

Sir Gawain and The Green Knight

translated by

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Book One

I

Since Troy's assault and siege, I trow, were over-past,
To brands and ashes burnt that stately burg at last,
And he, the traitor proved, for treason that he wrought,
Was fitly tried and judged,—his fortune elsewhere sought
The truest knight on earth, Æneas, with his kin,
Who vanquished provinces, and did, as princes, win
Of all the Western Isles, the wealth and worth alway;
Rich Romulus to Rome full swift hath ta'en his way,
First, hath he founded fair that city in his pride
To which he gave his name, it bears it to this tide;
Ticius doth dwellings found, turning to Tuscany,
And Langobard, a race raised up in, Lombardy.
But Felix Brutus sailed full far, o'er the French flood,
And on its banks so broad founded Britain, the good,
in bliss;

Where war nor wonder fail
And ne'er have done, ywis,
Nor shall both bliss and bale
their shifting chances miss.

II

And when that baron bold had Britain made, I trow,
Bold men were bred therein, who loved strife well enow,
And many a war they waged in those good days of yore—

He fared as one on feud,
And overall was green!

VIII

All green bedight that knight, and green his garments fair
A narrow coat that clung straight to his side he ware,
A mantle plain above, lined on the inner side
With costly fur and fair, set on good cloth and wide,
So sleek, and bright in hue – therewith his hood was gay
Which from his head was doffed, and on his shoulders lay.
Full tightly drawn his hose, all of the self-same green,
Well clasped about his calf – there-under spurs full keen
Of gold on silken lace, all striped in fashion bright,
That dangled beneath his legs – so rode that gallant knight.
His vesture, verily, was green as grass doth grow,
The barring of his belt, the blithe stones set arow,
That decked in richest wise his raiment fine and fair,
Himself, his saddle-bow, in silken broideries rare,
'T were hard to tell the half, so cunning was the wise
In which 't was broidered all with birds, and eke with flies!
Decked was the horse's neck, and decked the crupper bold,
With gauds so gay of green, the centre set with gold.
And every harness boss was all enamelled green,
The stirrups where he stood were of the self same sheen,
The saddle-bow behind, the girths so long and fair,
They gleamed and glittered all with green stones rich and rare,
The very steed beneath the self same semblance ware,

he rides

A green horse great and tall;
A steed full stiff to guide,
In broidered bridle all
He worthily bestrides!

The haft, it measured full an ell-yard long away,
The blade of good green steel, and all with gold inlaid,
Right sharp and broad the edge, and burnished bright the blade.
'T was sharpened well to cut, e'en as a razor good,
Right well the steel was set in staff so stiff of wood,
And iron bands to bind throughout the length it bare,
With cunning work of green all wrought, and graven fair.
Twined with a lace that fell in silken loops so soft
E'en at the head, adown the haft 't was caught full oft
With hanging tassells fair that silken threads entwine,
And buttons of bright green, all broidered fair and fine.
Thus in the great hall door the knight stood, fair and tall,
Fearless and free his gaze, he gat him down the hall,
Greeting he gave to none, but looked right steadily
Toward the royal seat, and quoth, "Now where is he,
The lord of all this folk? To see him am I fain,
And with himself would speak, might I the boon attain!" —

With frown

He looked upon the knights,
And paced him up and down,
Fain would he know aright
Who was of most renown!

XI

Then each man gazed amain, each would that hero see,
And each man marvelled much what might the meaning be,
That man and horse, alike, of such a hue were seen,
Green as the growing grass; and greener still, I ween,
E'en than enamel green on gold that gloweth bright:
Then all with one consent drew near unto that knight,
A-marvelling fell they all who he might be, ywis,
For strange sights had they seen, but none so strange as this!
The folk, they deemed it well fantasm, or faërie,
And none among them all dare answer speedily,
But all, astonied, gazed, and held them still as stone,

To speak, "I trow, Sir Knight,
An here thou seek'st a foe
Thou shalt not fail for fight!"

XIII

"Nay, here I crave no fight, in sooth I say to thee,
The knights about thy board but beardless bairns they be,
An I were fitly armed, upon this steed so tall,
For lack of strength no man might match me in this hall!
Therefore within thy court I crave a Christmas jest,
'T is Yuletide, and New Year, and here be many a guest,
If any in this hall himself so hardy hold,
So valiant of his hand, of blood and brain so bold,
That stroke for counter-stroke with me exchange he dare,
I give him of free gift this gisarme rich and fair,
This axe of goodly weight, to wield as he see fit,
And I will bide his blow, as bare as here I sit.
If one will test my words, and be of valiant mood,
Then let him swiftly come, and take this weapon good,—
Here I renounce my claim, the axe shall be his own—
And I will stand his stroke, here, on this floor of stone,
That I in turn a blow may deal, that boon alone

I pray,
Yet respite shall he have
A twelvemonth, and a day.
Now quickly I thee crave—
Who now hath aught to say?"

XIV

If erst they were amazed, now stiller sat they all,
Both high and low, those knights within King Arthur's hall,
The knight upon his steed he sat him fast and true,
And round about the hall his fierce red eyes he threw,
From 'neath his bushy brows, (all green they were in hue,)

And blessed him in Christ's Name, and bade him in good part
 To be of courage still, hardy of hand and heart.
 "Now, Nephew, keep thee well," he quoth, "deal but one blow,
 And if thou red'st him well, in very truth I know
 The blow that he shall deal thou shalt right well withstand!"
 Gawain strode to the knight, the gisarme in his hand,
 Right boldly did he bide, no whit abashed, I ween,
 And frankly to Gawain he quoth, that knight in green,
 "Make we a covenant here, ere yet we further go,
 And first I ask, Sir Knight, that I thy name may know,
 I bid thee tell me true, that I assured may be—"

"I' faith," quoth that good knight, "*Gawain*, I wot, is he
 Who giveth thee this blow, be it for good or ill,
 A twelvemonth hence I'll take another at thy will,
 The weapon be thy choice, I'll crave no other still
 alive!"

The other quoth again,
 "Gawain, so may I thrive,
 But I shall take full fain,
 The dint that thou shalt drive!"

XVIII

"By Christ," quoth the Green Knight, "I trow I am full fain
 The blow that here I craved to take from thee, Gawain,
 And thou hast well rehearsed, in fashion fair, I trow,
 The covenant and the boon I prayed the king but now;
 Save that thou here, Sir Knight, shalt soothly swear to me
 To seek me out thyself, where e'er it seemeth thee
 I may be found on field, and there in turn demand
 Such dole as thou shalt deal before this goodly band!"

"Now," quoth the good Gawain, "by Him who fashioned me,
 I wot not where to seek, nor where thy home shall be,
 I know thee not, Sir Knight, thy court, nor yet thy name,
 Teach me thereof the truth, and tell me of that same,
 And I will use my wit to win me to that goal,

And here I give thee troth, and swear it on my soul!"
"Nay, in this New Year's tide it needs no more, I ween,"
So to the good Gawain he quoth, that knight in green,
"Save that I tell thee true—when I the blow have ta'en,
Which thou shalt smartly smite—and teach thee here amain
Where be my house, my home, and what my name shall be;
Then may'st thou find thy road, and keep thy pledge with me.
But if I waste no speech, thou shalt the better speed,
And in thy land may'st dwell, nor further seek at need
for fight
Take thy grim tool to thee,
Let see how thou can'st smite!"
Quoth Gawain, "Willingly,"
And stroked his axe so bright.

XIX

The Green Knight on the ground made ready speedily,
He bent his head adown, that so his neck were free,
His long and lovely locks, across the crown they fell,
His bare neck to the nape all men might see right well
Gawain, he gripped his axe, and swung it up on high,
The left foot on the ground he setteth steadily
Upon the neck so bare he let the blade alight,
The sharp edge of the axe the bones asunder smite—
Sheer thro' the flesh it smote, the neck was cleft in two,
The brown steel on the ground it bit, so strong the blow,
The fair head from the neck fell even to the ground,
Spurned by the horse's hoof, e'en as it rolled around,
The red blood spurted forth, and stained the green so bright,
But ne'er for that he failed, nor fell, that stranger knight,
Swiftly he started up, on stiff and steady limb,
And stretching forth his hand, as all men gaped at him,
Grasped at his goodly head, and lift it up again,
Then turned him to his steed, and caught the bridle rein,
Set foot in stirrup-iron, bestrode the saddle fair,

The while he gripped his head e'en by the flowing hair.
He set himself as firm in saddle, so I ween,
As naught had ailed him there, tho' headless he was seen
in hall;

He turned his steed about,
That corpse, that bled withal,
Full many there had doubt
Of how the pledge might fall!

