him with the ring, and he became a great wolf, big of body. So fell he into sore mischance.

The wolf set off running full swiftly to the place where he saw the stag lie; forthwith he set himself upon the track,—now great will be the strife before he hath taken and caught it, and had its flesh. Meantime the

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lady saith to the squire: "Now let us leave him to take his fill of the chase." Therewith she got her to horseback; no whit did she tarry, but she took with her the squire, and straightway turned her towards Ireland, her own land. She came to the haven, where she found a ship; forthwith she addressed her to the sailors, and they carried her to Dublin, a city upon the seashore, that held of her father, the king of Ireland. Now hath she all that she asks. And so soon as she came to the port, she was received with great joy: with this let us leave her, and speak we again of Melion.

Melion, as he pursued the stag, pressed it wondrous hard, and at length he drove it into a heath where he soon brought it down. Then he took a great collop of it, and carried it away in his mouth. Swiftly he returned again to the place where he had left his wife, but did not find her, for she had taken her way towards Ireland. Right sorry was he, and knoweth not what to do when he findeth her not in that spot. But none the less, though he was a wolf, yet had he the sense and memory of a man. So he lurked and waited until evening fell; and he saw men loading a ship that was to set sail that night and go straightway to Ireland. Thither he went, and waited till it grew quite dark, when he entered into it at adventure, for he recked little of his life. There he crouched down under a wattle, and hid and concealed himself. Meantime, the sailors bestirred themselves, for the wind was fair, and so they set forth towards Ireland, and each had that he desired. They spread aloft their sails, and steered by the sky and stars; and the next day, at dawn, they saw the shore of Ireland. And when they were come into port Melion tarried no longer, but issued out of his hiding place, and sprang from the ship to the sand. The sailors cried out upon him, and threw their gear at him, and one struck him with a staff, so that well nigh had they captured him. Glad was he when he escaped them; and he went up into a mountain, and looked long over the land where he knew his enemies dwelt. Still had he the collop he had brought from his own domain, but now, in that his hunger was great, he ate it; sorely had the sea wearied him.

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And then he went away into a forest, where he found cows and oxen, and of these he killed and destroyed many. So began his war, and in this first onset he slew more than a hundred. The folk that dwelt in the greenwood saw the damage he wrought to the beasts, and ran flocking into the city, and told and recounted to the king that there was a wolf in the forest that wasted all the land, and had slain many of their horned beasts. And for all this they blamed the king.

So Melion ran through the forests and waste places, and over the mountains, until he joined company with ten other wolves; and he so cajoled and blandished them that they followed after him, and did all his desire. Far and wide they wandered through the land, and sore mishandled both men and women. So lived they a year long, and wasted all that region, harrying the land and slaying the folk. Well knew they how to guard themselves, and by no means could the king entrap them.

One night they had wandered far, and wearied and spent, they lay in a wood near Dublin, on a little hill by the sea shore. Beyond the wood was a meadow, and all round about was plain country. There they entered to rest, but there they will be ensnared and betrayed. They had been seen of a countryman, who ran forthright to the king: "Lord," saith he, "in the wood yonder lie the eleven wolves." And when the king heard him he was right glad, and spoke to his men of the matter.

Now the king called together his men: "Barons," saith he, "hearken to this: know ye of a sooth this man hath seen all eleven wolves in my forest." Then round about the wood they let spread the snares with which they were wont to take the wild boar. And when the snares were spread, the king went thither without tarrying, and his daughter said she would come with him to see the chase of the wolves. Straightway they went into the forest in all quiet and secretness, and surrounded the whole wood, for they had folk in plenty, who bore axes and staves, and some their naked swords. Then they cheered on their dogs to the number of a thousand, and these soon found the wolves. Melion saw that he was betrayed, well knew he that sore mischance had befallen him. The wolves were hard pressed by the dogs, and in their flight they came upon the snares, and all were torn to pieces and slain, save only Melion.

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He sprang over the traps, and fled into a great wood; so by his wit he escaped them. Meantime the folk went back to the town, and the king made great joy. Greatly he rejoiced that he had ten of the eleven wolves; well was he revenged on them, in that one only had escaped. But his daughter said: "That one was the biggest. And yet will he work you woe."

When Melion had stolen away he went up into a mountain; full heavy and sorrowful was he because of the wolves he had lost. Great travail had been his, but anon he shall have help. Now at this time Arthur came into Ireland to make peace, for there was war in the land, and he was fain to bring the foes into accord, in that it was his desire to subdue the Romans, and he wished to lead these men with him to battle. The king came privately, bringing with him no great host; some twenty knights only had he in his train. Sweet was the weather, and fair the wind, and the ship was full rich and great; trusty was her helmsman, and full well was she dight, and plenteously garnished with men and arms. Their shields were hung along the side,—right well Melion knew them. First he spied the shield of Gawain, then saw he that of Iwain, and then the shield of Idel the king; and all this was dear and pleasant to him. Then saw and knew he the shield of Arthur, and wit ye well, he had great joy thereof; glad and blithe was he, for he hoped yet to have mercy. So came they sailing towards the land; but now the wind was contrary to them, and they might not make the port, whereof they were right sorry. So turned they towards another haven some two leagues from the city, where, of old, had been a great castle which was now ruined; and when they were come thither, darkness fell, and it was night.

So the king is come into port; sore wearied and spent is he, for the ship had much discomfited him. And he called his seneschal: "Go forth," saith he, "and see where I may lie this night." The seneschal turned back into the ship, and called the chamberlain, saying: "Come forth with me, and let us make ready the king's lodging." So they issued out of the ship, and came to the castle; and they had two candles brought thither, and forthwith had them lighted; and they let bring carpets and coverlets, and speedily was the chamber well garnished. Then the king

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issued forth, and went straight to his lodging, and when he came therein right glad was he to find it so fair.

Now Melion had not tarried, but straightway went to meet the ship. Near the moat he halted; right well he knew them all, and well he knoweth that if he hath not comfort of the king, he shall come to his death in Ireland. Yet he knoweth not what to do, for he is a wolf, and so hath no power of speech; yet none the less will he go thither, and set himself at adventure. When he came to the king's door, right well knew he all the barons; for nought staid he, but hath passed straight in to the king, though it be at the hazard of death. At the king's feet he cast himself down, nor would he rise; whereof, lo you, Arthur hath great wonder, and he saith: "A marvel see I; this wolf hath come hither to seek me. Now see ye well that he is of my household, and woe to the man who shall lay hands on or hurt him."

When supper was made ready and the barons had washed, the king likewise washed and seated himself. Napkins were spread before them; and the king called to Idel and made him sit at his side. And Melion lay at the king's feet,—well knew he all the barons. Oftentimes the king looked down at him, and anon gave him a piece of bread the which he took and began to eat. Then greatly the king marvelleth, and saith to King Idel: "Look now, know ye of a sooth this wolf knoweth our ways." Then the king gave him a piece of roast meat, and gladly the wolf ate it; whereat Gawain saith: "Lords, look you, this wolf is out of all nature." And the barons all say one to another that never saw they so courteous a wolf. Thereupon the king let wine be set before the wolf in a basin, and so soon as he seeth it, he drinketh it, and certes, he was full fain of it; good plenty he drank of that wine, as the king well saw.

Now when they arose from meat and the barons had washed, they issued out upon the sands. And always the wolf followed after the king, and might not be kept from him, wheresoever he went. And when the king desired to go to rest, he commanded that his bed be made ready. So he withdrew him to sleep, for he was sore wearied; but with him went the wolf, and he lay at the king's feet, nor might any man dispart them.



## Melion

Passing glad was the king of Ireland in that Arthur had come to him; great joy had he thereof. Early at dawn, he rose, and went to the haven together with his barons. Straight to the haven they came riding, and each company gave fair welcome to other. Arthur showed the king much love, and did him much honour. When he saw him come before him, he would not be proud, but raised him up and kissed him. And anon the horses were made ready, and without any tarrying they mounted and rode towards the city.

The king mounteth upon his palfrey, and good convoy he hath of his wolf, who would not be disparted from him, but kept always at his stirrup. Passing glad was the king of Ireland because of Arthur, and the company was rich and mighty. So came they to Dublin, and lighted down from their horses before the high palace. And when Arthur went up into the donjon tower, the wolf held him by the lap of his garment; and when King Arthur was seated, the wolf lay at his feet.

The king hath looked down at his wolf, and hath called him up close to the dais. Side by side sit the two kings, and right rich is their following; right well are the barons served, for throughout all the household great plenty is dealt out. But Melion looketh about him, and midway down the hall he saw him who had brought thither his wife; well knew he that she had crossed the sea and was come into Ireland. Forthwith he seized the youth by the shoulder—no stand can he make against the wolf—but Melion brought him to the ground amid the hall. And he would have straightway killed and destroyed him, had it not been for the king's sergeants, who ran thither in sore disorder; and from out all the palace they brought rods and staves, and anon they would have slain the wolf had not Arthur cried out: "By my faith, ill befall whoso layeth hands on him, for know ye, the wolf is my own."

Then saith Idel, the son of Irien: "Lords, ye misdo herein; the wolf would not have set upon the youth, and if he had not sore hated him." "Thou sayest well, Idel," quoth the king; and therewith he left the dais, and passed down the hall to the wolf, and saith to the youth: "Thou shalt tell us why he set upon thee, or else thou shalt die." Melion looked up at the king, and gripped the youth so hard he cried out, and prayed the

## Melion

king's mercy, and said he would make known the truth. So now he telleth the king how the lady had brought him thither, and how she had touched Melion with the ring, and how she had borne it away with her into Ireland; so hath he spoken and told all, even as it befell.

Then Arthur bespoke the king: "Now know I well this is sooth, and right glad am I of my baron; let the ring be given over to me, and likewise thy daughter who stole it away; evilly hath she betrayed her lord." So the king went thence, and entered into his daughter's chamber, and with him went King Idel, and he so coaxed and cajoled her that she gave him the ring, and he brought it to King Arthur. Now so soon as Melion saw the ring right well he knew it; and he came to the king, and knelt down and kissed his two feet. King Arthur would fain have touched him with the ring, but Gawain would not so have it: "Fair uncle," saith he, "do not so, but rather lead him into a chamber apart where ye twain may be alone together, that he have not shame of the folk."

Then the king called to him Gawain, and Idel likewise he took with him: so led he the wolf into a privy chamber, and when they had come within, shut the door fast. Then he laid the ring upon the wolf's head, and all his visage changed, and his face became human. So turned he to man again, and he spoke, and fell down at the king's feet. They covered him over with a mantle; and when they saw him very man, they made great joy. But the king fell a weeping for pity, and weeping asked him how it fell that by sin he had lost him. And then he let summon his chamberlain, and bade him bring rich raiment. Fairly they clothed and arrayed him, and so led him into the hall; and all they of the household greatly marvelled when they saw Melion come in amongst them.

Then the king of Ireland led forth his daughter, and gave her over to Arthur that he might do as he would with her, whether it were to slay or to burn her. Saith Melion: "I will touch her with the ring, nor will I forbear." But Arthur said to him: "Do not so, rather let her be, for the sake of thy fair children." All the barons likewise besought him, and Melion accorded it.

## Melion

Now King Arthur abode in Ireland until he had assuaged the war; then he went again into his own land, and with him took Melion; full glad and blithe was he thereof. But his wife he left in Ireland, and commanded her to the devil; never again would he love her for that she had done him such wrong; never would he take her unto him again, rather would he have let burn or hang her. And he said: "Whoso believeth his wife in all things cannot help but come into mischance at the end, for it is not meet to set your trust in all her sayings."

True is the lay of Melion, so all good barons declare.

# The Lay of the Horn



nce upon a time, King Arthur held a mighty feast at Carlion. Our tale saith that the king hath sent through all his realm; and from Esparlot in Bretagne into Alemaigne, from the city of Boillande down even into Ireland, the king, for fellowship, bath summoned his barons, that they be at Carlion at Ascension tide. On this day all came, both high and low; twenty thousand knights sat at the board, and thereto twenty thousand damoiselles, maidens and dames. It was of great mark that each man had his mate, for he who had no wife yet sat with a woman, whether sister or friend: and herein lay great courtesy. But before they may eat one and all shall be sore angered; for now, lo you, a youth, fair and pleasing and mounted upon a swift horse, who cometh riding into the palace.

In his hand he held a horn banded about four times with gold. Of ivory was that horn, and wrought with inlay wherein amid the gold were set stones of beryl and sardonyx and rich chalcedony; of elephant's ivory was it made, and its like for size and beauty and strength was never seen. Upon it was a ring inlaid with silver, and it had a hundred little bells of pure gold,—a fairy, wise and skilful, wrought them in the time of Constantine, and laid such a spell upon the horn as ye shall now hear: whoever struck it lightly with his finger, the hundred bells rang out so sweetly that neither harp nor viol, nor mirth of maidens, nor syren of the sea were so joyous to hear. Rather would a man travel a league on foot than lose that sound, and whoso hearkeneth thereto straightway forgetteth all things.

So the messenger came into the palace and looked upon that great and valiant company of barons. He was clad in a bliaut, and the horn was hung about his neck, and he took it in his hand and raised it on high, and struck upon it that all the palace resounded. The bells rang out in so

## The Lay of the Horn

sweet accord that all the knights left eating. Not a damsel looked down at her plate; and of the ready varlets who were serving drink, and bore about cups of maplewood and beakers of fine gold filled with mulled wine and hippocrass, with drinks spiced and aromatic, not one of these but stopped where he was, and he who held aught scattered it abroad. Nor was there any seneschal so strong or so skilful but if he carried a plate, let it tremble or fall. He who would cut the bread cut his own hand. All were astounded by the horn and fell into forgetfulness; all ceased from speech to hearken to it; Arthur the great king grew silent, and by reason of the horn both king and barons became so still that no word was spoken.

The messenger goeth straightway to the king, bearing in his hand the ivory horn; well knew he the ten kings by their rich array; and still because of the horn's music all were silent about King Arthur. The comely youth addressed him, greeted him fairly, and laughing, bespoke him: "King Arthur, may God who dwells above save you and all your baronage I see here assembled." And Arthur answered him: "May he give you joy likewise." Saith the messenger: "Lord, now give heed to me for a little space. The king of Moraine, the brave and courteous, sendeth you this horn from out his treasure, on such a covenant—hearken to his desire herein—that you give him neither love nor hate therefor." "Friend," then saith the king, "courteous is thy lord, and I will take the horn with its four bands of gold, but will return him neither love nor hate therefor." So King Arthur took the horn which the varlet proffered him: and he let fill with wine his cup of pure gold, and then bespoke the youth: "Take this beaker, sit you down before me, and eat and drink; and when we have eaten I will make you a knight, and on the morrow I will give you a hundred livres of pure gold." But laughing the youth maketh answer: "It is not meet that the squire sit at table with the knight, rather will I go to the inn and repose me; and then when I am clothed and equipped and adorned I will come again to you, and claim my promise." Thereupon the messenger goeth his way; and forthright he issueth out of the city, for he feareth lest he be followed.

## The Lay of the Horn

The king was in his palace, and his barons were gathered about him: never before was he in so deep a study. He still held the horn by its ring, never had he seen one so fair; and he showeth it to Gawain and Iwain and Giflet; the eighty brethren looked at it, and so likewise did all the barons there gathered. Again the king took the horn, and on it he saw letters in the gold, enameled with silver, and saith to his chamberlain: "Take this horn, and show it to my chaplain, that he may read this writing, for I would know what it saith." The chamberlain taketh it, and gave it to the chaplain who read the writing. When he saw it he laughed, and saith to the king: "Sir, give heed, and anon I will tell you privately such a marvel that its like was never heard in England or any other realm; but here and now it may not bespoken." Nonetheless the king will not so suffer it, rather he swore and declared that the chaplain should speak out before them all, and that his barons should hear it. "Nor shall a thing so desired be kept from the dames and demoiselles and gentle maidens here assembled from many a far land," so saith the king.

One and all rejoiced when they heard from the king that they should know what the writing said; but many a one made merry who thereafter repented him, many a one was glad who thereafter was sorry. Now the chaplain, who was neither fool nor churl, saith: "If I had been heeded what is here written would not be read out in this place; but since it is your will, hear it now openly: 'Thus saith to you Mangon of Moraine, the Fair: this horn was wrought by an evil fay and a spiteful, who laid such a spell upon it that no man, howsoever wise and valiant, shall drink therefrom if he be either jealous or deceived, or if he hath a wife who has ever in folly turned her thoughts towards any man save him only; never will the horn suffer such a one to drink from it, rather will it spill out upon him what it may contain; howsoever valiant he be, and howsoever high, yet will it bespatter him and his garments, though they be worth a thousand marks. For whoso would drink from this horn must have a wife who has never thought, whether from disloyalty, or love of power, or desire of fortune, that she of would fain have another, better than her lord; if his wife be wholly true, then only may he drink from it.' But I do not believe that any knight from here to Montpelier who hath taken to

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him a wife will ever drink any whit therefrom, if it so be that the writing speaketh truth."

God! then was many a happy dame made sorrowful. Not one was there so true but she bowed her head; even the queen sat with bent brow, and so did all the barons around and about who had wives that they doubted. The maidens talked and jested among themselves, and looked at their lovers, and smiled courteously, saying: "Now will we see the jealous brought to the test; now will we learn who is shamed and deceived."

Arthur was in great wrath, but made semblance of gladness, and he calleth to Kay: "Now fill for me this rich horn, for I would make assay, and know if I may drink therefrom." And Kay the seneschal straightway filled it with a spiced wine, and offered it to the emperor. King Arthur took it and set his lips to it, for he thought to drink, but the wine poured out upon him, down even to his feet. Then was the king in sore wrath. "This is the worst," crieth he, and he seized a knife, and would have struck the queen in the heart below the breast, had not Gawain and Iwain and Cadain wrung it from him; they three and Giflet between them took the knife from his hand, and bitterly blamed him. "Lord," then saith Iwain, "be not so churlish, for there is no woman born who, if she be brought to the test, hath not sometime thought folly. No marvel is it that the horn spilled its wine. All here that have wives shall try it, to know if they can drink from it,—thereafter may ye blame the queen of the fair face. Ye are of great valiance, and my lady is true; none ever spoke blame of her." "Iwain," saith the queen, "now may my lord let kindle a fire of thorns, and cast me into it, and if one hair of my head burneth, or any of my garments, then may he let me be dragged to death by horses. No man have I loved, and none will I ever love, save my lord only. This horn is too veracious, it has attacked me for a small cause. In years past I gave a ring to a damoiseau, a young boy who had slain a giant, a hateful felon who here in the court accused Gawain of sore treason. The boy, Gawain's cousin germain, gave him the lie, and did battle with him, and cut off his head with his sword: and as soon as the giant was slain the boy asked leave of us. I granted him my favour, and



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gave him a ring, for I hoped to retain him to strengthen the court, but even had he remained here, he had never been loved by me. Certes," saith the queen, "since I was a maid and was given to thee—blessed was that hour—no other evil have I done on any day of my life. On all the earth is no man so mighty—no, not though he were king of Rome—that I would love him, even for all the gold of Pavia, no, nor any count or amiral. Great shame hath he done me who sent this horn; never did he love lady. And until I be revenged, I shall never know gladness."

Then said Arthur, "Speak no more of this. Were any mighty neighbor, or cousin or kinsman, to make war upon Mangon, never more would my heart love him; for I made the king a covenant before all my folk, and by all that is true, that I would hate him no hate for his gift. It is not meet to gainsay my word,—that were great villainy; I like not the king who swiftly belies himself." "Lord," saith the queen, "blessed was I when as a maiden I was given to you. When a lady of high parentry who hath a good lord seeketh another friend, she doth great wrong. He who seeketh a better wine than that of the grape, or better bread than that of the wheat, such a one should be hung and his ashes given to the winds. I have the best one of the three who were ever king under God, why then should I go seeking a fairer or a braver? I promise you, lord, that wrongfully are you angry with me. Never should a noble knight be offered this horn to the shaming of his lady—" But the king saith, "Let them do it. All shall try it, kings and counts and dukes; I alone will not have shame herein."

So Arthur giveth it to the king of Sinadone, but so soon as he took it, the wine spilled out upon him; then King Nuz taketh it, and it spilled out upon him; and Angus of Scotland would fain drink from it by force, but the wine all poured out upon him, at which he was sore angered. The king of Cornwall thought certes to drink from it, but it splashed all over him that he was in great wrath; and the horn splashed over King Gahor, and spilled great plenty upon King Glovien, and it spilled out upon King Cadain as soon as he took it in his hands. Then King Lot taketh it, and looketh on himself as afoot; and it splashed the beard of Caraton; and of the two kings of Ireland there was not one it did not bespatter; and it

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splashed all the thirty counts, who had great shame thereof; nor of all the barons present who tried the horn was there one who might take a drop therefrom. It poured out over each king, and each was in great wrath; they passed it on and were in great sorrow by reason of it; and they all said, may the horn, and he who brought it and he who sent it, be given over to the devils, for whoso believeth this horn shameth his wife.

Now when King Arthur saw it spilled out upon all, he forgot his sorrow and wrath, and began to laugh and made great joy. "Lords," he saith to his barons, "now hear me. I am not the only one bemoaned. He who sent me this horn gave me a good gift: by the faith I owe all those here gathered, I will never part with it for all the gold of Pavia; no man shall have it save he who shall drink from it." The queen grew bright red because of the marvel whereof she dared not speak; fairer than the rose was she. The king looked on her and found her most fair; he drew her to him and three times he kissed her: "Gladly, dame, I forget my ill will." "Lord, gramercy," saith she.

Then all, high and low, tried the ivory horn. A knight took it and laughed across at his wife; he was the most joyous of all the court, and the most courteous; none boasted less, yet when he was armed none was more feared; for in Arthur's court there was no better warrior, none mightier of his hands, save only my lord Gawain. Fair was his hair, his beard russet, his eyes gray-blue and laughing, his body comely, his feet straight and well arched; Caradoc was his name, a well skilled, knight, and of full good renown. His wife sat at his left; she was sister to King Galahal and was born at Cirencester. Full true was she, and thereto comely and gracious, featly fashioned and like unto a fay; her hair was long and golden; fairer woman was there none, save the queen only. She looked upon Caradoc, nor changed colour, but bespoke him, saying: "Fair friend, fear not to drink from the horn at this high feast; lift up your head and do me honour. I would not take any man for lord however mighty; no, though he were amiral, I would not have him for my husband and leave you, friend; rather would I become a nun and wear the veil. For every woman should be as the turtle dove, who after

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she has had one mate will never take another: thus should a lady do if she be of good lineage."

Full glad was Caradoc, and he sprang to his feet; fair he was, a well skilled and a courteous knight. When they had filled the horn it held a lot and a half; full to the brim it was of red wine; "Wassail," he saith to the king. He was tall and strong, and he set the horn to his lips, and I tell you truly that he tasted the wine and drank it all down. Right glad was he thereof, but all the table started in wonder. Straightway he goeth before Arthur, and as he goeth he saith to him, nor did he speak low-voiced: "Lord, I have emptied the horn, be ye certain thereof." "Caradoc," saith the king, "brave and courteous are you; of a sooth ye have drunk it, as was seen of more than a hundred. Keep you Cirencester; two years is it since I gave it in charge to you, and never will I take it from you, I give it to you for life and to your children; and for your wife—who is of great worth—I will give you this horn which is prized at a hundred pounds of gold." "Lord, I give you good thanks," Caradoc made answer, and sat down again at the board beside his wife of the fair face. Now when they had eaten, each man took leave and went back to his own domain whence he had come, taking with him the woman he best loved.

Lords, this lay was first sung by Caradoc, who wrought its adventure. And whoso goeth to a high feast at Cirencester, will, of a sooth, see there the horn: so say I, Robert Biquet, who have learned much concerning the matter from an abbot, and do now, by his bidding, tell the tale,—how in this wise the horn was tested at Carlion.

# The Divided Blanket



In goodly words and speech, it behooves every man, as best he may, to show and relate and tell clearly in the common tongue the adventures that befall in this world. For as a man goeth to and fro he heareth many a thing told that is good to tell again; and those who know and may venture the emprise, should give to it all care and heed and study, even as did those who came before us, the good masters of old time; for they who would live hereafter must be no wise idle. But in these present days, which are evil, men grow slothful, wherefore now the gentle minstrels will venture little; for know ye of a sooth it is no light thing to tell a goodly tale.

Now will I show you an adventure that befell some seventeen years ago, or twenty mayhap. A rich man of Abbeville, well garnished with goods and gold, departed out of his town, both he and his wife and his son, because he had come into dispute with folk that were greater and stronger than he, and much he feared and dreaded to abide among his enemies. So from Abbeville he came unto Paris. There he lived peacefully, and did homage to the king and became his liegeman and burgess. Now inasmuch as the good man was discreet and courteous, and his dame of good disport, and the lad showed himself no wise foolish or discourteous or ill-taught, the neighbors in the street wherein they came to dwell were full glad of them, and often visited them and did them much honour. So many a one with no great endeavour on his part may make himself well loved, and by mere fair and pleasant speech win much praise of all; for whoso speaketh fair, getteth a fair answer, and whoso speaketh ill or doth ill, must perforce win evil for himself again; even so is it oftentimes seen and known, and the proverb saith, "Ye shall know the master by his works."

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So for seven years and more the good man lived at Paris, and bought and sold such goods as came in his way; and he so bartered here and there that always he saved what he had, and added somewhat more thereto. So he traded prosperously and lived plenteously until he lost his companion, whenas God wrought his will in the wife who had been his fellow for thirty years. No other child had they save the youth of whom I have told you, who now at his father's side was all woful and discomforted; often he swooned for grief and wept, and sorely he lamented the mother who had reared him full softly. But his father comforted him, saying: "Fair son, now thy mother is dead, let us pray God that he grant her pardon. Wipe thine eyes and dry thy face for nought will tears avail thee; know of a sooth we must needs all die, all must pass by the same road; none can thwart death, and from death there is no return. Yet is there comfort for thee, fair son, for thou art growing a comely youth, and art near of an age to marry; whereas I am waxing old. If I can compass for thee a union with persons of high estate, I will part with good share of my havings; for thy friends are afar off and no wise speedily couldst thou come by them at need, none hast thou in this land and if thou dost not win them by thine own might. Now if I may but find a dame well born and rich in kindred and friends, who hath brethren and uncles and aunts and cousins germain, of good lineage and of good estate, I would help thee to win that which would profit thee, nor would I forbear on the score of my moneys."

Now, lordings, the story telleth us there were in that same land three knights who were brethren. On both father's side and mother's side they came of high parentage, and they were of much worship and honour in arms, but all their inheritance had been put in pawn, lands and forests and holdings, that they might follow tourneys; three thousand pounds at usury had they borrowed on their inheritance, whereby they were sore tormented. Now the eldest had a daughter born of his wife who was no longer living, and from her mother the damsel held a goodly house in Paris, face to face with the dwelling of the burgess of whom I have told you. This house did not pertain to the father, and the friends of the mother took good heed that he put it not in pawn, inasmuch as the rent

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thereof was reckoned at forty pounds of Paris, nor had he ever been at any pain or trouble for the ingathering of this sum.

Now because this damsel, by reason of her kin, had friends and power, the good man sought her in marriage of her father and friends. The knights questioned him of his goods and havings, how great they might be, and readily he answered them: "What in chatel and what in moneys I have of pounds one thousand and five hundred; I were but a liar and if I boasted me of more, and at the most I would add thereto one hundred pounds of Paris; honourably have I come by my fortune, and the half thereof am I ready to give over to my son." But the knights made answer: "This we may not agree to, fair sir; for if you were to become a templar or a white monk or a black monk, anon you would leave all your havings to the temple or the monastery; wherefore no such covenant will we make with you; no, sir, no, in faith, fair sir." "What other covenant then, tell me now I pray You." "Right gladly, fair, dear sir," quoth they. "Whatsoever ye can render, we would that you should give your son outright, that you should make over all to him, and that he should be so invested therein that neither you, nor any other, may in any manner dispute it with him. And if ye will agree to this, the marriage shall be made, but other wise we would not that your son should have our daughter and niece." The good man bethought him for a space, and looked at his son; still he pondered, but little good did his thought bring him, for soon he answered them, saying: "Sirs, whatsoever ye demand even that will I fulfil, but it shall be on this covenant: let my son take your daughter to wife, and I will give to him all that is mine, and since ye will so have it that I withhold nothing, let him receive all and take it for his own, for with it I endow and invest him." So the good man stripped himself bare, and before all the folk there gathered, disinvested and disinherited himself of all that he had in the world; so was he left bare as a peeled wand, for, and if his son did not give it him, he had neither chatel nor denier with which to buy his bread. All he gave him and declared him free of all; and when the word was spoken, the knight straightway took his daughter by the hand and gave her to the young man, who forthwith espoused her.

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So for two years thereafter they lived content and at peace as husband and wife, at which time, meseemeth, the lady bore a fair son to the young master; heedfully was he reared and cherished, and the lady likewise was dearly cared for, and often went to the bath and enjoyed much ease. And still the good man abode with them, but he had done himself a mortal hurt when he stripped himself bare of all that he had to live at another's mercy. Yet for twelve years and over he dwelt in that house, until such time as the child was well grown and of wit to see what passed about him. Often he heard told what his grandfather had done for his father who thereby had espoused the dame his wife, and ever the child kept it in his memory.

Meantime the good man had waxed in years, and age had so weakened him that now he must needs support himself with a staff; and right liefly would his son have bought his winding sheet, for it seemed to him the old man had tarried over late above ground, and his long life was grievous to him. And the wife, who was full of pride and disdain, could not let be, but held the good man always in despite, and bore him such malice that she could not withhold her from saying to her lord: "Sir, for love's sake I pray you send hence your father, for by the faith I owe my mother's soul, so long as I know him to be in this house, no morsel shall pass my lips, for full fain am I that ye drive him hence." "Dame," said he in answer, "even so will I do."

So, for that he feared and doubted his wife, he went to his father and said to him forthright: "Father, father, now get thee gone, for I tell thee here is nought to make or mend with thee or with thy lodging; for these twelve years and over hath meat been given thee here in this hostel, but now rise up and that speedily; go seek other lodging, wheresoever else ye may find it, for so it must needs be." At these words the father wept full sorely, and often he cursed the day and the hour in that, he had lived so long in the world. "Ah, fair, sweet son, what sayest thou? For God's sake do me so much honour that ye suffer me to abide within thy gates; no great place do I need for my bed, nor will I crave of thee fire or carpet or rich coverlet, but let there be spread for me a few handfuls of straw beneath the pent-house without there. Never cast me out from thy



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house for reason that I eat of thy bread; that my bed be made without yonder irketh me not, if ye do but grant me my victual, but nowise should ye deny me wherewithal to live; and soothly, if thou shouldst wear the hair, thou shalt not so well expiate thy sins as if thou dost some comfort to me." "Fair father," quoth the young man, "sermon me no sermons, but make haste and get thee gone, lest my wife goeth out of her wit." "Where would ye that I should turn, fair son, I that have not so much as a farthing in the world?" "Go ye out into the city wherein there are a good ten thousand that seek and find whereby to live; each one there abideth his adventure; great mischance it were and if you likewise did not find sustenance; and many a one that hath acquaintance with you will lend you hostel." "Lend me, son? Will chance folk so do, when thou thyself deniest me thine house? Since thou wilt give me no comfort, how should those that are nought to me grant me anything ungrudgingly, when thou that art my son, failest me?" "Father," quoth he, "no more can I do herein, and I take upon me all the burden; know ye that this is my will."

Thereat was his father so in dole that his heart was near to bursting, and weak as he was, he riseth and goeth out of the house, weeping. "Son," said he, "I commend thee to God. But since ye are fain of my going, in God's name, give me a fragment of a strip of thy coverlet—no very precious thing is that—for in truth I am so scanty clad I may not endure the cold, and it is from this I most suffer; wherefore I ask of thee wherewith to cover me withal." But his son, who ever shrank from giving, made answer: "Father, I have none; this is not the season of gifts, and none shall ye get at this time, and if I am not robbed and pillaged." "But fair, sweet son, all my body is a-tremble and greatly do I doubt the cold; do but give me such a covering as thou usest for thy horse, that the frost may do me no hurt." And the young man who was fain of his departure, saw that he could not be quit of him and if he did not grant him somewhat; so, for that he desired to be rid of him, he bade his son give the old man what he asked.

The child sprang up when he was called, "And what is your will, sir?" asked he. "Fair son," quoth the young master, "I would that if ye find

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the stable door open, ye give my father the blanket that is upon my black horse; give him the best, and if it be his will, he may make of it a covering or cloak or capuchon." "Fair grandfather, now come with me," said the child who was ready of wit. So the good man all in anger and sorrow departed with him. The child found the covering, and he took the newest and the best, the biggest and the widest, and folded it adown the middle, and as fair and even as he might, cut it atwain with his knife, and gave the half thereof to his grandfather. "Fair boy," quoth the old man, "what would ye? Thy father hath given the cloak to me, wherefore then hast thou cut it atwain? Herein hast thou done a great wrong, for thy father had commanded that I should have it whole and undivided, so now will I go my ways back to him again." "Go wheresoever it pleaseth you, for no more shall you get of me," saith the boy.

So the good man issued out of the stable. "Son," quoth he, "all thy sayings and doings are as nought. Why dost thou not chastise thy son that he may hold thee in fear and dread? See ye not, he hath kept back one half of the blanket?" "Foul fall thee, boy," saith the young master, "now give him the whole thereof." "Certes, that will I not," quoth the child, "for then how would you be paid? This half will I lay by for you, and no more shall ye get from me. And when I come to the mastery here, I will turn you out, even as you now turn him. And as he gave you all he had, so I would fain have all, and you shall take from me only just so much as you now give him. And if it so be that ye let him die in want, even so will I let you, and if I live." The young man heareth him, and deeply he sigheth, and bethinketh and questioneth himself; great heed he gave to the words of the child. Then he turneth his eyes to his father, and saith: "Father, come hither again; it was sin and the devil that laid an ambush for me, but please God, this shall not be; rather I will make you from this day forth lord and master in my house. And if my wife will not keep peace, and if she will not suffer you, ye shall be served elsewhere. Hereafter, pillow and rich coverlet shall be given you for your case, and I pledge you by Saint Martin, that I will never drink wine nor eat a rich morsel, but you shall have a better; and you shall dwell in a ceiled chamber, and keep a good fire in the chimney place; and garments shall

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ye have, like unto mine. For ye dealt fairly by me, sweet father, and if I am now rich and puissant, it is by reason of thy silver.”

This tale showeth clear and beareth witness how the child turned his father from his ill intent. And moreover all they who have marriageable children should give heed to it. Do not after the manner of the good man, and when you are foremost, yield not up your place; give not so much to your son but that ye may recover somewhat again; set not your trust in him, for children are without pity, and speedily they weary of the father that waxeth helpless; and whoso falleth into the power of another in this world liveth in great torment. And he who liveth at the mercy of another, and looketh to another for his very sustenance, should be to you as a warning.

Bernier told this ensample that teacheth so goodly matter, and of it he made what he might.

# Of the Churl Who Won Paradise



We find in writing a wondrous adventure that of old befell a churl. He died of a Friday morning, and it so chanced neither angel nor devil came thither, and at the hour of his death when the soul departed out of his body, he found none to ask aught of him or to lay any command upon him. Know ye that full glad was that soul for he was sore afraid. And now as he looked to the right towards Heaven, he saw Saint Michael the Archangel who was bearing a soul in great joy; forthright he set out after the angel, and followed him so long, meseemeth, that he came into Paradise.

Saint Peter who kept the gate, received the soul borne by the angel, and after he had so done, turned back towards the entrance. There he found the soul all alone, and asked him who had brought him thither: "For herein none hath lodging and if he have it not by judgment. Moreover, by Saint Alain, we have little love for churls, for into this place the vile may not enter." "Yet greater churl than you yourself is there none, fair Sir Peter," saith the soul, "for you were ever harder than a stone; and by the holy Paternoster God did folly when he made you his apostle, little honour shall be his thereby, in that three times you denied your Lord. Full little was your faith when thrice you denied him, and though you be of his fellowship, Paradise is not for you. Go forth, and that straightway, ye disloyal soul, but I am true and of good faith, and bliss is rightfully mine."

Strangely shamed was Saint Peter; quickly he turned away, and as he went, he met Saint Thomas, to whom he told all his misadventure word for word, and all his wrath and bitterness. Then saith Saint Thomas: "I myself will go to this churl; here he shall not abide, and it please God." So he goeth into the square to the countryman. "Churl," quoth the apostle, "this dwelling belongeth of right to us and to the martyrs and

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confessors; wherein have you done such righteousness that you think to abide in it? Here you cannot stay, for this is the hostel of the true-hearted." "Thomas, Thomas, like unto a man of law ye are over quick to make answer; yet are not you he who, as is well known, spake with the apostles when they had seen the Lord after his resurrection? Then you made oath that never would you believe it and if you felt not his wounds with your hands; false and unbelieving were ye." Then Saint Thomas hung his head, and yielded him in the dispute; and thereafter he went to Saint Paul and told him of his discomfiture. "By my head," quoth Saint Paul, "I will go thither, and try if he will argue."