XX

The head, within his hand he held it up a space,
Toward the royal dais, forsooth, he turned the face,
The eyelids straight were raised, and looked with glance so clear,
Aloud it spake, the mouth, e'en as ye now may hear;
"Look, Gawain, thou be swift to speed as thou hast said,
And seek, in all good faith, until thy search be sped,
E'en as thou here didst swear, in hearing of these knights —
To the Green Chapel come, I charge thee now aright,
The blow thou hast deserved, such as was dealt to-day,
E'en on the New Year's morn I pledge me to repay,
Full many know my name, '*Knight of the Chapel Green,*'
To find me, should'st thou seek, thou wilt not fail, I ween,
Therefore thou need'st must come, or be for recreant found!"
With fierce pull at the rein he turned his steed around,
His head within his hand, forth from the hall he rode,
Beneath his horse's hoofs the sparks they flew abroad,
No man in all the hall wist where he took his way,
Nor whence that knight had come durst any of them say,
what then?

The King and Gawain there
They gazed, and laughed again,
Proven it was full fair
A marvel unto men!

Book Two

I

Now this first venture fair, befell in the New Year
To Arthur, who such feats was ever fain to hear;
Altho' his words were few whenas at meat they met;
But now to task full stern their hand methinks be set.
Right gladly did Gawain begin these games in hall,
If heavy be the end, small wonder were withal:
A man hath merry mind when he hath drunk amain,
Speedy, the year hath sped and cometh not again;
Beginnings to their end do all unlike appear –
The Yuletide passed away; and eke the after year
Each season severally after the other sent;
When Christmas-tide was past then came the crabbéd Lent,
That, changing flesh for fish, doth simpler food provide;
The weather of the world with winter then doth chide,
The cold no longer clings, the clouds themselves uplift,
Shed swift the rain, and warm, the showers of springtide drift,
Fall fair upon the field, the flowers all unfold,
The grass, and e'en the groves all green ye may behold.
The birds begin to build, and greet, with joyful song,
Solace of summer sweet, that followeth ere long –

On bank

The blossoms fair they blow
In hedgerow rich and rank;
The birds sing loud and low
In woodland deep and dank.

II

After the summer-tide, with gentle winds and soft,
When zephyr on the sward and seeds doth breathe full oft,
(Full gladsome is the growth waxing therefrom, I ween,
Whenas the dewdrops drip from off the leaves so green,
Beneath the blissful beams of the bright summer sun) –
Then nigheth harvest-tide, hardening the grain anon,
With warnings to wax ripe ere come the winter cold,
With drought he drives the dust before him on the wold,
From off the field it flies, in clouds it riseth high;
Winds of the welkin strive with the sun, wrathfully,
The leaves fall from the bough, and lie upon the ground,
And grey is now the grass that erst all green was found;
Ripens and rots the fruit that once was flower gay –
And thus the year doth turn to many a yesterday,
Winter be come again, as needeth not to say

the sage;

Then, when Saint Michael's moon
Be come with winter's gage
Gawain bethinks him soon
Of his dread venture's wage.

III

Yet till All-Hallows' Day with Arthur did he bide,
Then for his sake the king a fair feast did provide,
Rich was the revel there of the good Table Round,
There were both courteous knights and comely ladies found,
And many sorrowed sore all for that good knight's sake –
Yet none the less no sign of aught but mirth they make,
Tho' joyless all the jests they bandy at that same –
With mourning after meat he to his uncle came,
And of his journey spake, and openly did say:
"Now, liege Lord of my life, your leave I fain would pray,

Ye know how stands the case, thereof no more I'll speak —
 Since talk, it mendeth naught, 't were trifling ease to seek;
 I to the blow am bound, to-morrow must I fare
 To seek the Knight in Green, God knoweth how, or where.”
 The best knights in the burg together then they ran,
 Ywain and Erec there, with many another man,
 Dodinel le Sauvage; the Duke of Clarence came,
 Lancelot, Lionel, and Lucain, at that same,
 Sir Boors, Sir Bedivere, (the twain were men of might,)
 With Mador de la Port, and many another knight.
 Courtiers in company nigh to the king they drew,
 For counselling that knight, much care at heart they knew.
 In dole so drear their tears in hall together blend
 To think that good Gawain must on such errand wend
 Such dolefull dint endure, no more fair blows to spend
 and free —

The knight he made good cheer,
 He quoth: “What boots it me?
 For tho' his weird be drear
 Each man that same must dree.”

IV

He dwelt there all that day, at early dawn besought
 That men would bring his arms, and all were straightway brought.
 A carpet on the floor they stretch full fair and tight,
 Rich was the golden gear that on it glittered bright.
 The brave man stepped thereon, the steel he handled fair,
 A doublet dear of Tars they did upon him there,
 A cunning cap-a-dos, that fitted close and well,
 All fairly lined throughout, as I have heard it tell.
 They set the shoes of steel upon the hero's feet,
 And wrapped the legs in greaves, of steel, as fit and meet.
 The caps that 'longed thereto polished they were full clean,
 And knit about the knee with knots of golden sheen.
 Comely the cuisses were that closed him all about

With thongs all tightly tied around his thighs so stout.
And then a byrnie bright with burnished steel they bring,
Upon a stuff so fair woven with many a ring.
And now upon each arm they set the burnished brace
With elbow plates so good—the metal gloves they lace;
Thus all the goodly gear to shield him was in place
that tide—

Rich surcoat doth he wear,
And golden spurs of pride,
His sword is girt full fair
With silk, upon his side.

V

When he was fitly armed his harness rich they deem,
Nor loop nor latchet small but was with gold a-gleam;
Then, harnessed as he was, his Mass he heard straightway,
On the high altar there an offering meet did lay.
Then, coming to the king, and to the knights at court,
From lords and ladies fair lightly his leave besought.
They kissed the knight, his soul commending to Christ's care—
Ready was Gringalet, girt with a saddle fair,
Gaily it gleamed that day, with fringes all of gold,
For this adventure high new nails it bare for old.
The bridle barred about, with gold adorned well,
The harness of the neck, the skirts that proudly fell,
Crupper and coverture match with the saddle-bow,
On all the red gold nails were richly set a-row,
They glittered and they gleamed, e'en as the sun, I wis—
The knight, he takes his helm, and greets it with a kiss.
'T was hooped about with steel, and all full fitly lined,
He set it on his head, and hasped it close behind.
Over the visor, lo! a kerchief lieth light,
Broidered about and bound with goodly gems and bright,
On a broad silken braid—there many a bird is seen
The painted perroquet appeareth there between

VII

First was he faultless found in his five wits, I ween;
Nor failed his fingers five where'er he yet had been;
And all his earthly trust upon those five wounds lay
That Christ won on the Cross, e'en as the Creed doth say.
And wheresoever Fate to fiercest fight did bring,
Truly in thought he deemed, above all other thing,
That all his force, forsooth, from those five joys he drew
Which through her Holy Child, the Queen of Heaven knew;
And for this cause the knight, courteous and comely, bare
On one half of his shield her image painted fair,
That when he looked thereon his courage might not fail
The fifth five that I find did much this knight avail
Were Frankness, Fellowship, all other gifts above,
Cleanness and Courtesy, that ever did him move,
And Pity, passing all—I trow in this fair five
That knight was clothed and happed o'er all that be alive.
And all these gifts, fivefold, upon that knight were bound,
Each in the other linked, that none an end had found.
Fast fixed upon five points, I trow, that failed him ne'er,
Nor joined at any side, nor sundered anywhere.
Nor was there any point, so cunningly they blend,
Where they beginning make, or where they find an end.
Therefore, upon his shield, fair-shapen, doth that same
Sign, in fair red gold gleam, upon red gules aflame,
Which the Pentangle pure the folk do truly name

with lore

Armed is Sir Gawain gay,
His lance aloft he bore,
And wished them all "Good-day,"
He deemed, for evermore.