Meantime, the soul who feareth not destruction taketh his delight down in Paradise. "Soul," quoth Saint Paul, "who brought thee hither, and wherein have you done such righteousness that the gate should be opened to you? Get you gone out of Paradise, you false churl." "How is this, Don Paul of the bald pate, are you now so wrathful who erst was so fell a tyrant? Never will there be another so cruel; Saint Stephen paid dear for it when you had him stoned to death. Well know I the story of your life; through you many a brave man died, but in the end God gave you a good big blow. Have we not had to pay for the bargain and the buffet? Ha, what a divine and what a saint! Do ye think that I know you not?" Then had Saint Paul great sorrow.

Swiftly he went thence, and met Saint Thomas who was taking counsel with Saint Peter, and privately he told him of the churl who had so vanquished him: "Rightfully hath he won Paradise of me, and I grant it to him." Then all three went to bring complaint to God. Fairly Saint Peter told him of the churl who had spoken shame of them: "By his tongue hath he silenced us, and I myself was so abashed that never again will I speak thereof." Then spoke Our Lord: "I will go thither, for I myself would hear this new thing."

He cometh to the soul and bespeaketh him, and asked how it chanced that he had come there without leave: "For herein without consent hath no soul, whether of man or woman, ever entered. My apostles you have slandered and scorned and outraged, yet none the less you think to abide here!" "Lord," saith the churl, "if judgment be accorded me, my

## Of the Churl who won Paradise

right to dwell here is as good as theirs: for never did I deny you, or doubt you, nor did any man ever come to his death through me, but all these things have they done, and yet are now in Paradise. While I lived on earth my life was just and upright; I gave of my bread to the poor, I harboured them morning and evening, I warmed them at my fire, and saw that they lacked not for shirt or hose; I kept them even till death, and bore them to holy church: and now I know not if I did wisely. Furthermore, I made true confession, and received your body with due rites; and we are told that to the man who so dies God forgiveth his sins. Well know you if I speak the truth. I entered in and was not denied, and now I am here, why go hence? Were it so, you would gainsay your word, for surely you have declared that whoso entereth here goeth not out again; and you would never lie because of me." "Churl," saith the Lord, "I grant it. You have made good your case against Paradise, and have won it by debate. You were brought up in a good school; ready of tongue are you, and know right well how to turn a tale."

The countryman saith in proverb that many a man who hath sought wrong hath won it by argument; wit hath falsified justice, and falsity hath conquered nature; wrong goeth before and right falleth behind. Wit is mightier than force.

# The Gray Palfrey





his tale is set in writing to portray and call to remembrance the worth, gentleness and honour that can be drawn from women; for well should we hold in mind the virtues that may be seen in them. Right sorry am I, and much it irketh me that they are not exalted and praised of all men to the height of their deserts. God! if but their hearts were sound and steadfast, strong and true, there were in all the world no treasure like unto them, It is great loss and great pity that they take not more heed to themselves; at the lightest breath a woman will change and shift and vary; her heart seemeth a very weather cock, for oft it chanches that in a little space her spirit changeth more quickly than the storm wind.

Now in that I have been commanded to that I have set my hand, I will not leave it for dread of faithless cowards who envy those whose hearts are brave and valiant, nor fail to run my race out, to make me known and win me fame. In the lay of the Gray Palfrey, hear now the wisdom of Huon Leroy wisely come down to you; and inasmuch as he knoweth how to listen to reason, he would fain display his sayings,—right well he turns them, methinketh.

Now know ye that a valiant knight, courteous and right chivalrous, high of heart but poor in havings, dwelt in the land of Champagne. Full meet it is I portray his worth and the valour wherewith he was kindled; in many a place he proved his prowess, for he had wisdom and honour and a heart of great valiancy. Had he but been as rich in gear as he was in desire for good—provided always he did not worsen by reason of his wealth—he would have known no peer, equal or fellow. And now I make me ready for the story, for meet it is the deeds of a man of prowess be told from end to end, that we may take therefrom a fair and goodly example. Now this knight was praised of all folk.

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Wheresoever he went his valour was confessed, for those who knew him not yet loved the fame of him by reason of the good that sprang from him. When he had helm on head and rode into the tourney, no thought had he for the wooing of ladies, nor did he linger on the outskirts. There where the press was greatest he smote right hardily. Armed and ahorseback he was full fair to see; ever he went gaily clad, even in midwinter; and of some he was blamed for his gaiety of heart. Little wealth of land he had; at the most it yielded him no more than two hundred pounds a year; but ever he rode far and wide in search of honour.

In those days in Champagne the woodland was wilder than it is today and likewise the open. Now it came to pass this knight fell to dreaming of a love fair and valiant,—a damsel, to wit, daughter to one of the foremost men of that land, one no wise wanting in riches, rather was he well supplied with goods and gear, and dwelt within strong walls. A full thousand pounds each year his land brought him; and often men came to him to seek his daughter in marriage, in that all folk were won by her great beauty. No other children he had, nor any wife living, and his time was almost spent. His dwelling stood in a wood, and all round about it the forest was great and thick.

Now the young knight of whom I told you made bold to seek the damsel, but her father gainsaid him, no desire had he that the youth should love her, or win him honor by means of her. The young knight's name was Messire Guillaume of a sooth, and he abode in that same forest wherein the old vavasour had his stronghold, with its riches and its wide lands. The one manor was two leagues distant from the other; but on both sides love could not fail to spring up, and on nought else was their thought set save its maintenance. And when the knight wished to go to her he loved, he made a path through the deep forest that was great and thick thereabouts, a way traversed by no living man save him only. By it he rode secretly to the damsel many a time, he and his palfrey, all still and quietly. Sore vexed was he that he could not speak to her face to face, but the court was right strongly enclosed, and high was the barrier; the damsel dared not issue out, but her comfort was that she spoke to

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him many a time through the timbers of the wall. Without, the fosse was wide, and the hedge thick and strong, so they could not come close to one another. The house stood upon a rock, and was full strongly enclosed. At the entrance was a drawbridge; moreover, the old knight who was in all ways crafty, and who had well nigh run out his time, seldom stirred out of the house, for he could no longer ride abroad, but sat at home in peace. He had his daughter well watched; and for his delight he made her sit with him, which oftentimes irked her in that thereby she lost that joy to which her heart was rooted. But the young knight who was wise and valiant did not forget the way to her; he asketh only to see her.

Inasmuch as he saw that matters could not be otherwise, oftentimes he returned to her dwelling, but never could he enter in, and never could he see her, who was so close a prisoner, as nigh at hand as his heart desired. Oft he came to see her, yet never could he look upon her, for she could not so stand that he could see her face all clearly. And the heart of each was sore stricken.

The knight, whom it beseemed to love the maid who was of such marvellous worth her like was not known, had—so the tale telleth us—a palfrey of great price; a vair it was, of wondrous colour, that no man might conceive of any colour, or the semblance of any flower so perfect in its beauty; know ye that in no kingdom was there its like in those days for goodliness, and none that went so soft an amble. The knight loved it much, and certes, he would not part with it for any treasure; long had the folk of that land seen it in his possession. Now oftentimes on this palfrey he rode to seek the damsel through the fair and solitary forest where he had worn a path, known to none save to him and to the palfrey. Little noise he made as he rode to seek his love; right great care must he take that he be not seen of her father, for full bitter was her life to her.

Thus then they spent their days, each longing for the other, for they could never comfort themselves with kiss or embrace, and I tell you of a sooth that if ever the lips of the one might have touched those of the other, right sweet had it seemed to the fellowship of those twain. Full

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fierce was the fire they could in no wise quench, for if they might have drawn each other close, and kissed and embraced full sweetly as they had great will and desire to do, then could no man have wrought them annoy, but their joy had been perfect. Now right great was their pain in that they might in no wise touch or solace one another.

Little joy could they have in one another save that of speech and hearing, and rarely they saw one another, for too cruel was the interdict between these two lovers. She was in fear of her father, for were he to know of the intercourse between those twain, he would more quickly give her in marriage elsewhere; and the knight on his part desired to do nought that might undo the love that was between them, and would not risk a quarrel, for much he feared that old man who was rich out of all measure.

Now the knight bethought himself, and day after day pondered the life he led, for ever he held it in mind. And at length the thought came to his heart that let it be for good or for ill, he would go speak to the old vavasour, and ask him for his daughter to wife, let what so will come of it, for he knoweth not what his present life will bring to him. Every day of the week he is denied that which he coveteth, for over narrow is the path.

So one day he made him ready and went to hold speech with the old man in his own house, there where his daughter was. Right well was he received, for full well was he known to the old man and to his household. And the knight who was brave and courteous, and ready of speech like a man of worth in whom naught lacketh, spoke, saying: "Sir, I am come hither, and of your grace I pray you hearken to my words. I have come into your house to ask a boon, may God let you grant it me." The old man looked upon him, and thereafter asked: "What may it be? By my faith, I will help you herein, if I may, saving my honour." "Yea, sir, this much I know of your matters that right well ye may it; now may God grant you concede it." "I will if it liketh me, but if it liketh me not, right well shall I know how to give denial; and if it is not my will to vouchsafe it, I will not deceive you by either token or promise." "Sir," he saith, "I will tell you now the gift I would ask of you. You know

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somewhat of my estate; well knew ye my father, my house and dwelling, and right well know ye the time and manner wherein I take my delight; and now in guerdon of this, sir, I would ask of you your daughter, if it be your will. Now may God grant that no thought so trouble your heart that by reason of the presumption of my request ye refuse me this gift. And I would that you know I was never of her acquaintance; right glad and joyous had I been if I might have spoken with her, and seen for myself the goodliness for which she is famed. Greatly is she beloved in this land by reason of her virtues; meseemeth she hath not her like in all the world. So tell me all those who know her, though but to few is she known in that she lives imprisoned herewithin. An overbold thought was mine when I dared ask her of you, but if I have your consent, and ye deign to give me the gift of her by way of service and guerdon, right glad and joyful shall I be thereof. Now have I made my prayer and do you answer me at your pleasure."

Then forthright and without staying for any counsel the old man saith to him: "Right well do I understand all ye have said, for all is plain therein. My daughter is young and fair and wise and a damsel of high lineage; and I am a rich vavasour, sprung of a noble house, and my land yieldeth a good thousand pounds each year. Now I am not so out of my wit that I would give my daughter to a knight who lives by what he may chance to win; for I have no other children save her only, nor has she failed my love, and after my time all will be hers, wherefore I desire to marry her well. I know of no prince in this kingdom, nor from here even to Lorraine, who howsoever wise and valiant he may be would not do well in having her to wife. Awhile ago, scarce a month since, one asked her of me in marriage whose land yieldeth a good five hundred pounds a year, which would now be made over to me, if I would give assent to his offer. But my daughter can well wait a little, for I am so rich in goods and gear that she will not lose her price or her value in marriage. The man of highest lineage in all this land or from here to Alemaigne, save only king or count, may well be hers."

Now when the knight heard this he was sorely abashed, nor did he make any tarrying but took leave and went away. But he knew not what

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to do in that he was so swayed and constrained by love, wherefore he made bitter lament.

When the damsel knew of the dismissal, and what her father had said, she was full sorrowful, for she was not light of love but had given her heart wholly to the knight, more so than words can tell. Before he who was wrathful with grief returned home again, they held speech together without the wall, and both spoke their thought. The knight told her all he had said to her father and of their falling out. "O lady, frank and free," saith the knight, "now what shall I do? Meseemeth I must leave this land and ride at errantry, for all I desired is vanished. You I may not win, and I know not what will become of me. On an ill day I came to know the great riches whereon your father so prides himself; liefer would I have you poorer, for had your father not been so rich he would have looked with favour on what I may win." "Certes," saith she, "and I might have my way, gladly would I have less than I am to have. Ah, Sir, if my father would but give thought to your valour and worth, by my faith, he would not gainsay your wooing me, and making a covenant with him; if he but weighed your riches over against your valiancy surely he would grant the compact. But his heart is overladen with prudence; he does not desire what I desire, nor sorrow at my sorrow. If he were at one with my thought, right soon were the thing granted. But the heart that beats in old age giveth no thought to youth nor to the desire of youth, for the heart of the old is not as that of the young, methinketh. Yet if you will do according to my counsel you cannot fail of winning me."

"Yes, by my faith, even so will I do, damsel; now without fail tell me your will." "I have bethought me," she saith, "of a thing on which my mind hath often dwelt. You know right well you have an uncle who is of great wealth, and a strong manor he hath within his defences. Even so rich as my father is he, and he hath neither wife nor child nor brother, nor any heir nearer than you yourself. 'T is well and fully known that after his death all will be yours, and his money and rents are well worth sixty marks of fine gold. Now go to him straightway, old he is and frail, as ye know right well; tell him that you have had such words with my

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father that never can you be of accord with him unless he aid you in the matter. Let him promise you as much land as will bring in three hundred pounds yearly, and let him come to ask this thing of my father, who greatly loves him. Your uncle looks on my father as a sage, and each deems the other a man of worth; both are old and full of years, each wholly trusts the other; and if your uncle will graciously do so much for your love that you can induce him to promise you so much of his havings that he can say to my father: 'My nephew shall have three hundred pounds of my land in return for your daughter whom he seeketh,' then the marriage will indeed come to pass, for I truly believe my father would yea-say it, if your uncle spoke in this wise. And when you shall have married me, you will return to him again all the land which he will have promised to you on these terms; and I have so given myself over to your love that I shall be well content of the bargain." "Fair one," he saith, "now know ye of a sooth that never did I desire anything so much, and straightway will I speak with my uncle."

So he took his leave and returned home again; but his thoughts were sad and sombrous because of the refusal he had met with. Thus he rideth through the forest upon his gray palfrey; in sore wrath is he, and yet right glad at heart by reason of the wise and good counsel the damsel had given him. So he rode without let or hindrance to Medet where his uncle dwelleth. Straightway he came before him and maketh to him sore complaint and lament. Thereafter they went into an upper chamber, and there he told his uncle plainly all his plight and his covenant. "Uncle, if you will do so much," saith he, "that you will speak to him of the matter, and tell him that you have given over to me three hundred pounds of your land, I will without condition pledge you, and my hand in your hand, herewith promise you, that when I shall have married the damsel who is now denied me you shall have your land again all quit, as guerdon and reward; now do as I beseech you." "Nephew," saith his uncle, "right willingly, for I am well pleased and content with the project. By my head, you would marry the best in the land, and I think I can bring it to pass." "Uncle," saith he, "prithee hasten my suit, and so press it that he consent to the marriage, for I would fain no longer waste my

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time; and meantime, I will go to the tournament at Galardon; I shall be full richly accoutred, and may God grant me as guerdon that I do so well that my suit may thereby be bettered. And do you bethink you to so contrive that the wedding may be on my return." "Right willingly, fair nephew," saith he, "I am right glad of your tidings, in that the maid is frank and free." Then Messire Guillaume rode away forthwith; and he made great joy in that his uncle had said that he should of a sooth have to wife her whom he so desired,—of no other joy is he fain. So all alight with happiness he rode to the tourney as one who is well wont thereto.

The next morning at dawn of day, his uncle got him to horseback, and six more with him, and before the hour of prime came to the spot where dwelt the old vavasour, who maintained a full rich household, and who was father to her whose beauty knew no fault. He was received with full great state, for he was much beloved of the old man whose fellow he was in years, in that he was his neighbour and mightily rich. So the old man made great cheer and joy, in that this other who was of high estate had come to see him, and forgot not to say: "Right welcome are you, fair sir." And a goodly feast was spread, for the old man was frank and free, and knew well how to honour him whom he would.

When the tables were removed there were tales told,—old meetings of lance and sword and shield; and of old deeds was many a fair word said. But the uncle of the good knight did not over long forget himself, but laid bare his thought, and all openly he saith to the old man: "Where am I wandering? As God may aid me, I love you right well, as you shall now hear. I am come to you to seek help in a matter; may God so incline your heart that my prayer be heard in such wise and manner that I may attain it." And the old vavasour maketh answer: "By my head, I have so taken you into my heart, that even though it be to my hurt, nothing sought by you shall be refused, but rather shall the boon be granted you." "Sir, thanks and guerdon will I gladly give you," saith the old man, who delayeth no longer to speak his thought: "Fair sir, I have come to ask for your daughter who is wise and discreet; fain would I take her to wife, and before I marry her, she shall receive a dower from my own store, for I am passing rich. Ye know I have no heir of my own flesh and



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blood, which sore grieveth me, and to her I will be of good faith inasmuch as you are right dear to me. When I shall have taken your daughter to wife, I shall not be fain to leave you, or to dispart my wealth from yours, rather all shall be one; and together we will hold in common that which God hath given us." Then he who was prudent and wise was right glad, and said: "Sir, without any naysaying I will give her to you, and right willingly, inasmuch as you are a man of worth and honesty. Full glad am I that you have asked her of me; had I been given the best castle in all Friesland I would not have known such joy; to none would I give her in marriage so gladly as to you, for I have found you discreet and a man of wisdom in all points wherein I have known ought of your affairs."

Thereupon he promised and affianced to him the damsel who had no desire for him, but thought surely to have another. Now when the damsel knew the truth she was in sore grief and dismay. Ofttimes she maketh oath to Saint Mary that she would never be married to that old man; all woful she was, and weeping, ofttimes she made lament: "Alas, unhappy that I am, how am I undone. What treason hath this old man wrought! Surely he deserves death. How he hath deceived his nephew, that brave and gentle knight who is all compact of goodness. And now, lo you, I am given to this old man, all only because of his riches. May God give him his reward for it. Surely he hath wrought great folly; never will he know gladness, and on the day he weddeth me he will win a mortal enemy. Alas, that I should ever see the day. Nay, may God not grant me life so long that I do see it. Now hath my friend sorrow and great anguish; never have I heard of such treason. If I were not so imprisoned right soon would I end this matter; but I can do nought, nor even issue out of this house. I must needs abide here and endure my father's will; but the pain is over cruel. Ah, God, what can I do, and when will he who hath been so cruelly betrayed return again? If he knew how his uncle had dealt by him, and had sinned towards me, I know full well that all joyless I would die and cease to be; and if he knew this, by my head, I think he would come to his end; and my great woes would cease. God, how my heart is torn; better would I love death than life.

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What envy and what treason! How did that old man dare think this thing? None can dispute with him for me, for my father loveth covetousness which doth overmuch tempt and allure him. Fie upon old age, fie upon wealth! Shall no man ever win a wife rich and of high lineage unless he have great possessions? Certes, I ought to hate him who separateth me from the one in whom I claim a part, and who thought of a surety to have me, but now meseemeth, I shall fail him."