VIII

Spurs to his steed he set, and sprang upon his way,
So that from out the stones the sparks they flew away –
Seeing that seemly sight the hearts of all did sink,
Each soothly said to each that which they secret think,
Grieved for that comely knight – “By Christ, ’t were pity great
If yon good knight be lost, who is of fair estate;
His peer on field to find, i’ faith, it were not light,
’T were better to have wrought by wile, methinks, than might!
Such doughty knight a duke were worthier to have been,
A leader upon land, gladly we such had seen! –
Such lot were better far than he were brought to naught,
Hewn by an elfish man, for gage of prideful thought!
Did ever any king obey such strange behest,
As risk a goodly knight upon a Christmas jest?”
Much water warm, I ween, welled from the eyes of all,
Whenas that gallant knight gat him from Arthur’s hall
that day:

Nor here would he abide,
But swiftly went his way,
By toilsome paths did ride,
E’en as the book doth say.

IX

Now rides Gawain the good thro’ Logres’ realm, I trow,
Forth doth he fare on quest that seemeth ill enow;
Often, companionless, at night alone must lie,
The fare he liketh best he lacketh verily;
No fellow save his foal hath he by wood or wold,
With none save God alone that knight may converse hold;
Till that unto North Wales full nigh he needs must draw,
The isles of Anglesey on his left hand he saw;
And fared across the ford and foreland at that same,
Over ’gainst Holyhead, so that he further came

To Wirral's wilds, methinks, nor long therein abode
Since few within that land, they love or man, or God!
And ever as he fared he asked the folk, I ween,
If they had heard men tell tale of a Knight in Green
In all that land about? Or of a Chapel Green?
And all men answered, "Nay," naught of that knight they knew,
And none had seen with sight a man who bare such hue

as green;

The knight took roads full strange,
And rugged paths between,
His mood full oft did change
Ere he his goal had seen.

X

Full many a cliff he climbs within that country's range,
Far flying from his friends he rideth lone and strange;
At every ford and flood he passed upon his way
He found a foe before, of fashion grim alway.
So foul they were, and fell, that he of needs must fight—
So many a marvel there befell that gallant knight
That tedious 't were to tell the tithe thereof, I ween
Sometimes with worms he warred, or wolves his foes have been;
Anon with woodmen wild, who in the rocks do hide—
Of bulls, or bears, or boars, the onslaught doth he bide;
And giants, who drew anigh, from off the moorland height;
Doughty in durance he, and shielded by God's might
Else, doubtless, had he died, full oft had he been slain.
Yet war, it vexed him less than winter's bitter bane,
When the clear water cold from out the clouds was shed,
And froze ere yet it fell on fallow field and dead;
Then, more nights than enow, on naked rocks he lay,
And, half slain with the sleet, in harness slept alway.
While the cold spring that erst its waters clattering flung
From the cliff high o'erhead, in icicles now hung.
In peril thus, and pain, and many a piteous plight

And for the change they chose the choicest to their thought.
Then soon he did them on, and I would have ye know,
Right well became the knight those skirts of seemly flow.
That hero, fair of face, he seeméd verily,
To all men who his mien and hue might nearer see
So sweet and lovesome there, of limb so light, they thought
That never Christ on earth a comelier had wrought—

That knight
Thro' the world far and near
Might well be deemed of right
A prince with ne'er a peer
In field of fiercest fight.

XVI

A chair before the fire of charcoal, burning bright,
They set for good Gawain, with cloth all draped and dight.
Cushion and footstool fit, the twain they were right good,
Then men a mantle cast around him as he stood,
'T was of a bliaunt brown, broidered in rich device,
And fairly furred within with pelts of goodly price,
Of whitest ermine all, and even so the hood.
Down in that seemly seat he sat, the gallant good,
And warmed him at the fire—then bettered was his cheer;
On trestles fairly set they fix a table near
And spread it with a cloth, that shewed all clean and white,
Napkin and salt-cellar with silver spoons so bright.
The knight washed at his will, and set him down to eat,
Serjants, they served him there in seemly wise and meet;
With diverse dishes sweet, and seasoned of the best,
A double portion then they set before the guest,
Of fishes, baked in bread, or broiled on glowing wood,
Anon came fishes seethed, or stewed with spices good,
With choicest dainties there, as pleasing to his taste—
The knight, he quoth full oft, a feast that board had graced,
Then all, as with one voice, this answer made in haste:

XVIII

By that was dinner done, the knight from table rose,
The eventide drew nigh, the day was near its close,
The chosen chaplains there to chapel go forthright,
Loudly the bells they ring, e'en as was fit and right.
To solemn evensong of this High Feast they go —
The lord the prayers would hear, his lady fair also,
To comely closet closed she entereth straightway;
And even so, full soon, follows Sir Gawain gay.
The lord his lappet took, and led him to a seat,
Hailing him by his name, in guise of friendship meet,
Of all knights in the world was he most welcome there
He thanked him, and the twain embrace with kisses fair,
And soberly they sit throughout the service high —
Then 't was the lady's will to see that knight with eye,
With many a maiden fair she cometh from her place,
Fairest was she in skin, in figure, and in face,
Of height and colour too, in every way so fair
That e'en Gaynore, the queen, might scarce with her compare.
She thro' the chancel came, to greet that hero good,
Led by another dame, who at her left hand stood;
Older she was, I trow, and reverend seemingly,
With goodly following of nobles, verily;
But all unlike to sight, I trow, those ladies were,
Yellow, the older dame, whereas the first was fair.
The cheeks of one were red, e'en as the rose doth glow,
The other, wrinkles rough, in plenty, did she shew.
The younger, kerchiefs soft, with many a pearl so white,
Ware, that her breast and throat full well displayed to sight,
Whiter they were than snow that on the hills doth lie —
The other's neck was veiled in gorget folded high,
That all her chin so black was swathed in milk-white folds;
Her forehead all, I ween, in silk was rapped and rolled,
Broidered it was full fair, adorned with knots enow,
Till naught of her was seen save the black bristly brow.

Her eyes, her nose, I ween, and eke her lips, were bare
And those were ill to see, so bleared and sour they were—
Meet mistress upon mold, so men might her declare

that tide—

Short and thick-set was she,
Her hips were broad and wide,
And fairer far to see
The lady at her side.

XIX

When Gawain saw that dame, gracious of mien, and gay,
Leave from his host he craved, and t'wards her took his way;
The elder, bowing low, he fittingly doth greet,
Lightly within his arms he folds the lady sweet
Gives her a comely kiss, as fit from courteous knight;
She hailed him as her friend—a boon he prays forthright,
Her servant would he be, an so her will it were—
Betwixt the twain he walks, and, talking still, they fare
To hall, and e'en to hearth, and at the lord's command
Spices in plenty great are ready to their hand,
With wine that maketh gay at feast time, as is meet—
The lord, in laughing wise, he sprang unto his feet,
Bade them make mirth enow—all men his words must hear—
His hood he doffed from head, and hung it on a spear,
And quoth that that same man worship thereof should win
Who made the greatest mirth that Christmas-tide within:
"I'll fail not, by my faith, to frolic with the best,
Ere that my hood I lose—with help of every guest."
And thus, with joyous jest the lord doth try withal
To gladden Sir Gawain with games in this his hall

that night;

Till that the torches" flare
He needs must bid them light,
Gawain must from them fare
And seek his couch forthright.

XX

Then, on the morrow morn, when all men bear in mind
 How our dear Lord was born to die for all mankind,
 Joy in each dwelling dwells, I wot well, for His sake,
 So did it there that day, when men High Feast would make;
 For then, at every meal, messes, full richly dressed,
 Men served upon the dais, with dainties of the best;
 That ancient lady there doth fill the highest seat,
 The castle's lord, I trow, beside her, as was meet.
 Sir Gawain hath his place beside that lady gay
 At midmost of the board, when meat was served alway.
 And then, thro' all the hall, each one, as seemed him best,
 Sat, each in his degree – fitly they served each guest,
 Much meat had they and mirth, with joy and merry song,
 Methinks to tell thereof would take me over-long
 Altho' perchance I strove to tell that tale as meet –
 I wot well that Gawain, and this, the lady sweet,
 In their fair fellowship much comfort needs must find,
 In the dear dalliance of words and glances kind,
 And converse courteous, from all unfitness free –
 Such pastime fitting were for prince in purity –
Sweet strain
 Of trump and piping clear
 And drum, doth sound amain;
 Each doth his minstrel hear,
 And even so the twain.

XXI

Much mirth they made that day, and e'en the morrow's morn
 Nor slackened of the feast when the third day was born;
 The joy of sweet Saint John, gentle it was to hear,
 The folk, they deemed the feast fast to its end drew near;
 (The guests must needs depart, e'en in the dawning grey)

Full early did they rise, and serve the wine straightway;
 Danced carols merrily, so, blithe, the day they passed,
 And when the hour waxed late they took their leave at last.
 Each one to wend his way whenas the day should break—
 Gawain would bid good-day—his hand the lord doth take
 To his own chamber leads, and by the chimney wide,
 To thank his guest full fain, he draweth him aside;
 Thanks him for worship fair that he from him had won,
 And for the honour high he to his house had done
 By lending countenance unto this Christmas Feast—
 “Of honours, while I live, I ’ll count this not the least
 That Gawain this, my guest, at Christ’s own Feast hath been!”
 “Gramercy,” quoth Gawain, “In all good faith, I ween
 The honour it is yours, and may Christ you repay.
 I wait upon your word, to do your will alway
 As I be bound thereto by night and e’en by day
 of right—”

The lord, he was full fain
 To keep with him the knight,
 Then answered him Gawain
 That he in no wise might.

XXII

The lord, he courteous prayed that he would tell him there
 What deed of daring drove Gawain afar to fare
 E’en at this time from court, and thus alone to wend,
 Before this Holy Feast had come unto an end?
 “In sooth, Sir,” quoth the knight, “Ye speak the truth alway,
 A hasty quest, and high, doth send me on my way,
 For I myself must seek, and find, a certain place
 And whitherward to wend I wot not, by God’s grace!
 Nor would I miss my tryst at New Year, by my soul,
 For all the land of Logres! Christ help me to my goal!
 Therefore Sir Host, I now require ye without fail
 To tell me here in truth if ye e’er heard a tale

Told of a Chapel Green? Where such a place may be?
The knight who keepeth it, green too, I ween, is he;
We sware a forward fast, I trow, between us twain,
That I that man would meet, might I thereto attain,
And to that same New Year but few days now remain—
Now fainer far would I behold that self-same knight,
If so it were God's will, than any gladder sight;
Therefore with your good will, I needs must wend my way
Since I have, for my quest, but three bare days away;
Fainer were I to die than fail in this my quest—"
Then, laughing, quoth the lord: "Of needs must be my guest,
I'll shew to thee thy goal ere yet the term be o'er
That very Chapel Green—so vex thy soul no more,
Do thou in bed abide and take thine ease, I pray,
Until the fourth day dawn, with New Year go thy way
And thou shalt reach thy goal ere yet it be midday.

So, still,
To the New Year abide
Then rise, thy goal is near
Men shall thee thither guide,
"T is not two miles from here—"

XXIII

Sir Gawain, he was glad, and laughed out gay and free,
"I thank ye, Sire, for this, o'er all your courtesie,
Achieved is this my quest, and I shall, at your will
Within your burg abide, and do your pleasure still."
The lord, he took that knight, and set him at his side,
And bade the ladies come to cheer them at that tide,
Tho' they had, of themselves, fair solace, verily—
The host, for very joy, he jested merrily
As one for meed of mirth scarce wist what he might say.
Then, turning to the knight, he cried on him alway:
"Didst swear to do the deed I should of thee request,

The cov'nant 'twixt the twain
The lord to memory brought,
For jesting was he fain.

Know I am at your will, (forsooth it pleaseth me)
And here for grace I yearn, yielding me readily.
For where one needs must yield to do so swift were best!"
And thus he answer made, with many a merry jest;
"But might I, Lady fair, find grace before your eyes,
Then loose, I pray, your bonds, and bid your prisoner rise,
I 'ld get me from this bed, and better clad, I trow,
I in your converse kind comfort would find enow."
"Nay, nay, forsooth, beau Sire," so quoth that lady sweet,
"Ye shall not rise from bed, I 'll rede ye counsel meet,
For I shall hold ye here, since other may not be,
And talk with this my knight, who captive is to me,
For well I know, in sooth, ye are that same Gawain
Worshipped by all the world where ye to fare be fain;
For all your honour praise, your gracious courtesie,
Or lords or ladies fair, all men on earth that be!
Now are ye here, I wis, and all alone we twain,
My lord to fare afield with his free folk is fain,
The men, they lie abed, so do my maidens all—
The door is safely shut, and closed and hasped withal;
Since him whom all men praise I in my hand hold fast,
I well will use my time the while the chance doth last!

Now rest,
My body's at your will
To use as ye think best,
Perforce, I find me still
Servant to this my guest!"

V

"In good faith," quoth Gawain, "I now bethink me well,
I be not such an one as this your tale would tell!
To reach such reverence as ye rehearse but now
I all unworthy were—that do I soothly vow!
Yet, God wot, I were glad, an so ye thought it good,
If I in word and deed here at your service stood;

To pleasure this your prayer, a pure joy 't were to me."
 "In good faith, Sir Gawain," the lady answered free,
 "The prowess and the praise that please us ladies fair
 I lack not, nor hold light, but little gain it were
 Ladies there be enow to whom it were more dear
 To hold their knight in hold, e'en as I hold ye here,
 To dally daintily with courteous words and fair
 That bring them comfort good, and cure them of their care,
 Than wealth of treasure told, or gold they own withal—
 But now I praise the Lord who here upholdeth all
 Him whom they all desire is in my hold and hall
 of grace!"

She made him such good cheer
 That lady fair of face,
 The knight was fain to hear
 And answer, in his place.

VI

He quoth: "Now Mary Maid reward ye, as she may,
 I find your frankness fair and noble, sooth to say.
 Full many folk, I trow, have well entreated me,
 Yet greater honour far than all their courtesie
 I count your praise, who naught save goodness here shall know."
 "By Mary Maid," she quoth, "methinks it is not so,
 For were my worth above all women who may live,
 And all of this world's wealth were in mine hand to give,
 And I were free of choice a lord to choose to me,
 Then, for the customs good I in this knight must see,
 For beauty debonaire, for bearing blithe and gay,
 For all that I have heard, and hold for truth alway,
 Upon no man on mold save ye my choice were laid."
 "I wot well," quoth the knight, "a better choice ye made!
 Yet am I proud of this, the praise, ye give to me,
 My sovereign ye, and I your servant, verily,
 Do yield me here your knight, and may Christ ye repay!"

They spake of many things till noon had passed away,
And aye the lady made mien that she loved him well,
And aye he turned aside her sweet words as they fell,
For were she brightest maid of maidens to his mind,
The less love would he shew, since loss he thought to find
anon —

The blow that should him slay,
And for his blow was boon —
The lady leave did pray.
He granted her, full soon.