Thus the damsel made lament in her sore distress, for her heart was so bound in love to the young knight that scarce can she conceal her thought from any; and contrarywise, she hateth him to whom her father hath given her. She thinketh herself evilly bestowed, for he is old and of great age, his face is all wrinkled and his eyes red and hateful. From Chalons even unto Beauvais was no knight older than he seemed in all points, nor even unto Sens any of greater riches, so men say. But the folk of that land held him for coward and felon, whereas she so shone with beauty and valiancy that in all the kingdom of France was no woman so fair, or so frank and courteous. Full diverse was the portioning, on one side bright, on the other dark; nor was there any shadow in the light, or any glimmer in the darkness. Fain would the damsel whom love so grieved and tormented have changed her plight. But he who had betrothed her and had great joy of her well devised his affair, and set term for the wedding, even as one who had no suspicions, and knew nought of the debate and grief in her whom love held captive, even as ye have heard me relate.

Now I must not fail to tell you of the conclusion of the marriage. He who was wise and a man of worth made himself ready full richly. And before the third, day dawned the old vavasour had bidden all the hoary old heads sprung of that land and countryside, those he deemed men of most wisdom, to be present at the high marriage of his daughter,—she who had set her heart elsewhere. She had given her love and desire to the brave and far-famed knight, but now 't is seen how without hope she is tricked and betrayed. The two old knights have assembled a goodly company, for they were well known to all the men of years and worth in that land, and the more part came thither, a good thirty in number; not

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one of them but had revenue and safeguard from the old vavasour, and now they are come together in his house.

So the word is gone forth that the damsel shall be married at dawn of day. And the maidens who attend her are bidden to make her ready; but they give thought to the day and the hour, which sorely displeases them, and assume looks of great dismay. The old knight asketh them on whom his command is laid if his daughter is fully prepared, and if she is in doubt about aught, and if anything lacketh whereof she hath need. "No, fair sir, nought that I can see," so made answer one of the damsels, "if but we had palfreys and saddles to carry us all to the minster; for there will be, methinketh, great company of ladies, cousins and kindred who dwell nigh at hand." "There need be no fear for palfreys," quoth he, "methinketh there will be enough and to spare." And there was not a baron in the land from whom he did not command one; and he to whom the message was given went straightway to the dwelling of him whose heart was all fulfilled with valour,—he who shone with prowess.

Now Messire Guillaume, the brave and wise, knew not that the marriage had been plotted to this point, but love which goaded his heart had hastened his return. Of nought could he think save that which tormented him; and his love waxed and flourished. Yet he had come back from the tourney as one no wise unglad, for he still thought to have for his own her he has now lost,—unless it please God and some adventure betide. Each day he expected fair and pleasant tidings, and that his uncle would send word to him that he might marry the damsel. So he went singing through the house, and he made a minstrel play new songs upon the viol; full of joy and mirth he was, for furthermore, he had won every prize at the tourney. But ever he looks towards the door to see if anyone cometh with news.

Much he wonders when they will send to him, and at the last he stops his singing, for love forbids him to set his thought on aught beside. And now, lo you, without more tarrying, a varlet enters the court. When Messire Guillaume saw him his heart leaped and trembled with joy; and the varlet saith to him: "God save you, sir; the old vavasour who has long been your friend, as ye well know, hath in great need sent me to

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you. You have a palfrey of great price, no other in the world goeth so soft an amble; now my lord prayeth and commandeth that you loan it to him of your love, and send it to him this same night." "And wherefore, friend?" saith he. "Sir, to bear his daughter to the minster, our lady gracious and fair." "And to what end goeth she thither?" "Fair sir, there she is to marry your uncle to whom she is affianced; and tomorrow morning at dawn she is to be escorted to the waste chapel that lieth on the edge of the forest. But ye delay too long, sir, prithee haste; lend now to your uncle and my liege lord your palfrey, the best in the kingdom as I well know, for oft has it been so proven."

Messire Guillaume heareth him. "God," saith he, "hath my uncle whom I so trusted, and besought so fairly that he help me in my need, now betrayed me? May the Lord God never forgive him his misdeed and his treason! Scarce can I believe he has done this; methinketh you speak not truly." "You may know it of a truth tomorrow," saith he, "before the hour of prime; and already great is the assembly at his house of ancient knights of the land." "Alas," saith he, "how I have been tricked and deceived and betrayed." And for sorrow he well nigh fell to the ground in a swoon; in sooth, had he not feared blame from the folk of the household he would have done otherwise than he did. All hot he was with wrath and sorrow, and knew not what to do or say. Unceasingly he made lament; but despite his sore distress, the messenger urgeth him and changeth his thought: "Sir, let your good palfrey be saddled straightway, and my lady will ride upon him to the minster, for softly he goeth." And he who was easily moved still maketh sorrow, even while he masters his grief in bethinking what he will do, namely, to know of a truth if he will indeed send his gray palfrey to him he needs must hate above all others. "Yes," saith he straightway, "she who is of such high excellence, and whom I have now lost, hath no blame herein,—much it irketh me. My palfrey will go to serve her, and requite the high honour I have always found in her, for I have proven her at all points; but nevermore will she be mine, this I may know of a truth.

"Now I have not spoken wisely, rather have I lost my wit and fallen short of the mark, when I thought to send my palfrey for the joy and

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delight of him who has betrayed me and brought me to nought. Hath he not forced me to turn away from her whom I thought to have for mine own? No man should love one who seeketh his betrayal. Over bold is he who asketh for my palfrey; nothing of mine will I send to him of whom I have nought. Hath he not disinherited me of the sweetness, beauty and great courtesy for which my lady is praised?

“Long time I served her in vain; well had I deserved the sovereign honour of her; but now no joy of her shall I have henceforth. How send him who maketh me so sorrowful anything whereof he will be glad? But none the less, though it cost me somewhat that she who is of such goodness should ride upon my palfrey, well I know that when she looks on him, he will recall me to her remembrance. I have loved her in good faith, I do love her and shall love her always, but her love costs me too dear. All solitary I will be her lover, yet I know not if she put her heart into the old intimacy that hath made my heart so heavy and sorrowful; methinketh it was not dear to her; Cain the brother of Abel did no greater treason. Now is my heart in sore torment by reason of her of whom I have no comfort.” Thus he made lament unceasingly; but he let saddle the palfrey and called the squire; to his enemy he sent the gray palfrey, and the messenger set out straightway.

Messire Guillaume had no respite from his sorrow, he shut himself into his chamber all wrathful and sorrowful, and said to all his sergeants that were any so bold as to attempt to make merry, he would have him hung or put to the sword. No heart had he for joy, rather he was fain to lead a life without cheer, for he could no wise drive out the heaviness, the grief and the pain from his heart. Meantime, he to whom he had given the palfrey led it away, and returned forthwith to the house of his master, who made great joy.

The night was clear and still, and within the house was a great company of ancient knights. When they had eaten plenteously, the old man bade the watch, and said to all and commanded them, that an hour before daylight they be all awake and ready, and horses and palfreys be saddled and accoutred without noise or disorder; and thereafter they all went to rest and sleep. But she whom love caused to sigh and tremble

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with dread had no thought of sleep, not once that night did she slumber; all others slept, she watched. Nor was her heart asleep but all intent on making moan; and if it might have been, she would never have waited for the stirring of the men or the coming of the dawn, but would have fled away forthwith.

After midnight, the moon arose, and lighted all the heavens and the air; and when the watch, who had drunk deep, saw the great light round about him, he thought the dawn was breaking. "The high company of knights should have been astir before now," he thought; and he sounded the dawn, and called aloud and cried: "Up lordings, the day breaketh." So cried he who was all bemuddled from the wine he had drunk over night. And they who had scarce rested or slept arose all bewildered, and hastily the squires saddled the horses, for they thought the day had come. But before ever the dawn shall break they may well ride and travel a good five leagues.

The palfreys were saddled, and all the old men who were to escort the damsel to the waste chapel on the edge of the forest had mounted, and the maiden was committed to the care of the most discreet. The gray palfrey had been saddled, and when it was led forth, she made greater sorrow than ever she had made before. But the wise old men guessed nothing, nor knew her thought, rather they deemed she wept because she was leaving her father's house; nought they understood of her tears or the sorrow that she made; all wofully she got her to horseback.

So they rode forth together, and turned straight towards the forest, methinketh. They found the path so narrow that no two could ride abreast; now they who accompanied the damsel were in the rear, and the others went on before; and he who was her escort, in that he saw the path was narrow, made her go before him, while he rode behind by reason of the straitness of the way.

Long was the cavalcade, but inasmuch as they had slept little they were wearied and worn, and somewhat dispirited; also they rode the more heavily in that they old were and ancient, and by reason it was long before day they were the more given over to slumber. So drowsing upon the necks of their horses they rode up hill and down dale; and he

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who had been chosen as the most discreet escorted the damsel; but passing little rest had he had in his bed that night, and sleep tricked him into forgetfulness, for great was his desire of slumber.

Now as for the damsel she was distressed by nought save her love and her grief. And while she was in this narrow path whereof I have spoken, the great company of knights and barons passed on; the more part were bent low over their saddles, some few watched, but their thoughts were on other matters than the escort of the damsel; and ever they rode on swiftly through the deep forest. The damsel was in deep distress, even as one who would fain be elsewhere, in London or Winchester.

The gray palfrey well knew this old and narrow way, for many a time had he traversed it. Anon they rode down a steep hillside where the forest grew so thick that the light of the moon was hidden; full dusky there was the wood, for right deep was the valley. Loud was the noise of the horses, and the more part of the barons rode before her. Some bent low in sleep over their comrades, some waked and talked; and so they all fared on together. Now the gray palfrey which the damsel rode, following in the rear of the company, did not know the way of the highroad that ran straight before them, but chose a by-path to the right which led directly to the house of Messire Guillaume. The palfrey seeth the path, full oft had he traversed it, and straightway left the road and the cavalcade of horses. As for the knight who accompanied the damsel, he was so overtaken with sleep that ever and again he let his palfrey stop short in the roadway. And now no one guides the damsel, save God only; she gives her palfrey the rein and he turns into the tangled by-way. Not one of the knights discover that the damsel is no longer following them, more than a league they ride before they take note thereof; little care hath her guide and leader given her. And she did not wittingly take flight, but rather rode on as one who knoweth not the way nor to what land the road leadeth.

The palfrey follows the path nor goeth astray, for often, both summer and winter, had he been there before. The damsel all woful ofttimes looketh about her, but sees neither knight nor baron. Full perilous

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seemed the forest, sombre and darksome; and she was right fearful in that she was without companions. No great marvel is it that she was afraid, and much she wondered what had become of the knights who had borne her company. Full glad she was of the mischance, yet woful that she had no guide, save God alone, for herself and the palfrey who had often passed that way before. But she committed her to God, and the palfrey bore her away. She who was sore discomforted gave him the rein, nor did she utter a single cry, for she had no wish that those others should hear her, or return to her again. Rather would she die in the wild wood than make such a marriage.

Thus she rode deep in thought, and the palfrey, which knew the path well and was eager to get him home again, went at so swift a pace that he speedily traversed that great forest. On a hillside was a stream which ran swift and dark; the palfrey went straight thither, for he knew the ford, which was not very deep or wide, and he passed over it as fast as might be. Scarce had they left it behind when the damsel heard the sound of a horn from the side whither the gray palfrey was bearing her. The watch was above the gate, and played upon his horn to herald the day, and thither rode the damsel. Straight to the house she came, all abashed and astray, even as one who knoweth neither the road nor the pass nor how to ask the way. Thus the palfrey left the path, and came out upon the bridge which led across a deep water that enclosed all the manor.

And the watch on guard sounding his horn heard the noise and clatter of the palfrey upon the bridge, which had crossed there many a time before. He stopped his horn blowing for a little and cometh down from his place, and as forthright: "Who is it rides so hard over the bridge at this hour?" And the damsel it maketh answer: "Surely the most unhappy lady ever born of woman. In God's name let me within until the day dawneth, for I know not whither I should go." "Certes, damsel," he maketh answer, "that I dare not do, nor to bring anyone into this house, save by the leave of my lord; and never hath any man been in greater grief than he now is; right sorrowful is he in that he hath been cruelly betrayed."



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Now even as he spoke in this wise, he put his face and eyes to an opening in the postern; neither torch nor lantern had he, for the moon shone clear, and he seeth the gray palfrey; right well he knew it,—often had he looked on it aforetime. Much he wondered whence it came; and long he looked upon the damsel who held it by the rein, and who was richly dight in new and goodly raiment. Speedily the watch goeth to his master, who lay upon his bed all joyless. “Sir,” saith he, “a damsel is come hither out of the wood, all uncounselled is she, and young of look and seeming; rich is her array, full rich her garments; meseemeth, she is wrapped about in a mantle richly furred, and her gown, methinketh, is of fine scarlet. Sad and downcast she rideth upon your gray palfrey; no whit unpleasing is her speech, but fair and gracious: I would not willingly lie to you, sir, but I believe in all this land is no maid so fair and winsome. Methinketh she is a fay that God hath brought hither to you, to make good the loss that hath rendered you so heavy hearted; fair amends will she make you for her ye have lost.”

Messire Guillaume heareth him, and forthwith springeth to his feet; with a surcoat upon his back and nought beside he cometh to the door, and bade it be speedily opened. The damsel crieth out to him, sighing: “Ah, gentle sir, sore travail hath been mine this night. Sir, in God’s name, be not angry, but let me enter now your house,—I ask not to abide there. I am in sore distress by reason of a company of knights who are now in great dismay inasmuch as they have lost me. For safeguard I have come to you, even as chance has led me; right sorrowful am I and all astray.”

Messire Guillaume heard her and had to great joy thereof. He knew the palfrey that had long been his own, and he looketh hard upon the damsel,—a more joyful man there might not be. So he leadeth her into his house; he hath set her down from her palfrey, and taking her by the hand hath kissed her more than twenty times. And she made no denial, for right well she knew him. One looked upon the other, and right great joy made they between them; and in one another they forgot all their griefs. He took from her her mantle, and joyfully they sat them down upon a cushion of rich silk bordered with gold. Each maketh the sign of the cross a good twenty times, for scarcely can they believe it is not a

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dream, they look upon. And when the serving-men were gone, much they solaced themselves with kisses, but no other misdoing was there between them.

Freely the damsel told him all her plight; now she saith blessed was the hour of her birth, in that God that led her thither, and hath, as fortune willed it, delivered her from that other who thought to make her his own in return for his chatels and gear. Now in the morning at dawn of day, Messire Guillaume arrays himself, and lets bring the damsel into his court and chapel, and without delay he lets summon his chaplain. Speedily the knight had himself married and bound in holy wedlock; not lightly may the twain be disparted. And when the mass was sung, maids and serving-men and squires made great joy within the house.

But great annoy was theirs who had heedlessly lost her. They were come together at the waste chapel, and right weary were they from riding the night long, not one of them but was the worse for it. Then the old man demanded his daughter of him who had guarded her so ill; he knew not what to say, but speedily he made answer; "Sir, she rode before me, I was behind, for right narrow was the path and the forest great and thick. I know not if she turned aside, for I drowsed in my saddle; now and again I awoke and ever I deemed her near me, but certes, she is not here now, and I know not what hath become of her; right ill have we guarded her, "

The old man looked for her up and down, and asked and inquired of all where she was, and if they had seen her; sorely were they all abashed thereat, and had no word to say. And he who was to wed the damsel was yet more woful. He was not slow to seek her, but nought avails him his search for the right scent was lost. Now even amid their dismay a squire rode spurring down the path, and anon he cometh before the old man. "Sir," saith he, "Messire Guillaume sendeth you his goodliest fellowship. Very early this morning in the first dawn, he married your daughter; wherefore right glad and joyful is he. Come ye to him, sir; and likewise he biddeth his uncle who did so falsely by him, but now he pardoneth him the offence, inasmuch as he hath the gift of your daughter."

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The old man gave ear to the marvel, never had he heard its like. He calleth and assembleth all his barons, and when they were come together he taketh counsel that he will go, and take with him that other to whom he had pledged his daughter; the marriage he seeth to be a sooth, no undoing may there be of that. So he who was right wise rode thither quickly and all his barons with him. When they came to the house they were received full richly, and Messire Guillaume made great joy, even as one who is glad at heart by reason of his guerdon. The father must needs grant the marriage whether he would or no, and the old man of the twisted moustaches took what comfort he might therein. Even so, lordings, the Lord God willed that this marriage which seemed good to him be established.

Messire Guillaume was brave, courteous and right valourous, and no whit did his prowess abate, but rather he strove the more, and was well looked on by counts and princes. Now before the third year, as the tale telleth us, the old man died, this is sooth, and he gave and granted all his wealth to the knight, who thereafter held all his lands which were rich and plenteous. A good thousand pounds a year the land yielded him.... And he held it quit of all claim.

So the adventure I have related endeth in this wise, as truth telleth you.

# The Knight of the Little Cask



foretime, in the wild land between Normandy and Bretaigne there dwelt a mighty lord who was of much great fame. Near to the border and beside the sea, he let build a castle full well embattled, and so strong and so well garnished that he feared neither count nor viscount, neither prince nor duke nor king. And the high man whereof I speak, was, the tale saith, most comely of body and countenance, rich in goods and noble of lineage; and from his face it seemed that in all the world was no man more debonair, but of a sooth, he was all falseness and disloyalty, so traitorous and so cruel, so fierce and so proud, so fell and of so great disdain he feared neither God nor man; and all the country round about him he had laid waste,—this is the sum thereof.

No man might he meet, but he did him some outrage of his body, so great was his licence; he held all the roads and waylaid the pilgrims and did the merchants annoy; and many were oft sore discomforted thereby. He spared neither churchman nor cloistered monk, neither canon nor eremite; and monks and nuns, whereas they are most bound unto God, he made to live shamefully whensoever he had them in his might; and likewise dames and damsels, and widows and maids. He spared neither the wise nor the simple; and he laid his hand upon both the rich and the poor; and many folk had he driven forth in dishonour, and of those he had slain the tale may not be told. Nor would he ever take to him a wife but thought to be abased thereby, for had he been married to a woman he had deemed himself much shamed. And always he ate flesh, nor would he observe any fast day; no will had he to hear either mass or sermon or holy writ, and all good men he held in despite. Methinketh there was never yet man so fulfilled with vile customs; for all the evil a man may do in deed or word or thought he devised, and all were

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brought together in him. And so he lived for more than thirty years and there was no let to his ill doing.

So the days came and went until a certain lenten tide, upon the morning of Good Friday. He that was nowise tender of God had risen full early, and said to his household after his wont: "Make ready now the venison, for this is the hour to break our fast; I would eat betimes and then we will ride out to win somewhat. The kitchen knaves were all abashed; doubtful and troubled they made answer: "We will do your command, lord; yet we would ye had said otherwise." But when his knights, whose hearts were more inclined to God, heard him, they straightway said to him: "Fool, what say ye? This is lent, a holy time, and it is that high Friday whereon God endured the Passion to bring us to salvation; every man should abstain this day, and you, you would break your fast and eat meat in evil wise. The whole world is under chastisement, in fasting and abstinence; yea, the very children do penance,—and you would eat flesh this day. God must revenge himself upon you, and certes, he will in time." "By my faith," he made answer, "it will not be straightway, nor before I have done much malice, and many a man hath been hanged and burned and undone." "Have ye no respite in doing despite to God?" quoth they then. "Now ought ye incontinent to cry upon our Lord Jesus Christ and bewep the sins with which ye are tainted." "Weep?" quoth he, "what jest is this? I have no mind for such folly. But do ye make moan and I will laugh, for certes weep will I never."