VII

Then, as she gave "good-day," she laughed with glance so gay,
And, standing, spake a word that 'stonied him away:
"May He who speedeth speech reward thee well, I trow,
But that ye be Gawain I much misdoubt me now," —
"And wherefore?" quoth the knight in fashion frank and fair
Fearing lest he have failed in custom debonaire:
The lady blessed him then, and spake as in this wise:
"Gawain so good a knight is holden in all eyes,
So clad in courtesie is he, in sooth, that ne'er
Had he thus holden speech for long with lady fair
But he had craved a kiss by this, his courtesie,
Or trifling token ta'en at end of converse free!"
Then quoth Gawain: "Ywis, if this ye fitting deem
I 'll kiss at your command, as doth a knight beseem
Who tarrieth to ask, and doth refusal fear —"
She clasped him in her arms, e'en as she stood anear,
Lightly she bent adown, and kissed that knight so free,
Commending him to Christ, as he her, courteously —
Then, without more ado, forth from the door she went;
The knight made haste to rise, on speed was he intent,
He called his chamberlain, his robes he chose anon,
When he was fitly garbed to mass he blithe has gone;
Then sat him down to meat, 't was served in fitting guise,

And then, in goodly jest, he calleth Sir Gawain,
The tale of that day's sport he to rehearse is fain,
Shews him how fair the fat upon the ribs, sharp shorn,
And quoth: "How seemeth this? Have I won praise this morn?
Am I, thro' this my craft, worthy of praise from thee?"
"Yea, soothly," quoth Gawain, "the fairest game I see
That I in winter-time have seen this seven year!"
"And all this," quoth his host, "Gawain, I give thee here
By covenant and accord, the whole thou well may'st claim."
"T is sooth," then said the knight, "I grant ye at this same.
Won have I worthily a prize, these walls within
Which, with as good a will, ye now from me must win."
With that he clasps his arms around his neck so fair
And in right comely wise he kissed him then and there,
"Now here hast thou my gain, no more hath fallen to me—
I trow had it been more my gift were none less free!"
"T is good," quoth the good knight, "nor shall my thanks be slow
Yet might it better be, an I the truth might know,
Where thou didst win this grace, or by thy wit or no?"
"Ask no more," quoth Gawain, "so did our forward stand,"
Since ye have ta'en your right no more may ye demand."

At will

They laughed and made them gay
With many a jest I trow,
To supper go straightway,
With dainties new enow.

XI

Then by the hearth they sit, on silken cushions soft,
And wine, within those walls, I wot, they serve full oft,
And, ever, as they jest, come morrow morn, they say
That forward they 'll fulfil which they had kept to-day.
What chance soe'er betide, they will exchange their gain
When they at nightfall meet, be much or little ta'en.

This covenant they accord, in presence of the court,
And beverage to the board at that same time was brought,
A courteous leave, at last, doth each from other take,
And each man for his bed himself doth ready make.
The cock at early morn, had crowed and cackled thrice
When swift, the lord arose, with him his knights of price;
They hearken mass, and meat, with service fit, they bring,
Then forth to forest fare ere yet the day doth spring
for chace —

With sound of hunter's horns
O'er plain they swiftly pace,
Uncoupled midst the thorns
Each hound doth run on race.

XII

Full soon they strike the scent, hard by a rock withal,
Huntsmen cheer on those hounds who first upon it fall,
Loudly, with whirling words, and clamour rising high,
The hounds that heard the call haste hither at the cry.
Fast on the scent they fall, full forty at that tide,
Till of the pack the cry was heard both far and wide.
So fiercely rose their bay, the rocks, they rang again,
The huntsmen with their horns to urge them on were fain.
Then, sudden, all the pack together crowd and cry
Before a thicket dense, beneath a crag full high,
Hard by the water's edge — the pack, with one consent,
Run to the rugged rocks, which lie all scarred and rent.
Hounds to the finding fare, the men, they follow keen,
And cast about the crag, and rocks that lie between.
The knights, full well they knew what beast had here its lair
And fain would drive it forth before the bloodhounds there.
Then on the bush they beat, and bid the game uprise —
With sudden rush across the beaters, out there hies
A great and grisly boar, most fearsome to behold,

and hue,
The dame made no delay
To greet her knight so true,
Early she took her way
To test his mood anew.

XIV

She to the curtain comes, and looks upon the knight,
Gawain doth greet her there in fitting wise and right;
She greeteth him again, ready of speech is she,
Soft seats her at his side, and laughs full merrily.
Then, with a smiling glance these words to him doth say:
“Sir, an ye be Gawain I marvel much alway,
So stern ye be when one would goodly ye entreat,
Of courteous company ignore the customs meet,
An one be fain to teach, swift from your mind they’re brought
Since all forgotten now what yesterday I taught
By truest tokens all, that well might be, I trow.”
“What is that?” quoth Gawain, “naught I remember now,
But if ’t is sooth ye speak, then blame I needs must bear.”
“Of kissing was my rede”; so quoth the lady fair,
“When countenance be known, swiftly a kiss to claim,
That doth become a knight who beareth courteous name!”
“Nay, cease, my dear, such speech,” so quoth the gallant knight,
“A kiss I dare not claim, lest ye deny my right,
For an ye did forbid, to take, I trow, were wrong –
“I’ faith,” in merry wise she spake, “ye be too strong,
Ye may not be forbid, since ye may take with might
An any do such wrong as to deny thy right!”
“Yea,” quoth Gawain, “by Christ, your speech it soundeth well,
But threats shall little thrive in that land where I dwell,
Nor count we fair a gift that is not proffered free –
I am at your command, to kiss, if so shall be
Your will – to take or leave, as seemeth good to ye.”

With grace,
She bent, that lady fair,
And gently kissed his face.
They hold sweet converse there,
Of love-themes speak a space.

XV

“Fain would I ask of ye, (that lady questioned free)
If so ye were not wroth, what may the reason be
That one so young and fair, as ye be at this tide,
For knightly courtesie renowned both far and wide,
Who of all chivalry the head and chief men hold,
Versed in the lore of love, and warfare, fierce and bold—
Since each true knight doth tell how he did venture dare
(This token and this sign his deeds perforce must bear)
How for a lady’s love his life at stake he set,
And for her favour fair full doleful dints hath met,
With valour ’venged her wrongs, and cured her of her care
Brought bliss unto her bower, and did her bounties share—
And ye be comeliest knight of this, your land and time,
Your worship and your words be famed in every clime,
And I, two mornings long have sat beside ye here
Yet never from your mouth a word came to mine ear
That ever dealt with love, in measure less or more;
But ye, so courteous held, so skilled in all such lore,
Surely to one so young as I should swiftly shew
And teach some token sure, whereby true love to know.
Are ye unlearnéd then, whom men so highly prize?
Or am I all too dull for dalliance, in your eyes?

For shame!

Hither I come and sit
To learn, as at this same;
So teach me of your wit,
While sport my lord doth claim!”

XVI

“In good faith,” quoth Gawain, “your good deeds God repay,
For goodly is my glee, my profit great alway;
That one so fair as ye doth deign betake ye here
To please so poor a man, and me, your knight, to cheer
With kindly countenance, in sooth doth please me well
But that I, in my turn, should here of true love tell,
And take that for my theme, (or tales of gallant knight)
And teach ye, who I wot, doth wield more skilful sleight
In such arts by the half, or hundred-fold indeed,
Than I, long as I live on earth may win for meed,
'T were folly all indeed, sweet lady, by my fay!
Your will in troth I'll work in such wise as I may,
As duteous I am bound – and ever more will do
Your service faithfully, God grant me grace thereto!”
Thus did she ask him fair, and oft did test and try,
To win him here to woo, whate'er her will thereby –
But he doth fend him fair, nor ill hath done, I ween,
And never deed of wrong hath chanced the twain between,
but bliss –

They laugh and talk amain,
At last she doth him kiss,
Her leave of him hath ta'en,
And gone her way, I wis.

XVII

Then doth Sir Gawain rise, and robe him, mass to hear.
Then was the dinner dight, and served with mickle cheer;
Thus, with the ladies twain, in sport the day he spent,
The while the lord doth chase the boar o'er bank and bent –
Follows the grisly swine, as o'er the holts it sped,
With broken back, his hounds, beneath its jaws fall dead.
The boar would bide at bay, the bowmen grant no grace,
But force him 'gainst his will once more his foes to face.