"Hearken, sir," they make answer, "in this wood dwelleth a right holy man, and to him those folk who would turn from their sin, go to make Confession; come, let us confess to him and give up our evil life; man should not always live sinfully but rather should turn again to God." "A hundred devils!" saith he. "Confess? shall I become a jest and a byword? Cursed be he that turneth his footsteps thither with such intent, but if there be any spoils to be got I will go hang this hermit." "Nay, sir," quoth they, "prithee come with us. Do this kindness for our sake." "For your sake," he then made answer, "I will follow you, but for God will I do nought; 't is but for fellowship I go with ye. Bring up my horse, and I

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will forth with these hypocrites. But liefer had I two good mallards, nay, two tiny sparrows than all their confessions; yet will I go thither to make a jape of them. Whenso that they are shriven they will go rob here or there; it is even as the confession made between Reynard and the hen-hawk,—such repentance falleth at a breath." "Sir," quoth they, "now mount your horse, that God who knows no lie may do his will with you and give you true humility." "By my faith," saith he, "may it never so fall that I become mild and debonair and be feared of no man." And straightway thereafter they set forth. He who is possessed of the devil rideth behind singing, and his fellows go before weeping. And as his men fare on before him, ever he gives them ill words, pricks and prods and misprises them; but they, on their part, to humour him, say whatsoever he will.

And they ride on by the straight paved way so long they come into the forest to the hermitage. There they enter, and within the chapel they find the holy man; but their lord has stayed without, for he was fell and stark and full of malice, and fiercer than mad dog or werewolf; oftentimes he looketh down at his feet and proudly he straighteneth himself. "Lord," they say, "now light ye down and come within, amend your ways, or at the least, pray God's mercy." "Nay, I will not stir hence," quoth he; "and why should I pray his mercy when nought would I do for his sake? But now speed ye your affair for therein have I no part or portion; and much I fear lest I lose all my day through this dallying. For even now the merchants and pilgrims, whom it behooveth me to bring to ground, fare along the highroad, and now they will go their way unhindered; and as God may aid me, this weighs heavy upon me. By Saint Remi, I had liefer that ye were never shriven than that they go hence unshamed."

His men perceive that he will do no otherwise, and they pass into the chapel before the altar and speak with the holy hermit. Each hath said his matter as fairly as he might, and the hermit, as his wont was, assoiled them full sweetly but only by making covenant with them—to wit, that ever thenceforth they should withhold them from evil so much as they might. Fairly they pledged them, and then gently they besought him:

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"Lord, our master is without; for God's sake now call ye him, for he would not come within for our asking, and who knoweth if he will come for you." "Certes, lords," saith he, "I know not, but gladly will I make assay; yet do I greatly fear him."

So he issued out, leaning upon his staff, for he was feeble of body, and saith forthright to the baron: "Sir, be ye welcome. It is meet we put all evil from us, repent us and confess, and think full sweetly of God." "Think ye of him, who forbiddeth you? But I will think of him no whit." "Yea, that ye shall, fair sir, for you should be gentle of heart, you that be a knight. A priest am I, and I require you, for the sake of him who suffered death and offered up himself for us upon the cross, that ye speak with me a little." "Speak? In the devil's name what would ye I should say, and what have ye to make known to me? I am hot to depart from your house and you, for by a fat bellwether would I set more store." "Sir," the hermit made answer, "I believe ye, wherefore do it not for my sake but only for that of God." "Proud and persistent are ye," quoth the knight; "but if I go within, it will be for neither prayer nor orison nor almsgiving." "Sir, at the least, ye will see our chapel and convent." "I will go," he saith, "but on such conditions that I shall give no alms nor say no paternoster." "Now come but within," he maketh answer, "and if it pleases you nought, return again." And for very weariness the knight lighteth down from his horse: "Methinks ye will not have done to-day; to no good did I come hither this morn, and alack that I rose so early."

But the good man took him by the hand, and urging him on full gently, led him into the chapel before the altar. "Sir," saith he then, "there is no help, here are ye in my prison; now take it not ill of me that ye perforce must speak with me. Ye may cut my head from off my body, but for nought you may do shall you escape from me until that ye have told me of your life." He that was stark and full of malice maketh answer: "Certes, that will I not, and for this were I like to slay ye; never shall ye learn aught from me, so let me go and that speedily." "My lord," saith he then, "go you shall not, so please you, before you tell me of your life and the sins with which you are tainted; I would know all your



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deeds." "No, certes, that will I not, sir priest," saith he. "Never shall you know my doings. I am not so drunken with wine that I will tell you aught." "Not for me, but for the sake of God the Glorious, speak, and I will hearken." "Nay, certes, I will have nought to do therewith. Is it to this end that you brought me hither? I am like to slay you, and in truth the world were well rid of you. Methinks you are either mad or besotted with wine that you would know my life, and moreover would drive me to speak by force; now are you over-masterful, in sooth, you that would make me say that to which I am not minded." "Yet will ye do it," quoth he, "fair friend; and may he who was nailed upon the cross bring you to true penitence, and grant you so deep repentance that ye shall know your sin; now begin and I will listen."

Then looked hard upon him the tyrant who was fell and a seeker of evil. The good man was in sore dread, and every moment feared the knight would strike him, but he set all at adventure, and calling to mind the scriptures, said right gently: "Brother, for the sake of God omnipotent tell me but one sin; and when you have once begun I know well God will aid ye to tell truly all your life from end to end." "Nay, in sooth, nought shall ye hear thereof," quoth the knight. "Yea, but in truth I will." "Nay, ye shall not." "How now, ye will tell me nought! Have ye then no mind for well doing?" "No, in sooth, ye may die in your lament but nought shall ye hear from me." "Yet shall ye do my bidding, whomsoever it grieves; rather shall ye stay here until nightfall than that I hear nought. And now to make an end, I conjure you by God himself and by his most high virtue; this is the day whereon Christ suffered death and was nailed upon the cross, and I conjure you by that death that slew and destroyed the arch enemy, and by the saints and martyrs, that you open your heart to me; yea, I command you," so spake the hermit, "that ye tell me all your sins. Now delay ye no longer." "Nay, ye go too far with me," quoth the baron, sore moved; and so confounded and astonied was he that he became all shamed. "How now," said he, "are ye such that I must perforce tell my story, may it be no other wise? Despite me then I will speak, but, certes, no more will I do."

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Then wrathfully he began to tell over the tale of his sins one after the other, word by word he told them, nor did he fail of any. And when he had made his confession he said to the hermit: "Now have I told you all my deeds; are ye well content, and wherein are ye bettered? By St. James, meseems ye had not been appeased and if I had not told you the whole tale of my deeds. But now all is said,—and what then? Will ye leave me in peace henceforth? Now methinks I can go. By St. James, I have no will to talk more with you, nor to let my eyes rest longer upon you. Certes, without sword ye have won the day of me, ye that have made me speak perforce."

The good man had no will to laugh, but he weepeth full sorrowfully in that the knight doth not repent him. "Sir," he maketh answer, "well have ye said your say, save that it is without repentance; but now if you will do some penance I shall hold me well repaid." "And a fair return ye would make me," quoth he, "ye that would make me a penitent. Foul fall him who hath aught to do herein or who would desire it of me. But if it were my will so to do, what penance would ye lay on me?" "In sooth, even that which ye would." "Nay, but tell me." "Sir, with good will; to overcome your sins you should fast a space, each Friday these seven years." "Seven years!" quoth he, "nay, that I will not." "Then for three." "Nay, in sooth."

"Each Friday for but a single month." "Hold your peace, nought will I do herein for I may not achieve it." "Go barefoot for but one full year." "No, by Saint Abraham!" "Go all in wool without linen." "Anon my body would be preyed upon and devoured of vermin." "Do but chastise yourself with rods each night." "That is ill said," quoth he; "know that I may not endure to beat or mutilate my flesh." "Then go a pilgrimage over sea," quoth the hermit. "That is too bitter a word," answered the knight; "say no more of it; herein ye speak idly, for full of peril is the sea." "Go but to Rome, or to the shrine of Saint James." "By my soul," said he, "thither will I never." "Go then each day to church and hear God's service, and kneel till that ye have said two prayers, an ave and a pater noster, that God may grant you salvation." "That labour were over great," made he answer. "All this ado avails not, for certes, no one of

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these things will I agree unto." "How now! Ye will nought of good? yet shall ye do somewhat, and it please God and please you, before we twain dispart. Now do but take my water cask to yonder stream for the love of God omnipotent, and dip it into the fountain, no hurt will that be to you, and if ye bring it to me full, ye shall be freed and absolved of both your sins and your penance, no more need you be in doubt, but I will take upon myself all the burden of your iniquity; lo, now your penalty is meted out to you."

The baron heard him and laughed out in scorn, and then he spoke, saying: "No great toil will it be and if I do go to the fountain; and speedily will this penance be done. Now give me the cask forthwith for I am in haste." The good man brought it to him, and lightly, as one untroubled, he received it, saying: "I take it on this covenant, that, until I have brought it back full to you I will never rest me." "And on this covenant I give it unto you, friend." So the knight fared forth, and his men would fain have followed him, but he would have none of them: "No, in sooth, abide where ye are," he saith.

So he cometh to the fountain and dippeth in the cask, but not a single drop runneth into it, although he turns it this way and that until he is well nigh beside himself. Then he thinketh something hath stopped the opening and thrusteth in a stick, but finds it all free and empty. So again in his wrath, he that was proud of heart dipped the little cask into the fountain, but not a drop would enter therein. "God's death!" saith he, "how is it that nought comes into it?" Then yet again he thrust the cask into the water; yet were he to lose his head thereby no whit might he fill it.

Then in his chagrin he ground his teeth, and rose up in great wrath, and went again to the hermit. Hot and ireful he hardened his heart, and spoke, saying: "God! I have not a single drop. I have done my uttermost, yet I could not contrive or so dip the cask that so much as a tear-drop of water came therein; but by him who made my soul never will I rest, nor will I cease night or day till that I have brought it to you again filled to overflowing." And again he spoke to the hermit, saying: "Ye have brought me into sore trouble by this cask of the devil. Cursed be the day

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whereon it was shaped and fashioned, since by reason of it so great toil must be mine, that never may I rest, nor know solace or ease by day or by night, nor let my face be washen, nor my nails trimmed, nor my hair or my beard be cut, till that I have fulfilled my covenant; afoot will I travel, and penniless will I go, nor take with me so much as a farthing in my doublet, nor yet bread nor meat."

The hermit heareth him and weepeth full gently: "Brother," quoth he, "in an ill hour were ye born, and most bitter are your days. Certes, and if a child had lowered this cask into the fountain he would have drawn it forth full to overflowing, and you have not gathered a single drop. Wretch, it is by reason of your sins that God is in anger against you, but now in his mercy he would that you should do your penance, and torment your body for his sake; now be not unwise but serve God full sweetly." But in wrath the baron made answer: "For God, certes, will I do nought, but I will do it for very pride, and in wrath and vexation: it is done neither for good, nor for the sake of my fellows." Then all in pride he turned to his men, saying: "Now get ye gone forthright, and take with you my horse, and bide you quiet in your own of land. And if you hear men talk of me, mind that ye tell them nought, neither one nor other, nor this man nor his fellow, but hold your peace and be silent, and live after your wont; for I have become such that never henceforth shall I know a day without travail and toil, by reason of this cask which is of the fiend,—may the cursed fire and the cursed flame devour it! Meseems the devils have had it in their care and have laid a spell upon it; but I tell you of a sooth that rather will I seek out all the waters of all the world than not bring it back again full to overflowing."

Then without taking leave he fared forth, and passed out of the door with the little cask hung about his neck. But know ye of a truth that, save only the garments he wore, he took not with him so much treasure as would buy him four straws; and alone he set forth, for none went with him save God only. Now know ye what anon he will know, what hardships will fall to him by night and by day, at morning and evening, for he goeth forth into strange lands. Few will he have of those delights to which he is wont, and he must lie hard and lodge ill, and cold victual

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will be his and scanty bread; poverty will be oftentimes his neighbor, and much toil and trouble will be his.

So over hill and dale fared he, and to whatsoever water he cometh he thrusteth in his cask and testeth it, but it avails him not, for nought can he gather up. And his great wrath, that sways him overmuch, is ever kindled and burning. Well nigh half a week it was before he bethought him of food or had any desire thereof. Ever his great wrath consumed him, but when he saw that hunger so beset him that he might not defend him, it behooved him to sell and barter his robe, whatever else anyone should tell you, for a paltry tunic that was worn and tattered and shameful for so high a man. Nor had he any sleeves, whether full or narrow, and neither hood nor capuchon. So he wandered by valley and plain until his face, which of old had been fresh and fair, grew changed and tanned and blackened. But whatsoever water he came unto ever he thrust in his cask and proved it, but little his labour profited him, for howsoever much he toiled, he might not gather up a single drop; and much he suffered and endured thereby.

His sorry raiment soon grew worn and tattered. Barefooted he crossed many a great hill and many a valley. He wandereth in cold and in heat: he fareth through briars and thorns, and among the wild beasts; his flesh is torn in many a place, and many a drop of blood falleth from him, and sore pain and trouble is his. Now he passeth ill days and ill nights: now he is poor and a-beggared; now rebuffs and ill words are his portion, and he hath neither robe nor chattle; now he findeth no hostel, and again he meeteth with folk full harsh, churlish and cruel, for in that they see him so denuded, so stark and tall and great of limb, so hideous and tanned and blackened, and bare legged even to the thighs, many a one, forsooth, feareth to give him lodging, so that oft-times he must lie in the fields. Neither jest nor song had he, but ever great wrath and sore torment. And I may tell you thus much, that never could he humble himself, or lighten his sore heart, save in so far as he made lament to God of the great travail and misease he endured; yet it was, but for bewilderment, for he was nowise repentant.

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When that he had spent the money he won by the sale of his raiment, he had not wherewith to buy bread; and if he would eat he must perforce learn to beg. Now are all his woes exceeded, for never again shall he know solace, but woe only so long as he liveth. Often he fasteth for two days or three, and when his heart is so weakened that he may no longer endure his hunger, in wrath he goeth aside to seek for bread or some crumb or morsel, and then he fares on for a space.

Thus he sought through all of Anjou, Maine, Touraine, and Poitou, Normandy and France and Burgundy, Provence and Spain and Gascony, and all of Hungary and Moriane, and Apulia and Calabria and Tuscany, and Germany, and Romagna, and all the plain of Lombardy, and all Lorraine and Alsace; and everywhere he setteth his heart to the task. Methinketh I need not tell you more; the day long I might tell ye of the woes he endured, but in a word, from the sea that circles and encloses England even unto Baretta that lieth on the Eastern shore, ye cannot name a land that he hath not searched, nor any river that he hath not tested; nor lake, nor mere, nor spring, nor fountain, nor any water foul or fresh, into which he hath not dipped his cask, but never might he draw a single drop; never would any whit come into it, howsoever much he strove; and yet he did all his endeavour, and more and still more he laboured.

And amid all his woe which was so great and grievous, a marvel befell him, for never by any chance of adventure did he find any man who did him aught of kindness, or spoke him fair in fellowship, but all men hated him and mocked and chid him, nor spake with him, whether in field or wood or hostel, and it were not to revile him; yet whatsoever shame men might say to him, he would neither dispute with any nor defame any, for he held them overmuch in scorn, and all men he hated and despised.

What more should I tell you? He fared for so long, up and down, here and there, that his body grew so tanned and stained and blackened that scarce had any man known him that had seen him aforetime. His hair was long and tangled and hung in locks about his shoulders; his fair hair and face and forehead grew black as a flitch of bacon, and his neck

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that had been great and thick, was long and thin to the bone. All lean from hunger he was and hairy; his eyebrows had grown shaggy, his eyes sunken; his sides were all uncovered, and his skin so hung about his bones that you might count the ribs beneath; his legs were bared and brown and lean and shrunken; his veins showed and his sinews, and from toe to groin no shred of raiment had he, and black and brown and stained he was. Thereto had he waxed so weary and spent that scarce might he stand upright; he needs must have a stick to lean on as he walked, and much the cask, that he had carried night and day for a year, now weighed upon him. What more need I tell you? His body had been in so great torment the year through that marvel it was how he had brooked it; and so much had he borne and suffered that he knew right well he might not longer endure. Yet was there a thing he must do. He holdeth he must return again,—never will the hermit laugh when he seeth him, rather will he weep. So the knight set forth leaning upon his staff, and often he maketh lament in a loud voice, yet he strove so much that still he held on his way to the hermitage. At the end of the year on the same day he had departed from that most holy place, the high day of Good Friday, even in such guise as I have told you, he came thither again. Now hear ye what befell him.

All dolorous he entered; and the hermit, who had no thought of him, was alone within, and he looked at him in wonder for that he saw in him a man so weary and wasted. Him he knew not, but the cask, which was hung about his neck, he knew right well that aforetime he had seen it. And the holy man spoke, saying:

“Fair brother, what need brings thee here, and who gave thee this cask? Ofttimes have I seen it, and this same day, a year past, I gave it forsooth to the fairest man in all the Empire of Rome and to the starkest, methinketh, but if he be alive or dead I know not, for never since hath he returned hither again; but tell me now of thy courtesy, who thou art and how men call thee, for never did I see so weary a man as thou seemest, nor one so poor and disgarnished. Had the Saracens had you in their prison even so stripped and denuded had ye seemed; whence thou art come I know not, but of a sooth thou hast fallen among ill folk.” But the

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other brake out in anger, for still was his wrath great, and irefully he spoke: "Even to such a plight hast thou thyself brought me!" "I, how so, friend? For methinks I have never before set eyes upon thee. What wrong have I done thee? Prithee tell me, and if I can, I will amend it." "Sir," quoth he, "I will tell thee: I am he whom a year ago this day thou didst confess, and gave me as a penance this cask which has brought me to such straits as ye see." Then he told him all the tale of his travels, of all the lands and countries he had travelled through, of the sea and the rivers and the great and mighty waters. "Sir," saith he, "everywhere have I sought, and everywhere have I tested the cask, but never a drop hath entered therein, and yet I have done mine uttermost; and well I know that anon I must die, and may endure no more."

The good man heard him and was sore moved, and all in sorrow he began to speak, saying: "Wretch, wretch," so spake the hermit, "thou art worse than a Sodomite, or dog or wolf or any other beast. By the eyes of my head, methinketh that had a dog dragged the cask to so many waters, and through so many fords, he had drawn it full,—and thou hast not taken up a single drop! Now I see of a sooth God hateth thee, and thy penance is without savour, for that thou hast done it without repentance, and without love or pity." Then he wept and lamented and wrung his hands, and so rent was his heart that he cried aloud, "God, thou who seest and knowest all things and canst do all, look now upon this creature who has led so toilsome a life, who has lost both body and soul, and spent his time to no purpose. Blessed Mary, sweet mother, now pray God your sovereign father that it be his will to keep this man, and to rest his fair eyes upon him. If ever I did aught of good, sweet and dear God, or aught pleasing in thy sight, I pray thee here and now that thou grantest mercy to this man who hath been brought to so great distress through me; God, in thy mercy let not his misery be wasted, but lead him to repentance. God, if he were to die through me, I must render account thereof, and my grief were greater than I could bear. God, if thou takest to thee one of us twain, leave me here at adventure, and take thou this man." And he wept right tenderly.



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The knight looked long upon him yet spake no word, but all low within himself he said: "Lo, here in sooth is a strange thing, whereof my heart hath great marvel, that this man who is not of my house, and hath no kinship with me save in God, should so harass himself for my sake, and weep and lament for my sins. Now of a surety, I am the basest man living, and the vilest sinner, that this man holds my soul so dear that he destroyeth himself because of my offences, and am so spotted with evil, and have in me so little goodness that I have no compunction thereof; and yet he is full of sorrow because of them. Ah, sweet God, and thou wilt, through thy might and thy power, grant me such repentance that this good man who is so out of all cheer may be given solace. God, let not all my travail be vain and profitless to my soul; when all is said, by reason of my sin was this cask laid upon me, and for my sins I took it, sweet God, if I have done wrong herein, now do thou thy will; lo, I am ready." And God straightway so wrought in him that his heart was freed and disencumbered of all pride and hardness, and fulfilled with humility and love and repentance, and fear and hope, whereby his spirit melteth, and he weepeth. Then he cast away the world from him, and the tears flowed forth from his heart, that nought might staunch them, all burning they were with repentance, and he drew such great sighs that at each it seemed his spirit must issue out of him. His repentance was so puissant that his very heart had been broke had it not been lightened by tears; but he shed them in so great plenteousness his relief is no marvel. Such dolour laid hold of his heart that he might not speak with his lips, but he made covenant with God within his heart full sweetly, that thenceforth he would sin no more, nor do more wrong towards him.

Now God seeth well that he repents him. The cask which had caused him such woe still hangeth about his neck, but still it was empty, and it was all his desire that it should be filled. And God seeth his longing, that his mind was bent on well-doing, and that he was no wise feigning; and then God did a great bounty and a fair kindness,—but what need to say it, for never did he unkindness. But now hear you what God did to comfort his friend who had cause to be out of all comfort. In his sore distress there sprang from his eyes a great tear which God drew forth

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from a true source; with the flight of a bolt it sprang straight into the cask, and the book telleth us that the cask was filled so full by the tear that the overflow gushed out and ran down on all sides, for this tear was so hot with repentance, and so boiling, that the froth over-ran.

And the hermit hastened to him, and cast himself down at his feet, and kissed them both all naked as they were. "Brother," said he, "fair sweet friend, the holy Ghost hath entered into thee. Brother, God hath heard thee, God hath saved thee from hell's pit, never henceforth shalt thou be defiled. God hath pardoned thee thy sins, now rejoice and be glad, for thine expiation is complete." Men was the knight so glad methinketh never again shall I see such joy in any man; and still he weepeth, this is the sum thereof. Then he spake to the holy hermit, and told him all his desire: "Father," saith he, "I am wholly thine; father, all good hast thou done me. Fair, sweet father, and I might, how gladly would I stay with thee. Never in sooth would I leave thee; but ever would I serve thee and love thee; but I may endure no longer and I needs must suffer death, most sweet father, through God's mercy. This day a year past I was here, as vain and foolish as thou knowest, fair sweet father, and told thee all my sins in anger and sore wrath, without fear or repentance; and now I would tell them again in great love and great compunction, if it may be that God, who is life eternal, grant me to-day a good end." Saith the hermit: "Fair sweet brother, blessed be God who hath given thee this thought; and behold, now I am ready, speak and I will listen."

Then the knight beginneth, and from his very heart telleth all his life, weeping and with joined hands; nought did he mis-say, and from his heart he sigheth full softly, and his tears spring forth in great plenty. When the good man saw it was time to shrive him, he gave him absolution and granted him great treasure, the body of Jesus Christ, to wit, and well he showed its great virtue. "Dear son, lo, here is thy salvation, lo, here is thy life and thy healing. Believest thou so?" "Yes, fair father, well do I believe that this is my Redeemer and he that may save us all; but haste thee, for death is near me." And the holy man giveth him all the body of God; and the other taketh it, nor doth he

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delude himself, and in all excellence receiveth it, in love and in truth, and in right great humility.

When he was houseled, and so cleansed and purified that there remained in him no drop of the lees of folly and sin, he spake to the hermit, and told him all his desire, saying: "Fair sweet father, now I go hence, pray for me for I am near my end; here I may not tarry, but must seek another dwelling; my heart faileth me, sweet father, and no more may I speak with thee. Most sweet father, I commend thee to God, and now at the last I pray thee that thou put thy arms about me." And straightway the good man embraced him full gently and gladly and with good will.

The knight lieth him down before the altar, and hath given all his heart to God. He closeth his eyes and saith his mea culpa and setteth all his hopes in God. His little cask that had done him more good than ill, lay upon his breast, nor would he let it be taken from him, for it was all his desire to keep it in death as in life. So upon his heart lieth his penance, and a flood of repentance hath so shaken him that God hath wholly pardoned him all sin and sorrow. His heart travaileth and his body is anguished, and it behooveth the twain to dispart, and the soul to leave the body. And it hath issued forth so purged and cleansed and purified that there is neither spot nor sin therein. So soon as the soul is freed of the body and hath gone forth, the blessed angels that have come thither, have received it. Great comfort hath come to the soul that was snatched by the holy angels, and sore peril hath it escaped, for the devil was waiting for it, and he thought to have it, in all certainty and surety, but now he goeth thence discomfited. And all this was seen of the good man from point to point to the end, for he was illumined by the Holy Spirit. All clear he saw the angels that bore away the soul, the while the body resteth barefoot and naked, and lieth under a sorry covering.

But hear ye now what adventure befell upon his death, for his knights, who had been with him just a year before and to whom he had done so great annoy, came that day by reason of prayer, as was right and fitting, for it was the high day of Good Friday. Close upon noon the men of arms came within and found their lord dead; well they

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recognized him by his stature and all his form and seeming, and the cask they knew right well; and that it was their lord whose body was so wasted, they doubted not. Then were they sore troubled in that they knew not how he came to his end, whether well or ill, and every man maketh great lament; but the good man comforteth them and told them all the truth. From point to point, he told them all as it befell,—how their lord had come to him, and the hour and the time when he confessed and was repentant, and how his soul was ravished above into life perdurable, and how he had seen the angels all clearly that had borne it away. Then the knights made great joy, and honoured the body full nobly, right gently they shrouded it, and after mass, gave it due burial. And when that they had eaten and drunk they took leave of the good man, and each went again to his own land, and everywhere they told and recounted all they knew of their lord; and the folk of that land had great joy thereof and great pity, and gave thanks to Our Lord.

Now have I told you all the tale of this high man, even as it hath come down to us from holy men who mistell nought herein, but all they accord in true telling, and disagree in nought of good. These men tell us how the knight strove and how God redeemed him,—and ever God knoweth how to work in this wise, and to ransom sinners who would return to him, for no man may do so great wrong, but, if it be his desire to turn again to God, God will not pardon him. And none should despise his fellow, but should hold himself to be the worst, and God who hath power to create men, knoweth their hearts, and hath the power rightfully to judge them; and subtle are his judgments. Here endeth the story of the cask, and in this wise the knight came to his death. Now let us pray God who created all things that it be his will to lead us to that glory wherein he dwelleth.

# The Angel and the Hermit



here dwelt in Egypt, of old time, a holy father who while yet young of age had withdrawn into a hermitage. There he set himself to great toil and sore labour, fasting, weeping, and living ever in solitude; and much pain and torment he endured of his body that he might bring joy and content to his soul. But oftentimes it betideth that one man, be he religious or layman, hath more of happiness than falleth to the lot of two of his fellows. And to him of whom the tale telleth, it seemed he had few of those delights which God giveth to his own, delights spiritual, to wit, and fain would he have had such as were enjoyed by certain of his acquaintance; for long had he served without reward, him seemed. Now oftentimes God giveth fair gifts to one who doth him scant service; and yet another who is more deserving, he leaveth, mayhap, all his life days in poverty, misery and sore want. And the hermit pondered much wherefore God's judgments are of so great diversity. Now it is summer, now winter; now it is one man, and anon to-morrow no more of him; and our life is even as a wheel that turns, abiding in no one estate. Such judgments are dark, yet are they good and right and just for God doth naught unwisely. And the good man so pondered the matter, that he said to himself he would go forth into the world to see if any man therein were of so great wisdom that he could show him wherefore God made the world after this manner, and wherefore men are not equal in good hap and ill hap. He was all desirous to know of this matter; and albeit there was neither road nor highway near him to his knowledge, he took his staff and set forth from his hut.

He had not travelled far before he came to a footpath; and thereinto the good man turned, and when he had walked on for a space, he looked behind him and saw a youth that came after him with all speed. In his

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hand he bore a javelin, and full comely he was, and well fashioned, and he was girded up to the knee. His dress was seemly and such as befitteth a sergeant; fair of face he was, and goodly of body; and well might it be seen he served a rich lord and a mighty.

So he drew near and bowed him and gave greeting; and the good man spoke to him, saying: "Now tell me, brother, whom dost thou serve?" "By my faith, sir, that will I full gladly; I am the servant of God who made all things." "Certes, thine is a right good lord, none better canst thou find. But tell me now where thou goest." "Sir," he saith, "I would fain visit the friends and fair ladies I have known in this land" "Now and if I might go with thee it would please me much, for never till to-day was I in this land and naught know I thereof." "Sir, full fair of speech are ye, and I were right glad of your company; so come with me, fair and dear father, for full well know I the land." Thereupon they set forth together; the varlet goeth before, and after him cometh the hermit, praying to God.

Thus they journeyed the day long, until that they came to a little wood wherein they espied a dead man who had been traitorously stain there, and who had lain so long upon the ground that, what with the summer and the warm weather, the body stunk so foully that there is no man in this earthly world were not sickened thereby, so be that he passed that way and he did not well cover his face. The hermit held his nose and thought to die because of the foul smell. But the varlet straightway went up to the body, nor did he show by any sign that he perceived aught evil therein. "Fair father," he saith, "now come with me, for God hath guided us hither that here we may bury this dead man." "Fair, sweet brother, in God's mercy know that I may not do this thing. Because of the foul stink I cannot bring myself to set hand to him, for I am sore sickened thereby." Then saith the varlet: "I myself will give him burial, if that I may." And thereupon he dragged him into a ditch that he found hard by, and covered the body over with earth. The hermit marvelled much that the other smelt not the stink, or made no sign or semblance of so doing.

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Thereafter the varlet set forth again, and the hermit followed after, striving to keep pace with him. When that they had gone on for a space they encountered upon the way a train of knights and ladies—fast riding they drew towards them, and right fair was their array. They came from a feast, and I know not if they had drunk deep, but as they rode one jostled other, and profligate they were of seeming. The varlet covered over his face as well as he might, even as if he could not well endure the odour that came from them, and turned aside from the path. The hermit marvelled much that his comrade should so do, and that he should hide his face because of the knights, he that had not so done for the carrion.

But why tell ye a long tale? They journeyed on after this manner until night, when they lodged with a hermit who gave them shelter full willingly. Such meat as he had he set before them, and gladly they received it. And that evening as soon as they had supped they should have turned to prayer; but the varlet saw that their host gave himself much trouble because of a certain hanap or drinking-cup that he had, and that he spent more pains in drying and rubbing it than he did in praying to God. And the varlet took note where the good man bestowed the hanap, and he stole it away and hid it, for he would not leave it behind. On the morrow at dawn he carried it away, and thereafter showed it to his comrade. Now when the hermit saw it he was full sorrowful, nor might he hold his peace: "For love of God let us take it back again; you have done me much wrong and hurt in that you have deceived that good man, and robbed him of that which was his. Why have ye done such wickedness?" "Hold your peace and say no more, fair and dear father," saith the varlet; "know that there was need for this, and hereafter ye shall learn the truth herein. And whatsoever ye see me do, be not angry, but follow and be silent, for all is done in reason." And the youth so wrought with the hermit that he durst say no more, but goeth after him with bent head.

At evening they came to a city and besought lodging in many places, but could find none; ever it behooved them to pass on, for in that they were penniless the simplest folk looked askance at them; for still in many places do men love money dearer than God,—great is the pity and the



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blame thereof. The hermit and the varlet who were weary and wet to the skin, for it had rained the day long, sat them down upon the perron before the door of a great house. Both entreated the master thereof, but little they won thereby, for he refused them aught. Then saith the hermit to the varlet: "Certes, fair brother, I am sore weary, and here have we no shelter from the rain, let us rather creep under yonder pent-house." "Nay," saith the varlet, "let us call out again, for yet will I lodge within." And they so clamoured and beat upon the door that for very weariness they were suffered to enter and take refuge beneath the stairway, where was strewn a little of musty straw. "Here ye may rest until the morning," quoth the damsel; and so withdrew her, and left the twain in small comfort, for they had neither eaten nor drunk, nor had they either light or fire.

The master of the house was a usurer, full rich in gear and gold; but rather would he go without bread the day long than give a farthing to God, for the devil had him in his toils. Now that night when he had taken his pleasure and eaten and drunk plenteously, a few peas were yet left that might not be eaten, and these he sent to his guests. The damsel brought them the dish, but if she gave them a light I know not. Thus then they passed the night, and when the day dawned the hermit saith: "Now let us go hence." "What say ye, sir?" the varlet made answer; "for naught would I depart and if I did not first commend our host to God. I go now to take leave of him, and inasmuch as he hath given us lodging I would give him this good hanap that is neither of pine nor maplewood but of fair and well polished mazer," — the same it was which he had taken from the hermit. Therewith the varlet mounted the stairway, and in the chamber above he met with his host. "Sir," he saith, "we would fain take leave of you; and in return for our lodging we give you this hanap which is right fair, for we would be just and naught beholden unto you." "Now as God may aid me, here is a proper guest," saith the burgher, and taketh the cup. "Fair sir, come ye often back hither; and may God keep ye, for fair is the bargain." So leave taken, the varlet went his way, and with him the hermit.

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When they were without the city, "Varlet," saith the hermit, "I know not whether it be in my despite thou dost so bear thyself; thou didst rob the good hermit who was a religious, and now to this man who entertained us so churlishly thou hast given a gift; such deeds are against reason." "Good sir, I pray you hold your peace," saith the varlet, "you are no sage, instead you were brought up in these woods and wastes, and know not good from evil. Now follow me and fear naught, for as yet ye have seen but little."

That day they made good speed, and at night came to a convent wherein the monks gladly gave them lodging, and let serve them freely and bounteously; for great was the brotherhood and full rich in land and rents and harvest, and thereto many a fair house was theirs; no fear had they of times of dearth. Right well were those twain lodged; but in the morning when they were shod for their journey, the varlet lighted a brand and laid it at the foot of his bed. There was good plenty of straw, and the room was low, and lightly the blaze caught. Then the youth called to the hermit to hasten, saying: "Hie you fast, for anon the fire will run through all the place." And the hermit made what speed he might, for of the deed he was in sore fear. The varlet goeth before him, and leadeth him up a great hill from the top whereof he looketh abroad, and saith to the hermit: "Lo you, how clear and bright the abbey burneth." But the hermit crieth out aloud, and teareth and beateth his breast. "Woe and alas! what will become of me? Unhappy the father that engendered me, unhappy she who bore me, and most unhappy me in that I have lost all. Alack for my soul and my salvation! Lo now, I have become a burner of houses; never was man so wofully betrayed. Alack the day that I met this youth, and woe is me that I became his comrade, for he hath robbed me of my life and my soul!" And sore he rendeth himself with his nails. Thereupon the varlet cometh to him and beginneth to comfort him. "Nay, I have no love for thee," saith the good man; "thou hast taken from me my life." "Sir," the youth maketh answer, "ye do wrong to make such sorrow for naught. In the beginning I covenanted with you to do these things, and thereby to bring you to wisdom; now come away

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and say no more." And he so soothed the good man that he led him away in quietness.

All that day they fared on together, and at night they came to a city that stood beside a wide river, and whereof the burghers were rich and of good conditions. The youth made great cheer in that he knew the place well, and goeth straight unto a house wherein it seemeth him they might lodge at their case. He cometh to the door with his master and asketh shelter in God's name. And right good cheer was theirs methinketh, for the burgher was a goodly man. A wife he had, and one child, a boy whom they dearly loved; no other had they and they were already waxing old; and the boy was ten years of his age. They washed the feet of the two travellers, and gave them to eat and to drink, and let them sleep until the day. In the morning when the time was come to depart, "Fair host," the varlet saith, "lend us the child for a little, that he may guide us beyond the bridge since we must pass that way." "That will I gladly. Come, fair son," and straightway the boy riseth up; he goeth before, and the other twain follow after. Now when they were come to the bridge, where there was neither edge-stone nor parapet, the varlet so jostled the boy that he fell down into the water, and the stream swept him away and drowned him. "Herein have we done well," saith the varlet; "and stay, sir hermit, and ye will, for ye shall not be destroyed or slain." But the hermit set himself to run, for he was all a-sweat with fear, and well-nigh had he slain himself for sorrow. When he was come into the fields he cast himself down. "Alas, unhappy that I am, what will become of me," saith the hermit. "Woe, worth the day whereon I was born, for now I am come to despair and madness. Alas, caitiff that I am, why did I leave the place whereto I was appointed and wherein I had come to my old age? The devil hath betrayed and destroyed me. Never again shall I know joy nor peace. Was I not a party to the burning of the abbey and the death of the child? Christ! what will become of me? Now with mine own hands will I slay myself!"