So fast the arrows fly, the folk they gather round,
Yet huntsmen stiff and stern, he startles at that stound.
Till spent with flight, at last, he may no further win,
But hies him in all haste, until a hole within
A mound, beside a rock, hard by the brooklet's flow,
He gains—then turns at bay, tearing the ground below.
His jaws, they foam and froth, unseemly to behold,
He whets his tusks so white—was never man so bold
Of those who faced him there, who dare the issue try;
They eye him from afar, but none will venture nigh.

Right wroth,
Many he smote before,
Thus all might well be loath
To face the tusks that tore—
So mad was he, i' troth.

XVIII

Then cometh swift the lord, spurring his goodly steed,
See'th the boar at bay, of his men taketh heed;
He lighteth from his horse, leaves it with hanging rein,
Draws out his blade so bright, and strideth forth amain.
Fast does he ford the stream, the boar bides on the strand,
“Ware of the gallant wight, with weapon fast in hand;
His bristles rise amain, grim were his snarls withal,
The folk were sore afraid, lest harm their lord befall.
The swine, with spring so swift, upon the hero fell,
That boar and baron bold none might asunder tell,
There, in the water deep, the boar, he had the worst,
For the man marked him well, e'en as they met at first,
His sharp blade in the slot he set, e'en to the heft,
And, driving hard and true, the heart asunder cleft,
Snarling, he yields his hold, the stream him hence hath reft.

Forthright,
The hounds, with fierce onslaught
Fall to, the boar they bite,

Swift to the shore he's brought,
And dogs to death him dight.

XIX

Forthwith from many a horn a joyful blast they blow,
Huntsmen together vie, high rings the loud "Hallo!"
The brachets bay their best, e'en at their masters' will,
Who in that fearsome chace had proved their hunters' skill.
And then a wight so wise in woodcraft, fit and fair,
The quarry to unlace hath set him straightway there.
He heweth off the head, and setteth it on high,
With skill he rendeth down the backbone, presently,
Then, bringing forth the bowels, roasts them on embers red,
And, to reward his hounds, doth blend them with their bread.
He strippeth off the brawn, e'en as in shields it were,
The hastlets hath he ta'en, and drawn them forth with care.
The halves he taketh now, and binds them as a whole,
With withy stiff and stout, made fast unto a pole.
And with that self-same swine homeward they fare thro' land;
The boar's head do they bear before their lord, on brand,
Who slew him in the ford, by force of his right hand
so strong—
Till he might see Gawain
In hall, he deemed it long,
His guest he was full fain
To pay, nor do him wrong.

XX

The lord, with merry jest, and laugh of gladsome glee
Soon as he saw Gawain, spake words both fair and free,
(The ladies too he bade, e'en with the household all—)
The boar's shields doth he show, and tells his tale withal,
How broad he was, how long, how savage in his mood,
That grisly swine—and how they chased him thro' the wood,

Sir Gawain doth commend his deeds, in comely wise,
Well hath he proved himself, to win so fair a prize—
“For such a brawny beast, (so spake that baron bold)
And such shields of a swine, mine eyes did ne’er behold.”
They handle the huge head, the knight doth praise it well,
And loud and fair his speech, his host his mind may tell.
“Gawain,” quoth the good man, “this gain is sure your own,
By forward fair and fast, e’en as before was shown.”
“Yea,” quoth the knight, “’t is true, and here too, by my troth,
I give ye all my gain, nor thereto am I loth.”
With that he clasped his host, and doth him kindly kiss,
And so a second time he did the same, I wis.
“Now are we,” quoth Gawain, “quit in this eventide
Of forwards all we made since I with ye abide
in hall.”

The lord quoth: “By Saint Giles,
I hold ye best withal,
Rich are ye in short, while
Your profits be not small!”

XXI

The tables then they bring, on trestles set aloft,
And cover them as meet, with cloths both fair and soft,
Clear falleth on the walls, of waxen torch, the light;
Sithen, to service fair they set them, many a knight.
Then clamour glad, and glee, arose within the hall,
Where flares the flame on floor they make much mirth withal,
They sing, e’en as they sup, and after, knights so true,
Fair songs of Christmas-tide, and many a carol new,
With every kind of mirth that man to tell were fain—
And by that lady’s side he sat, the good Gawain,
Such semblance fair she made, in seemly wise and meet,
To please the gentle knight, with stolen glances sweet,
Whereat he marvelled much, and chid himself amain,
Yet, for his courtesy, would answer not again,

Dealing in dainty wise, till fate the die was fain
to cast.

Thus made they mirth in hall,
Long as their will did last,
Then, when the lord did call,
To chimney-corner passed.

XXII

They drank, and dallied, there, and deemed 't were well to hold
Their forward fast and fair till New Year's Eve were told,
But Gawain prayed his leave, with morrow's morn to ride,
Since it were nigh the term his challenge to abide.

The lord withheld his leave, praying him strait to stay:

"As I be faithful knight, I pledge my troth alway
Thou shalt thy tryst fulfil, there at the Chapel Green,
Before the New Year's Morn hath waxed to prime, I ween;
So lie, and rest thee soft, and take thine ease at will,
And I shall hunt the holts, and keep our forward still,
To change my gain with thee, all that I homeward bear—
Twice have I tested thee, and found thee true and fair,
A third time will we try our luck, at dawn of day;
Now think ye upon joy, be merry while ye may,
For men may laugh at loss, if so their will alway."

Gawain doth grant the grace, and saith, he will abide;
Blithely they brought him drink, and then to bed they hied

with light—

Sir Gawain lies and sleeps
Soft, thro' the stilly night,
The lord his cov'nant keeps,
For chase is early dight.

XXIII

A morsel after mass, he taketh with his men,
Merry the morning tide—his mount he prayeth then,
They who, a-horse, should hold him company that day
A-saddle all, their steeds before the hall-gate stay.
Full fair it was a-field, the frost yet fast doth cling,
Ruddy, and red, the sun its rising beams doth fling,
And clear, and cloudless all, appears the welkin wide—
The huntsmen scatter them hard by a woodland side,
The rocks, they rang again before the horn's loud blast,
Some fell upon a track, where late a fox had passed—
(The trail may oft betray, tho' fox no feint doth lack—)
A hound hath found the scent, the hunt is on his track,
The dogs, they follow fast, and thick the hue and cry,
They run in rabble rout on the trail speedily
The fox, he fled apace, the hounds their prey have seen,
And, once within their sight, they follow fast and keen,
Loudly they threaten there, with cry and clamour fierce
The fox, with twist and turn, the undergrowth doth pierce,
Winding, and hearkening oft, low thro' the hedge doth creep,
Then, by a little ditch, doth o'er a spinney leap,
So, still, he stealeth forth, by rough and rugged way
Thinking to clear the wood, and cheat the hounds that day;
Then, ere he wist, I trow, to hunters' tryst he came
Threatened he was threefold, by hounds as at that same:

from fray

He starteth swift aside,
And fled, as he were fey;
Fain was he at that tide
To seek the woodland way.

XXV

Drowsing, he dreamed, the knight, a dream with travail fraught,
 As men, in morning hours, are plagued with troubled thought;
 How destiny, next morn, his weird should duly dight,
 When, at the Chapel Green, he needs must meet that knight,
 And there his buffet bide, nor make there for debate—
 But, came that comely dame, his wits he summoned straight,
 Aroused him from his sleep, and spake full speedily;
 That lady drew anigh, sweet was her smile to see—
 She bent her o'er his face, and kissed him, fair and free.
 A greeting fit he gave, in words of gladsome cheer,
 So glorious her guise, clad in such goodly gear,
 Her features faultless all, her colour fair and fine,
 The springs of joy well free, warming his heart like wine;
 Their seemly smiles full swift were smitten into mirth,
 Bliss, and good fellowship, betwixt the twain to birth
 did win—

Their words were fair and good,
 Weal reigned those walls within,
 Yet peril 'twixt them stood,
 Nor might she nearer win.