Then saith the varlet within himself: "It behooveth me to go comfort that old man and foolish." So he getteth his javelin into his hand and cometh to the hermit, and saith: "Fond and simple that ye are, now give

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ear unto me. I am nowise mad; and do ye hold your peace and hear reason which shall bring you solace. Now shall be shown unto you the virtue of my deeds which ye thought done against reason. Now give heed unto me, fair, sweet sir; well know I that ye are a hermit, but ye were tempted of the devil when ye thought to go forth into the world to seek out a man of wisdom who knew all things, and who would tell you why God made the world such as we now see it. You would seek to understand his judgments, so do ye dote in your old age, whereas ye should have amended and bettered thyself; no whit wouldst thou struggle against this temptation, but thou didst wander forth from thy house, thou that wert bewildered as a silly sheep. The devil would have put thee to shame, and if God had not had pity upon thee, and sent a holy angel to thee to lead and guide thee; for thy sake he sent me to the earth,—for know that I am an angel. And I have shown thee that thou soughtest to know, and that which it was thy will to seek in the world, but thou knewest it not. Now listen and thou shalt learn.

“And for the dead body which lay in the wood and rotted upon the ground, and whereof ye smelt so great a stink that ye might not aid me therewith,—it is but in the course of nature that a body should rot, and therefore should it be buried; but such odour vexes me not, nor was it displeasing to Jesus Christ, for it is nowise contrary to nature; therefore I had no will to hide my face, but thou that wert neither God nor angel might not endure it. But when I saw the knights and squires and ladies that came from such a feast, each with a chaplet of flowers upon his head, and all fulfilled with luxury, they so stunk in my nostrils that it behooved me to hold my nose. Such evil odours rise even to God in paradise, and he lamenteth them to his own; Jesus Christ will revenge him of such sin and wickedness; and for them, they are filled with such vileness I have no will to say more thereof; and for the stink of them I covered my face.

“And now I will tell thee of the hermit whose hanap I stole, which deed seemed evil in thy sight. But the cup did him much hurt, for that he gave himself more toil and trouble in the rubbing and polishing thereof than he took in praying to God; to it he gave the greater part of his days and thereby was he come to sore peril, for it is God’s will that a man

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should love naught save him only, and the more if that man be a hermit and a religious. Now there are certain men who hold their possessions so dear that they will lend them to none, and rather than so do they hide them away; and this methinketh is a great sin, that they should make of them an indulgence and an idol; and certes, he is but foolish who enters into religion and giveth not his whole heart to God. Now the hermit had set his heart upon the drinking-cup which he loved overmuch, and therefore God willed that I should take it from him.

“And again I will tell thee of the usurer who left us to call and clamour at his door, and where we entered only through vexation. In the morning when it was time to depart, I told thee I would take courteous leave of our host and would give him the hanap; God willed that I should so do, for else the usurer, when he received his damnation, might have said: ‘Lord, Lord, I gave lodging to thy people; can I in justice be damned?’ But God cares naught for the alms of such as he, and no usurer shall be saved if he does not return that which he hath wrongfully received of others; God will not permit or suffer him to give in charity the goods which are not rightfully his. If he bringeth a poor man into his house and shareth with him his bread, God will straightway return it to him again. Here and now, in this world, he taketh his portion, for into no other paradise shall he come. And therefore fair, sweet friend, God willed that he should be doubly paid by us. Now judge if it were well done.”

“I am content,” saith the hermit; “but tell me now of the abbey, and wherefore ye set fire to it; surely herein thou didst ill.” Saith the angel: “I will tell thee in all truth. When the order was first established it was poor and unfavoured; the monks lived without chattels or revenue, yet they had sufficient unto each day, for God gave plenteously unto them that were their purveyors. In those days the brethren of the convent led holy lives and served God with all their might; and never, either morning or evening, did they neglect or fail of prayer. But now they had come to such a pass the order was going to destruction, their rule was no longer heeded by them, for they would not look before and feared neither God nor man. Despite all their rents and goods they had no will

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to visit the poor nor aid them, nor do aught in charity. To get money and heap up wealth that they might take their pleasure, they grew false and cruel. Each one thought to be abbot, or at the least, provost, steward or cellarer; and each one was all desirous to have his the richest abbey. The churches and chapterhouses were neglected, and the refectory and halls were given over to idle talk and tale telling; and God willed that they should lose these things and become poor. Never shall ye hear praise of a rich monk; but know ye well a monk should be lowly, and he would be truly religious. Among the poor shall ye find God, there is his true hostel upon the earth; and therefore it was God's will to bring these monks again to poverty, to amend them of their folly and sin. Those who desired power and place will no longer, in that it would now yield them nought. They will build them new houses nought so rich as before, and the poor labourer will gain somewhat of the wealth of the monks, who henceforth will be more compassionate. For such reasons God made me to kindle the fire that destroyed all the convent." Quoth the hermit: "Well didst thou do and herein I hold me content. But why didst thou drown the child of the good man who made us such cheer? For nought will I believe that was not very murder." Saith the angel: "Now hear why this was done in all justice; wise is he who learneth well.

"Now know, fair and dear hermit, the good man ye saw yesterday and who entertained us with such good will, had lived together with his wife for thirty years uprightly. Never a poor man came to his house but he gave him lodging and shared with him what he had, and so much of his fortune he gave away for God's sake that little was left him thereof; and he shone with charity. But much he desired to have a son, that he might leave his lands to him and teach him to serve God with all his heart. Many prayers he made to heaven, and many tears he wept, and at last God granted them a child. Ten years of age or more he had come to be, and the good man had grown hard of heart because of the son to whom he would bequeath his goods, and had so set himself to the heaping up of money that his heart had no other thought; that which had been his wont he turned from, and had grown cold and fainthearted; his good deeds he forgot, and within a short space he would have become a

usurer rather than see his child poor in goods and heritage; it was in his heart, and such a thought would soon have come to him that all his well doing had been undone, and he had lost his soul and that of his son. But now through the loss of the child he hath escaped all peril, and the child knew nought of sin, wholly pure he was, wherefore he was taken to such a place that his soul is now in paradise. And his father will amend him, and he and the mother will be more fearful, and will turn to deeds of charity. So all three shall be saved, and God did graciously to the parents in that he took the child to his profit. Now have I made known to you, fair, sweet friend, the reason of my deeds. In this wise God hath shown you how divers are his judgments, that in this world he taxes his people and renders them poor and destitute; and oft-times grants great riches to his enemies, for that they shall have no part in heaven So it is even as I tell you; and now may I abide here no longer; bethink ye of well doing, get ye back to your hermitage and do penance." And forthright the youth changeth his semblance, and became a wondrous angel; and he rose into heaven, singing, "Gloria in excelsis Deo."

To the hermit it seemed he had heard him for too short a space, and fain had he not been parted from such joy. He cast himself upon the ground and stretched out his arms in the form of the cross, and weeping, gave thanks to God for the goodness he had shown him. He returned again to the hermitage which he had left in his folly; there he lived all his life, and when death came to him God saved his soul, and crowned it in paradise.

Now may God grant us in this life such desire of well doing that we shall win the light whereby we may know God and man.

# The Jousting of Our Lady





weet Jesus, what a fair feat of arms he doth, and how nobly he bears his part in the tourney who of good will entereth the minster wherein is celebrated the holy mystery of the sweet son of the Virgin Mother. To show this I will now tell a story, even as I found it in the book of examples.

A knight, sage and courteous, hardy and of great valiance, that none in all chivalry was of so great worship, held ever in great love Mary the Virgin. To prove his valiance and to exercise his body in feats of arms he was on his way to a tourney, armed and fortified in his joy. So it befell on the day of the jousting, that he to please God rode forth full hastily, for fain would he be first in the field. But anon from a church hardby he heard the bells give signal of the singing of holy mass. And straightway the knight turned into the church to listen to the service of God. Within they sang nobly and devoutly a mass in praise of Mary the Holy Virgin; and then straightway they began another. Full well the knight gave ear and prayed with good heart to Our Lady.

Now when the second mass was done a third was begun forthright in the same place. Thereupon his squire bespoke the knight: "Sir, by the holy body of God the hour of the tourney is passing, and do you yet linger here? Come away I pray you. Think you to turn hermit, or devotee, or hypocrite? Go we now about our own proper trade." "Friend," the knight then made answer, "he jousts right nobly who listens to the service of God. When all the masses are said and sung we will ride our way; and if it please God, we will not leave before; but afterwards, for God's honour, I will go joust full hardily." Thereafter he spoke no more, but turned his face to the altar and remained at prayer until all the chanting was ended.

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Then the twain mounted their horses, as it behooved them to do, and fared forth towards the place wherein they were to take their sport. But even as they rode, they met other knights returning from the tourney which already had been fought out from end to end. And lo you, the knight who came even then from mass was he who had won the prize. They who were returning, greeted him and praised him, and said that never had any knight done so great feats of arms as he had that day done, and always thenceforth would the honour thereof be his. Many there were who surrendered themselves to him, saying: "We are your prisoners, this we may not deny, nor that you won us by force of arms." Then was the knight no longer abashed, for he understood speedily that she for whose sake he had stayed him in the church had borne his part in the battle.

Frank and free he called his barons about him, and said to them: "Now give ear, all ye of your courtesy, for I would tell you of such a marvel that never have ye heard its like." Then he told them point by point how he had waited to hear out the masses, and had not entered the lists, nor fought with either lance or shield, but he believed that the Maid whom he had worshipped within the church had fought for him in his stead "Right wondrous is the tourney wherein she hath jousted for me, yet I should make small account thereof and if I did not now do combat for her; foolish and simple would I be and if I turned me again to the vanities of the world." And so of a sooth he promised God that never thenceforth would he tourney save before the true judge, who knoweth all good knights and passeth sentence upon them according to their deeds. Then he took leave full piteously, and many a one wept thereat right tenderly. But he departed from them, and in an abbey of monks thenceforth served the Virgin Mary, and methinks he held to the path that leadeth to a good end.

By this ensample we may well see that the gentle God, whom we worship, loves and cherishes and honours him who gladly stays him to hear mass in holy church, and who gladly does service to his fair, sweet Mother. Fruitful is the custom thereof, and he who is sage and courteous

## The Jousting of Our Lady

willingly practises good manners; for what the colt learneth in teething time that will he hold to so long as he liveth.

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ell it is when the wise man speaketh, for thereby may we win much of wisdom and good and courtesy; well it is to haunt the company of him who taketh heed to his ways and setteth not his heart upon folly. For as we read in Solomon, the man who hath understanding doeth well in all things, and if at whiles he fail in aught unwittingly, lightly should he be forgiven, inasmuch as he would forsake his wrongdoing.

But now it behooveth me to speak and tell and relate a tale I heard of a king in the land of paynimry, who of old was a right great lord and a full loyal Saracen. Saladin was his name; cruel he was, and many a time did great hurt to our faith and damage to our folk by his pride and outrageousness; until upon a time it fell that a prince came to do battle with him. Hugh of Tabarie he hight, and with him was a great company of knights of Galilee, for he was lord of that land. Many good deeds of arms were done that day, but it was not the will of the Creator, whom we call the King of Glory, that the victory should be with us, for there Prince Hugh was taken prisoner. He was led away down the streets, and forthwith brought before Saladin, who greeted him in his own tongue which he knew right well. "By Mahomet," so saith the king, "I am right glad of thy taking, Hugh; and now one thing I promise thee, either thou must die or render great ransom." "Since you give me choice herein," Hugh answered him, "I will take the ransom, if it be that I have the wherewithal to defray it." "Yea," so saith the king to him, "thou shalt give over to me a hundred thousand besants." "Ha, sir, that could I not compass, even were I to sell all my land." "In sooth ye shall do it," quoth Saladin. "But by what means, sir?" "Thou art of great valiance and full of high chivalry, and no man of worth will refuse thee when thou askest for thy ransom, but will give thee a fair gift; and in this wise thou shalt acquit

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thee." "Now I would fain ask thee how I may depart from here?" And Saladin made answer: "Hugh, thou shalt pledge me on thy word and thy law that two years from to day without fail thou shalt have paid thy ransom, or thou wilt return again to my prison; on these terms ye may depart." "Sir," saith he, "I give thee good thanks, and even so make pledge."

Then he straightway asked leave in that he would return again to his own country, but the king took him by the hand and led him away into his own chamber, and gently besought him: "Hugh," he saith, "by the faith that ye owe to the God of your law, make me wise for I am fain to know all the Order of Chivalry, and how knights are made." "Fair sir," Hugh made answer, "this I may not do." "Why so, fair sir?" "Even that will I tell thee. In thee the holy order of knighthood would be ill bestowed, for thou art of the false law, and have neither faith nor baptism. It were great folly were I to deck and cover a dunghill with cloth of silk to the end it should no longer stink; in no wise could I compass it; and even so would I misdo, were I to invest thee with this order; never would I dare do it, for much would I be blamed." "Not so, Hugh," saith he, "no blame would be thine herein, for thou art my prisoner and needs must do my will, howsoever much it mislike thee." "Sir, if I must perforce do this thing, and no denial will avail, do it I will without more caviling."

Thereupon Hugh beginneth to show him all it behooved him to do, and let dress his hair and beard and face right fairly, as is meet for a new knight. And next he made him enter a bath, and when the souden asked him what this might signify, "Sir," he made answer, "this bath wherein you are bathed is to signify that even as the child which is born in sin issueth out of the font pure after baptism, even so, sir, should you issue forth clean of all felony, and be fulfilled with courtesy; for you should bathe in honesty and courtesy and kindness, that you may come to be loved of all men." "God! right fair is this beginning," then said the king. And thereafter he was taken out of the bath, and laid in a goodly bed which was dight right heedfully. "Hugh, tell me now without fail what this bed betokeneth." "Sir, this bed signifieth to you that by your

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chivalry you should win the bed of Paradise that God granteth to his friends; for this is the bed of rest, and great is the folly of him who will not lie therein."

Now when he had lain in that bed for a little space, they raised him up, and clothed him in white garments of linen. Then again Hugh spake in his own tongue: "Take not this thing lightly, for these white garments that cover your body give you to understand that a knight should always study to keep his flesh pure if he would attain to God." Thereafter he invested him with a robe of scarlet, whereat Saladin marveleth much why the prince so dighteth him. "Hugh," he saith, "now what does this robe betoken?" And Hugh of Tabarie maketh answer: "Sir, this robe giveth you to understand that you must hold you ready to shed your blood for the defense of holy church, that it be wronged of no man; for so it behooveth a knight to do, if he would fain please God: this the scarlet colour betokeneth." "Hugh," saith he, "much I marvel." Thereafter the knight did upon his feet shoes of dark and fine-wrought say, and saith to him: "Sir, of a sooth, this black foot-gear should remind you to hold death ever in remembrance, and the earth wherein you shall lie, that dust from which you came and to which you shall return again; upon this you should set your eye, and fall not into pride; for pride should not hold sway over a knight, nor have any place within him, but he should seek simplicity in all things." "All this is right good to hear," saith the king, "and rejoiceth me much." Thereafter he stood upon his feet, and Hugh girt him about with a white girdle finely wrought. "Sir, by this girdle you are given to understand that you should keep your flesh, your reins and all your body pure, even as in virginity, and scorn and blame all luxury. For a true knight greatly loveth purity of body, that he sin not herein, in that such vileness is sore hated of God." And the king maketh answer: "Good is uprightness." Next Hugh did two spurs upon his feet, and said to him: "Even as swift as you would have your horse, and eager for the race when you smite him with your spurs, and that he turn quickly this way or that according to your will, even so these golden spurs betoken that ye be eager to serve God all your life;

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for so do all knights that love God with their very hearts, always they serve him loyally." Well pleased therewith was Saladin.

Thereafter he was girt with a sword, and asked what the blade might signify. "Sir," saith Hugh, "ward and surety against the onset of the foe. The sword is two-edged, even as You see, which giveth you to understand that always should the knight have both justice and loyalty; which is to say, meseemeth, that he should always protect the poor that the rich may not tread them down, and support the weak that the strong may not bring them to shame. Even such is the work of mercy." Saladin, who hath given good heed to his words, agreeth well thereto. Next Hugh set upon his head a coif all of white, and of this likewise the Sultan asked the meaning. "Look you sir," saith Hugh, "even as you know the coif to be without spot, but that, fair and white, clean and pure, it crowneth your head, even so upon the Day of Doom must we straightway render up the soul pure and clean of our sins and all the wrong that the body ever doeth to God, that we may earn the delights of Paradise,—for tongue may not tell, nor the ear hear, nor the heart dream what is the beauty of that Paradise which God granteth to his friends."

The king gave heed to all this, and thereafter asked if there were now no more to be done. "Yes, fair sir, but this one thing I dare not." "And what may it be?" "Sir, the accolade." "But why have you not given it to me and told its significance?" "Sir, it is the reminder of him who girt a knight with his gear and invested him with the order; but never will I give it to you, for though I am in your power I ought to do no felony for aught that may be said or done to me, wherefore I will not give you the accolade; and this you must hold for true. But none the less I will show and tell and teach you the four weightiest matters that a knight should know and hold to all his life, if he would fain win honour.

"First of all let him have no part in false judgments, or be in that place wherein is treason, but flee from it right speedily, for if he may not change the wrong, let him straightway depart from it. Full fair is the second charge: that he in no wise miscounsel dame or damsel, but if they have need of him, aid them he must with all his might, if he would have



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glory and praise; for a knight should hold women in honour and do high deeds in their defense. Now soothly the third point is that he should practise abstinence; and truly I tell you that he should fast on Friday in holy remembrance of Jesus Christ, that for our redemption he was smitten with the spear and gave pardon to Longinus. All his life through should the knight fast upon that day for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ,—if he be not forced to fail of it by reason of sickness, or of fellowship, and if for such cause he fail of his fast it behooveth him to make peace with God by alms-giving or other good deeds. And lastly, the fourth charge is that he should hear mass each day, and if he have the wherewithal should make offering, for right well is that gift placed that is laid upon the table of God, for so it beareth great virtue.”

The king hath given right good heed to all that Hugh telleth him, and hath great joy therein. And now he riseth, dight even as he is, and goeth straight into his hall, where were assembled fifty amirals, all of his own land. He sitteth down in his great chair; and Hugh sat at his feet, but right soon the king raised him up, and showed him to one of the high seats, and spoke, saying: “Know now of a sooth that I would fain make thee a fair gift in that thou art a man of valour and worth, for I promise thee fairly that if any of thy folk are taken, in melée or battle, they shall for thy sake go free, if thou wilt come to ask it. But thou shalt ride through my land peacefully and without disorder; hang thy helm on the neck of thy palfrey in all men’s sight, that no man may do thee any hurt. And of thy folk that are now in my prison I will surrender ten of them to thee, if thou wouldst fain take them hence with thee.” “Gramercy sir,” saith Hugh, “for this deed deserveth good thanks. But I would not forget that thou didst bid me whenever I met with a man of worth, that I ask him to aid me in my ransom; now none know I of so great worth as thou thyself, sir king, wherefore give me somewhat, as is meet in that thou didst bid me ask.” Whereupon Saladin laughed and spoke, even as a man well pleased, saying: “Thou hast begun right well, and freely and fairly will I give thee fifty thousand good besants, for I would not that thou shouldst fail through me.” Thereafter he arose and said to Hugh: “Go now to each baron and I will go with thee.” And he spoke to them,

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saying, "Lords, give us wherewith to help ransom this high prince." Then the amirals there gathered began to give to him, so that he had his full ransom, and thirteen thousand besants over and above, so much they gave and promised him.

Thereafter Hugh asked leave to go from the land of paynimry. "Nay," saith the king, "go thou shalt not until thou hast received the residue of that they have promised us, for out of my own treasury shall be taken those thirteen thousand besants of pure gold." Whereupon he commanded his treasurer that he give the besants to Hugh, and thereafter claim them again from those who had made promise to give. And the treasurer hath justly measured out the besants, and given them over to Count Hugh who must needs take them, though liefer had he left them behind, for he was fain to ransom his folk who were in thraldom and sore captivity in the hands of the Saracens. But when Saladin heard this, he swore by Mahomet that never should they be ransomed; and Hugh, when he heard him say so, had great wrath in his heart, but inasmuch as the king had sworn by Mahomet, he did not make bold to press him further, for he dared not anger him.

Then he bade array his ten companions, the which he was free to take back into his own land. Yet thereafter he abode and tarried a good eight days in high feasting and great delight, but at the end demanded safe-conduct through that land of disbelief. And Saladin granted him good store of his men, fifty there were who without pride or felony escorted them through the land of paynimry, that they had no let or hindrance on the way. Then the Saracens turned back, and each departed into his own land; and the Prince of Galilee likewise returned home, but sore he grieved because of his folk he must needs leave behind him; he might no wise amend it, yet he was more wroth thereat than any man beside. So into his own land he came with those ten and no more. Thereupon he divided the great treasure he had brought with him, and gave of it to many a man who thereby grew wealthy.

Lords, this tale should be welcome to good folk, but to others it shall be as nought, for they understand no better than silly sheep. By the faith I owe to God in Paradise, he will of a sooth lose his jewels who casteth

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them before swine, for know ye they will tread them underfoot, and take no delight therein, for they have not wit thereto, rather they will take them all awry. And whoso should tell this tale to such like, he too would be spurned and held as nought by their folly. But whoso would learn herein may find two things right goodly in this same tale: one, in the beginning, telleth the manner wherein knights are made, such as all men should honour, inasmuch as they defend us all. For if it were not for chivalry little would our baronage avail, for 't is the knights defend Holy Church, and do justice against those who would mishandle us; and I will not withhold me from their praise. He who loveth them not showeth himself a fool, even as one who should steal away the chalices from the table of God before our eyes, and might not be restrained therefrom. Now their righteousness taketh heed that by them we have good defense; for if they did not repulse evil folk the good might not endure, and there would be none left save Albigenses and Saracens and Barbarians and folk of the false law who would make us deny our faith. But such as these stand in fear of knights, wherefore of us those same should be held right dear, and exalted and honoured, and we should always rise upon our feet when from afar we see them coming. Certes, we should scorn those who hold them of little worth. And now I tell you of a sooth the knight is privileged to have all his arms and to bear them in holy church when he goeth to hear mass, that no ill man may interrupt the service of the Son of Mary, or that of the Holy Sacrament whereby we win salvation; and if any seek to hinder it, him the knight may slay forthwith.

Yet a little more it behooveth me to say: come what may, do ye the right. This command is laid upon the knight, and if we are to hold him dear, let him give good heed to it. And boldly I tell you that if he live according to his order, he cannot fail of coming straight into Paradise. So have I taught you this: do that you ought, and honour knights above all other men, save only the priest who doth the sacrament of God's own body.

Now soothly I tell you by this tale ye may know the truth of what befell Prince Hugh, who was right brave and wise. And inasmuch as he

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found him full valiant, Saladin praised him, and bade great honour be done to him, in that he did good with all his might, for thereby may one win great worth. And I find writ in Latin, good deeds bring a good ending. And now at the end let us pray to him who is without end, that when we come to the end of all things, we may so end that we shall win that pure joy which for the good hath no end. And for him who wrote this, may he dwell with Jesus Christ, and in the love of Saint Mary; amen, amen, saith each and all.

Here endeth The Order of Chivalry.

# Notes

The tales in this volume are among the earliest examples of the French short story that have come down to us. They grew up in that little renaissance of the XII and XIII centuries, when the tradition that literature must be epic, that it must tell of national heroes or the history of some great house, was passing, and the trouvère was free to take his matter where he found it and make of it what he would. Celtic traditions, stories from the East or the classics, every day happenings, old legends and new manners, all were turned to account, and woven, it might be, into a long romance full of leisurely digressions, or retold in a tale admirably compact.

The short stories, like most of the literature of the time, were composed in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, verse narratives for minstrels to recite. Of their authors for the most part we know nothing. Their very names have vanished save in the few cases where they were wrought into prelude or epilogue, and made part of the text: and to none, with the exception of Marie de France can more than one or two tales be attributed. So impersonal, however, are the stories that their being anonymous matters little. We look to them not for the flavour of any one man's mind, but for an impression of the age in which they were produced, its shows and fashions, its manners, its sentiments and ideals, its inheritance of early legends, of old, word-of-mouth story-telling, stories which the trouvères dressed anew and preserved to us.

The tales fall into three main groups: *lais*, *fabliaux*, and *contes dévots*. The *lais*, like the romances to which they are close akin, belong to the courtly literature of the time and found their audience in hall and castle. Denis Pyramus, a contemporary, in writing of Marie de France, tells us her lays were "beloved and held right dear by counts and barons and knights," and that "ladies likewise took great joy and delight in them." Like the romances which they helped to foster and which superseded

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them, the lays tell of love and adventure, of enchantment and strange happenings. In them side by side with the knights and squires and ladies move fays and giants and werewolves. Their material is that of folklore and fairy-tale. A knight hunting in the lande adventureuse meets a maiden in the forest who leads him to a castle with green walls and shining towers. There he spends three days, and when he would return home again, learns that three hundred years have gone by, that the king, his uncle is dead and his cities have fallen, and there lingers but a legend of the king's nephew who went out to hunt the white boar and was lost in the forest. Often in such lays the old fairy-tale simplicity, its matter-of-fact narration of the marvellous survives; and yet in their somewhat spare brevity they have a grace and charm that lets one feel the beauty, the wonder, or the tragedy of the story.

But the interest in the lays is not always that of the land of faery; sometimes it is human enough, as in *The Two Lovers* where, despite the old-time test and the magic potion, our delight is all in the maid and the damoiseau "who hath in him no measure." Sometimes, as in *Eliduc*, we find old, rude material—here a primitive Celtic tale of a man with two wives ill cloaked by its additions of mediaeval Christianity—retold with a strange gentleness and sweetness, and turned at moments into a story of emotion and scruple.

Both types occur in the lays of Marie de France,—the best that have come down to us. Besides her lays she versified a collection of fables, *Isopet*, and translated from the Latin *The Purgatory of Saint Patrick*,—one of those other-world journeys that preceded the *Divine Comedy*. Yet apart from her works we have no record of her life. She herself in the prologue of her fables, tells her name: "I am called Marie, and I am of France"; but that is all, and it is only the internal evidence of her writings, their Anglo-Norman dialect, and a few chance hints and phrases that have made scholars decide that she was a Norman, or from that part of the Isle de France which borders upon Normandy, that she lived and wrote in England in the second half of the twelfth century, and that the unnamed king to whom she dedicated the lays was Henry II.

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Marie makes no claim to originality of theme; in her prologues she tells us she is but rhyming anew the stories "whereof the Bretons have made lays." just what the source was of the Celtic matter used by Marie and other French writers of the time is a point of dispute among scholars. Some will have it the tales came wholly from the Celts of Brittany, others that they are derived only from those of Wales. But there is reason in both theories, and the tendency now is to unite them. The Normans of the continent had not a little to do with their Breton neighbors of Armorica; sometimes they fought as enemies and sometimes as allies. Again, in England the Normans early settled in South Wales, and intermarriages were frequent. In both regions, then, they may well have learned to know the songs and tales of the folk about them.

But were they Welsh or Armorican, both history and romance bear testimony to the popularity of Breton minstrels in France during the twelfth century. No feast was complete without their music. Their lays were sung to the accompaniment of a little harp called the rote, and seem to have been given in their own tongue. But constantly in Marie and other writers we find a distinction between the lai and the conte, and it seems probable that the songs were preceded by a short prose narrative, or that prose and verse were interspersed after the manner of Aucassin and Nicolette. In just what form the tales came to Marie, how much she added to them, we cannot tell. We only know that her rendering of them was to the liking of the time and was long popular. Denis Pyramus tells us her writings were often repeated and often copied, and we have manuscripts of them that date from a hundred years after her time.

As the lai was the favorite literature of the courts the fabliau was that of the bourgeoisie, the proper kind of tale for telling at fairs or guild-hall feasts, at gatherings where women were not present. In time they are a little later than the lais, for beginning in the twelfth, the thirteenth century is their chief period. They deal not with the fanciful and the sentimental, but with the real and the comic; they forego magic and miracle for the happenings of every day life. "When a tale is historic," says M. de Montaiglon, who has given us a complete edition of this type of story, "or when it is impossible, when it is devout or didactic, when it



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is imaginative or romantic, lyric or poetic, it can by no means be classed as a *fabliau*."

At their worst they are often gross, often puerile, mere *contes pour rire* from which the laughter has long ago faded; but at their best they interest by the very fact that they mark an early venture into the real. They show us plainly the figures of the time, knights that put their lands in pawn that they might follow *tourneys*, the rich bourgeois riding armed to one of the great fairs, the minstrel ready to re cite a *chanson de geste* or carry a love message. Light and gay, always brief and to the point, they tell good humoredly of the odd chances of life, they satirize manners and morals. Unlike the *lays* that idealize women, they ridicule them; and they are ready to mock the *villein*, the lords of the earth, or the saints in heaven.

Often the story they tell is of eastern origin, often one of those stories that reappear in all times and among many races. Sometimes it is only a situation, a figure or two that they give us. Two minstrels meet and mock one another; each boasts his skill and decries that of the other, each enumerates his repertory, and in so doing hopelessly confuses the names and incidents of well-known romances of the time: "I know all about Kay the good knight; I know about Perceval of Blois, and of Pertenoble le Gallois." Each, as he brags, sets before us the stock in trade of the minstrel of the time; each shows his own utter incompetence,—and that is all the story. If the tale has a moral, as in *The Divided Blanket*, it is but the moral of common sense. If it tells a romance, as in *The Gray Palfrey*, it is still kept within the solid world of pounds and pence. We are told precisely concerning everybody's income. The heroine shows herself as accurate in her knowledge of the property of the hero's uncle as would one of the practical-minded damsels of Balzac. Her rescue is brought about not by the help of magic or knightly adventure, but by a lucky chance; the conclusion turns upon a sleepy escort and a horse's eagerness for his stable. Time and place, again, are definitely specified. In the *lays* it is usually, "Once upon a time," or "Of old, there lived a king," but *The Divided Blanket* begins: "Some twenty years ago, a rich man of Abbeville left his home and came up to Paris."

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More limited in scope than the other tales of the period, they at least accomplish their aim, that is, they give us a swift and entertaining narrative. "A little tale wearies less than a long one," says one of the prologues, and most of the fabliaux contrive to tell their story in four or five hundred lines. Peculiarly Gallic in character, they influenced the literature of other countries less than did the French lays and romances, they were less often imitated and translated. In France they were popular for two hundred years; then we hear no more of them. But in the fifteenth century, when printed books and the stage were taking the place of the minstrel, we find, as M. de Montaignon points out, similar plots and situations, the same shrewd though not deep observation, the same fashion of treating the every-day incidents of life from the comic point of view recurring again in the farces.

The church in the middle ages looked askance upon the minstrels and their stock in trade; the sermons of the time denounce their "ignoble fables," their "tales all falsehood and lying." But the church did not only censure, it tried to supplant, and produced within its own boundaries, quite apart from its more learned work in Latin, a large body of narrative literature in the vulgar tongue. These religious stories were written by lay clerks or by monks in the monastery schools, and like other tales were spread abroad by minstrels. Those who recited them were shown some favour, and M. Petit de Julleville quotes a *Somme de Penitence* of the thirteenth century which would admit to the sacraments those "jongleurs who sing the exploits of princes and the lives of the saints, and use their instruments of music to console men in their sadness and weariness."

Besides the lives of saints we have tales of miracles performed by Our Lady, tales of penitence, tales of good counsel. As a whole they are less interesting than the lay literature of the time. Written for edification, many of them are rather bare little "examples" and their authors show themselves more concerned with the lesson in point than with the story. Others are told with more elaboration and skill and give us good tale-telling. Sometimes, as in *The Angel and the Hermit*, an ancient story is given a mediaeval setting. M. Gaston Paris, in *La Poésie au Moyen*

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Age, has traced the history of this tale, which, originally of Jewish invention, has travelled all over Europe; a tale that was given a place in the Koran, and that was told both by Luther and Voltaire, besides its good rendering by some unknown clerk of France. Another story, Theophilus, gives a version of the Faust legend, and tells the story of a man who has made a compact with the devil, but who in this case is saved in the end by Our Lady. But if among the *contes dévots* tales as vivid as that of the proud knight on whom was laid the penance of the cask are rare, there are yet not a few that charm us by their mere sincerity and simplicity, that interest by revealing to us the superstitions and the beliefs of the time. They show us how vividly present to men's minds was the triple division of the world, how concrete that heaven and hell, whence issued on the one side the demons, on the other the Virgin and the saints to take share in the combat on earth for men's temptation and salvation. To turn the pages of a collection of these stories is like looking up at the dim, stiff figures of some early fresco, to see again, say, the strife of angels and devils for souls in *The Triumph of Death* on the walls of the Campo Santo in Pisa.

Just as the spirit of the *fabliaux* is found again in the farces, so that of the *contes dévots* continues in the miracle plays. But when, in the fifteenth century, prose drives out verse narrative, all three types of tale cease. In the renaissance and for long after they were neglected. It was in the eighteenth century, with its curiosity concerning the mediaeval, that men turned back to the manuscripts so long disregarded. Barbazan brought out a collection of texts, and Legrand d'Aussy published a collection of abridgments of twelfth and thirteenth century tales. Since then, various editors, both French and German, have made the best of the tales available to us.

Taken together, apart from the pleasure of the story for the story's sake, they give us a fresh sense of the time in which they were written, its feasts and tourneys bright with the gold and the vair; its wars, its interrupted traffic and barter; its license, its asceticism; its prayers and its visions. More than that, they interest us as standing midway between the old and the new. In them one may look for fragments of vanished

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stories, bits of myth and folklore, salvage of an age that told its tales instead of writing them; and, at the same time, we find in them the beginnings of modern literature, the first of that long and goodly line, the French short story. For all their simplicity they show the beginnings of a shrewd observation, of delicate description, and above all of compact narrative where no words are wasted. Already there is a conscious artistic pride; Marie de France tells us she has waked many a night in rhyming her verses; and "Know ye," one of the fabliaux charges us, "it is no light thing to tell a goodly tale."

# Bibliography

## List of Texts Followed in these Translations

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- The Two Lovers, The Woful Knight (Chaitivel), Eliduc: *Die Lais der Marie de France*, edited by Karl Warnke, Halle, 1900.
- Melion: *Lai d'Ignaurès, Suivi des Lais de Melion et du Trot*, edited by Monmerqué et Francisque Michel, Paris, 1832.
- The Lay of the Horn: *Le Lai du Cor*, edited by F. Wulf, Lunt, 1888. Also Tobler's notes on the same, *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, xii., 266.
- Of the Churl who Won Paradise, The Divided Blanket, The Gray Palfrey: *Recueil des Fabliaux des xiiie et xiiiie Siècles*, edited by A. de Montaiglon and G. Raynaud, 6 vols., Paris, 1872-90.
- The Knight of the Little Cask: *Zwei Altfranzösische Dichtungen, La Chastelaine de Saint Gille, Du Chevalier an Barisel*, edited by O. Schultzgora, Halle, 1889.
- The Angel and the Hermit: *Nouveau Recueil de Fabliaux et Contes*, edited by M. Méon, 2 vols. Paris, 1823,
- The Jousting of Our Lady: *Chrestomathie de l'ancien français*, Karl Bartsch, Leipzig, 1880.
- The Order of Chivalry: *Fabliaux et Contes*, edited by E. Barbazan, and revised by M. Méon, 4 vols., Paris, 1808.

In recent years, in various small books, a number of mediaeval French tales, chiefly the lays, have been rendered accessible to English readers, but no attempt has been made to bring together in a single collection examples of the different types of tales. The translator has tried within a small compass to show something of the range and scope of the Old

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French short story, and at the same time to choose, as far as might be, tales that had not been previously translated.

Three of those included in the volume have, however, already been done into English. The Two Lovers and Eliduc appeared in *Seven Lays of Marie de France*, by Edith Rickert, London, 1901; and a metrical translation by William Morris of The Order of Chivalry was printed in the Kelmscott Press edition of *Caxton's Order of Chivalry*. Of the others, I believe, no complete English version has been made. Condensed renderings, however, of The Order of Chivalry and The Lay of the Bird occur in *Way's Selections of Fabliaux and Tales*, London, 1796 and 1800. Also Leigh Hunt used the plot of Le Vair Palefroi for his poem The Palfrey; and in Parnell's Hermit an often told story is again repeated, and the anchorite and his divine comrade move, strange figures, through the ordered, eighteenth century landscape.

Many of the Old French tales have been preserved to us in but a single manuscript, with the result we have few critical texts. Such excellent editions as Warnke's *Lais of Marie de France* are rare, and the translator often encounters difficulties by the way. Some of the readings must perforce be conjectural, and others can but reproduce the ambiguities of the original. At the end of The Gray Palfrey I have omitted altogether a long but incomplete sentence that begins to tell us what happened next between the hero and his uncle. Zorak's text of Melion (*Zeitschrift für Romanische philologie*, vol. vi.) unfortunately did not come to my notice until these translations were in press, too late to do more than borrow a few readings where Michel is most unsatisfactory.

A word should be said as to the grouping of the tales. The types are not so distinct but that there is a borderland between the lai and the fabliau in which are found a few examples with the characteristics of each. The Lay of the Bird is a case in point. Gaston Paris, in his *Littérature française au moyen âge*, classes it as a fabliau because the story is not of Celtic but Eastern origin; yet M. de Montaiglon does not admit it to his complete edition of the Fabliaux. Indeed, the enchanted orchard, the talking bird, the sentiments, the praise of love are all in the manner of

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the courtly poetry. It is therefore, on account of its accessories, here included among the *lais*.