XXVI

She pressed that prince of price so close, I trow, that day,
 Leaning so nigh her point, that need upon him lay
 To take her proffered love, or roughly say her nay—
 For courtesy his care, lest he be craven knight,
 And more, lest mischief fall, in that he sin outright,
 And thus betray his host, the lord of house and hall,
 “God shield me,” quoth the knight, “that e'er such chance befall!”
 Forthwith, with laughter light, he strove to lay aside
 All speech of special grace her lips might speak that tide;
 Then quoth she to the knight: “I hold ye worthy blame

An ye love not that life which here your love doth claim,
And lieth wounded here, above all else on earth,
Save ye a true love have ye hold of better worth,
And to that lady fair your faith so fast ye hold,
Ye may not list my words—Save ye that tale have told
That will I not believe—I pray ye, of a sooth,
For all the love on life, hide not from me the truth
for guile?"

The knight quoth: "By Saint John,
(And gaily did he smile)
Of true love have I none,
Nor will I, for a while!"

XXVII

"That word," the lady quoth, "methinks hath grieved me more,
Yet I my answer take, altho' I sorrow sore;
But kiss me kindly now, ere yet I go my way
My fate to mourn on mould, as she who loveth may."
Sighing, she swayed adown, and kissed the knight so good,
Then raised her up again, and spake e'en as she stood:
"At this our parting, dear, grant me this grace for love,
Give me somewhat as gift, if it be but thy glove,
That I may think on thee, and so my grief may still
"Now, I wis," quoth the knight, "I would I had at will,
The thing I hold on earth most precious, it were thine,
Ye have deserved, I trow, by friendship fair and fine,
A guerdon goodlier far than I might e'er bestow!
But here, by gift of love, small profit might ye know,
Nor were ye honoured now, had ye at this time aught
Or glove, or other gift, from Gawain, as ye sought;
Here thro' the land I fare on errand strange and dread,
No men have I with mails, or trinkets, at this stead,
That much misliketh me, lady, for this thy sake,
Yet, be 't for good or ill, each man his chance must take
aright—"

“Thou knight of honour, nay”
(So spake the lady bright),
“Tho’ no gift be my pay
Somewhat I’ll give my knight.”

XXVIII

She proffered him a ring, of red gold fashioned fair,
A sparkling stone, I trow, aloft the setting bare,
Its gleam, in sooth, outshone the sunlight’s ruddy ray,
I wot well that its worth no man might lightly pay.
Gawain the ring refused, and readily he spake:
“No gift, my lady gay, of goodwill will I take,
Since I have naught to give naught will I take of thee—”
Straitly she prayed, Gawain refused her steadfastly,
Sware swiftly on his sooth, that ring he would not take—
The lady, sorely grieved, in this wise further spake:
“An ye refuse my ring, methinks, the cause shall be
Ye deem ye were too much beholden unto me,
I’ll here my girdle give as lesser gift this tide—”
She loosed a silken lace that hung low at her side,
Upon her kirtle knit, beneath her mantle’s fold,
With green silk was it gay, entwined with threads of gold,
Braided in cunning wise, by skilful fingers wrought;
She proffered it the knight, and blithely him besought
To take this as her gift, tho’ worthless all it were—
But still he said her nay, and, ever steadfast, sware
He would nor gift nor gold, ere God would give him grace
Well to achieve the chance t’wards which he set his face—
“Therefore, I pray ye now, be not displeased at this,
But let the matter be, I may not grant, I wis,
thy prayer
Much do I owe to thee
For this, thy gentle care,
By heat, by cold, I’ll be
Thy servant everywhere.”

And, seeking out a priest, he privily doth pray
He may his life unfold, that he may better know
How his soul may be saved, when he from hence shall go.
Shrived was he surely there—he shewed his misdeeds all,
Or less they be or more, and did for mercy call,
Then, from the listening priest, doth absolution pray—
Assoiléd well he was, and set as clean alway
As if the morrow's morn the day of doom should be.
Sithen he makes good cheer amid the ladies free,
With comely carols there, all joys men may devise,
(As ne'er before that day, methinks, had been his wise)
with bliss—

That all men marvelled there
And said of him, I wis,
Such semblance gay he ware
As none had seen ere this.

XXXI

Now let him linger there where love his share shall be—
The lord is yet afield, leading his folk so free,
Now hath he slain the fox, that he hath chased all day—
As he thro' spinney sped, eager to spy his prey,
There, where he heard the hounds that close on his track lay,
Lo! Reynard, running low, thro' tangled grove he steals,
And all the yelping pack of hounds are at his heels.
The knight, he saw the beast, and would his coming wait,
Drew forth his brand so bright, and flung it swift and straight,
The fox, the sharp sword shunned, to swerve aside was fain,
A hound doth hold him fast ere he might turn again,
Beneath the horse's feet the pack upon him fell,
Worried their wily prey with many a yap and yell,
The lord, he lights adown, the fox he seizes there,
Swiftly he snatches him from out the jaws that tear,
Holding him high o'er head, he halloos loud and gay,
While many a gallant hound doth round him spring and bay.

Thither the huntsmen hie, their horns sound merrily,
Answering each to each, till all their master see.
That noble company, they gather fair and fast,
All who the bugle bare together blew a blast,
While they who had no horn, they halloo'd loud and clear;
It was the merriest meet that ever man might hear
The clamour that was raised o'er Reynard's doom so drear

Then, gay,
The hounds they there reward,
Rubbing their heads that day –
Now have they ta'en Reynard
And stript his pelt away.

XXXII

And then they hied them home, for night-fall was full nigh,
Blowing a shattering blast on horn, with notes so high,
The lord at last alights before his home so dear,
A fire he finds on floor – his guest, he sitteth near,
Gawain the good, who glad and joyous was withal,
For, mid the ladies fair, bliss to his lot did fall.
He ware a robe of blue, e'en to the earth it fell,
His surcoat, softly furred, became him passing well;
Of self-same stuff, the hood upon his shoulders lay,
Bordered and bound the twain with fur alike that day.
His host he met forthwith, there, in the midmost hall,
A goodly greeting gave, and joyful spake withal;
"Now shall I first fulfil thy forward, mine and thine,
Which we together sware whenas ye spared no wine."
With that he clasped the knight, and gave him kisses three,
Setting them on his lips with all solemnity.
"By Christ," then quoth the host: "good fortune yours hath been,
If for such chance ye gave a fair exchange, I ween!"
"Thereof small need to speak –" the hero straightway said,
"Since light the cost, and swift, methinks, the price I paid."
"By Mary," quoth his host, "in that am I behind,

Gayest from here to Greece,
His steed he bade them bring.

II

The while in richest weed he doth himself array,
His coat, with cognizance embroidered clear and gay,
On velvet, rich adorned, with stones of virtue high
Well wrought and bound, the seams embroidered cunningly,
And all, with fairest skins, within well furred and lined –
The lace, the lady's gift, he doth not leave behind,
Gawain forgat it not, since 't was for his own good –
He belted fast his brand around him as he stood,
Then twined the token twice, and drew it round him tight,
Well did that silken cord enswathe the goodly knight;
The girdle of green silk, in sooth, beseemed him well,
On cloth of royal red, its hues, they richly tell.
But for that girdle's grace he ware it not, the knight,
Nor for the pendants' pride, tho' polished they, and bright,
Nor for the glittering gold, whose gleam the ends doth light –
But 't was to save himself, when he must shortly stand
And bide without debate, from knife or glittering brand
a blow –

Now, armed, the goodly knight
Forth from the hall doth go,
On all who there be dight
His thanks he would bestow.

III

Ready was Gringalet, his charger great and tall,
Stabled the steed had been in fitting wise withal,
Eager to start, the horse delay might little brook –
The knight, he drew anear, and on his coat did look,
Spake softly to himself, and by his sooth he sware,
"The men within this moat for honour fitly care,

that tide—
They climbed a hill full high
White snow lay on its side,
The guide, who rode hard by,
Now bade him to abide.

V

“Now lord, as I was pledged, I have ye hither led,
Now are ye nigh the place of note, your quest is sped
That ye have straitly sought, and asked for specially,
But now I know ye well, in sooth, I’ld say to ye—
(Since ye be such a lord that men full well may love,)
Would ye but work my will your welfare it might prove
The place whereto ye pass right perilous men hold,
A wight doth ward that waste, the worst is he on mould,
For stiff is he, and stern, and over keen to strike,
For height on middle-earth no man hath seen his like;
Bigger of body he, than any four who won
A place in Arthur’s house, yea, e’en were Hector one!
And this his custom cursed—here at the Chapel Green
There passeth never man, tho’ proud in arms, I ween,
But he doth do to death by dint of deadly blow,
For all discourteous he, nor mercy doth he know.
Chaplain be he, or churl, who by that chapel rides,
Mass priest, or hooded monk, or any man beside,
Is he as fain to slay as he himself to live—
So soothly as ye sit on steed, this rede I give:
Go ye there, with his will, ye come not hence alive—
Trow me, I speak the truth—yea, had ye twenty lives
to spend—
Long time hath he dwelt here,
His conquests know no end,
Against his dints so drear
No shield may ye defend.

VI

“Wherefore, Sir Gawain good, let ye this man alone,
And for God’s sake, I pray, from this place get ye gone.
Ride by some other road, Christ speed ye on your way –
I’ll hie me home again, but this I’ll do alway,
I’ll take an oath by God, and all the saints that be,
Or by such hallows all as shall seem best to ye,
That I will hold my peace, and never tell the tale
That ye to face your foe one time for fear did fail.”

“Gramercy,” quoth Gawain (in sooth ill-pleased was he)
“All good may he receive who wisheth good to me,
That thou would’st silence keep, I well believe of thee,
But, tried be thou, and true, if I should turn me here,
And this thy counsel take, and fly for very fear,
I were a coward knight, excused I might not be,
But at the Chapel Green I’ll chance it verily,
With that same man I’ll speak, e’en as shall please me well
Be it for weal or woe, as fate the lot may tell –

The knave
May well be stern in fight,
Cunning with sword and stave,
Yet God hath mickle might
His servant true to save!”

VII

“By Mary,” quoth the squire, “now ye so much have said
That this, your harm, henceforth, to your own count be laid;
Since ye will lose your life I’ll hinder not, nor let,
Take ye your spear in hand, on head the helmet set,
And ride adown this road, that by yon rock doth wind,
Till ye the lowest depth of yonder valley find;
A little to the left, on a lawn, shall ye see,
Within that dreary dale, the chapel, verily,
And him, that grisly giant, who shall its keeper be!

Now may God keep ye well, Sir Gawain, noble knight,
For all the gold on earth, I would not, an I might,
In fellowship with ye but one foot further go—”
With that the squire, he turned his horse’s head, and so
He spurred him with his heel, and listed not to spare,
But sprang across the lawn, and left the hero there
alone—

“By God,” thus quoth Gawain,
I’ll neither greet nor groan,
To God’s will am I fain,
To Him my need is known!”

VIII

He spurreth Gringalet, and down the path doth ride,
Close ’neath a shelving bank, a grove was at his side;
He rides the rough road through, right down into the dale,
Then draweth rein awhile, full wild he deemed that vale;
No sign of dwelling-place he see’th anywhere,
On either side the banks rise steeply, bleak and bare,
And rough and rugged rocks, with many a stony peak,
That shuddering shadows cast—the place was ill to seek.
Gawain, he stayed his steed, and cast his glance around,
And changed full oft his cheer, ere he that chapel found.
Nor here ’t was seen, nor there, right strange the chance he thought;
But soon, upon a lawn, a lawe his eye hath caught,
A smooth hill by a bank, set close beside a burn,
Where by a ford, the flood, forking, aside doth turn,
E’en as they boiled, within, bubbling, the waters spring—
The knight, he turned the rein, his horse to halt doth bring,
At the lawe lights adown, and to a linden bough
The rein, and his good steed, he maketh fast enow.
Then hies him to the hill, and, walking round about,
He cons what it might be, thereof was he in doubt.
A hole was at the end, and one on either side,
And all with grass o’er-grown, in clumps its form that hide,

X

With that the goodly knight, he called with voice so bold,
“Who waiteth in this place a tryst with me to hold?
For here is Gawain come, here hath he found his way,
If any wight will win aught, let him come to-day,
Or now, or never, so his need be fitly sped—”
A voice spake from the bank, on high, above his head,
“Stay, and I swift will give that which I promised thee—”
Awhile the clamour rang, still rushing rapidly,
The whetstone whirled awhile, ere he his foe might see,
And then, beneath a crag, forth from a cave he sprung,
And, coming from that hole, a weapon round him swung,
A Danish axe, new dight, wherewith the blow to deal,
Bound to the handle fast was the bright blade of steel,
Four foot long, fitly filed, no less, that blade of might,
And all was wrapped and bound with lace that gleamed full bright;
E’en as before was he in gear of green, that knight—
Green was he face and foot, his hair, his beard’s full flow,
But this time on the ground that knight afoot doth go,
Stalking, he held the axe, steel downward, at his side,
Thus to the water wins, and takes it in his stride.
He wades not, with his axe he leaps that water’s flow,
And fierce, and bold, bestrides the bent, all white with snow
that day—
Sir Gawain met the knight,
No greeting did he pay,
The other quoth: “Aright
Hast thou kept tryst to-day!”

XI

“Gawain,” quoth the Green Knight, “now may God give thee grace,
Welcome art thou, I wis, to this, my dwelling-place;
Thy travel hast thou timed e’en as true man should do—
Thou know’st the forward fast we sware betwixt us two;

This day, a twelve-month past, thy share thereof didst take,
And I, at this New Year, should fitting answer make.
Here in this dale alone, I trow, we be to-day,
To deal as likes us best, with none to say us nay;
Now doff thy helm from head, thy payment forthwith take,
And with no more debate than I with thee did make
When thou whipped off my head, with but one sweeping blow –”
“Nay, by God,” quoth Gawain, “to whom my life I owe,
Nor greet will I, nor groan, for grief that may befall,
Deal, an thou wilt, the stroke, still will I stand, withal,
Nor bandy words with thee, nor e’er for mercy call –”

Straight there

He bent adown his head,
And shewed his neck all bare,
No sign he gave of dread,
But made as free from care.

XII

Then swift the knight in green made ready for the fray,
And gripped his grim tool fast, as fain Gawain to slay,
With all his body’s force the axe aloft he bare,
A mighty feint he made to deal a death-blow there,
Yea, had he driven adown in wise as he made show
That valiant knight had died beneath the deadly blow.
But as the gisarme fell Gawain, he swerved aside,
E’en as, with fell intent, it did toward him glide;
His shoulders shrank before the sharply gleaming blade.
The other, as he flinched, the axe from falling stayed –
He doth reprove that prince in proud and scornful mood:
“Thou art not that Gawain whom men aye deem so good,
Who never waxed afraid, by mountain, or by vale,
Now, ere thou feelest hurt, for fear thine heart doth fail –
Such cowardice in such knight I never thought to know –
I never flinched nor fled, when thou didst aim thy blow,
I made no parleying there, within King Arthur’s hall,

And I wish thee as well, here on my faith, Gawain,
As any man on earth, for true art thou, and tried –”
But yet he said him “nay” with him he would not ride.
They clasp, and kiss again – the other, each commends
Unto the Prince of Peace, and there they part as friends
on mould –

To the king’s hall, I ween,
Sir Gawain rideth bold,
He gat, that knight in green,
Where’er he would on wold.

XXI

The wild ways of the world Sir Gawain now must trace
A-horse, of this his life, he now hath gotten grace;
He harbours oft in house, and oft, I ween, without,
Oft venture bold, in vale, vanquished in battle stout,
Such as, at this same time, I care not to recall –
Whole was the hurt he won upon his neck withal,
And the bright belt of green he ware about him wound,
Even in baldric’s wise, fast at his side ’t was bound;
’Neath his left arm the lace was fastened in a knot,
This token of his fault he bare with him, I wot.
So cometh he to court, all hale, the knight so true,
Weal wakened in those halls whenas the dwellers knew
That good Gawain had come – Methinks they deemed it gain,
To greet that knight with kiss the king and queen were fain,
And many a valiant knight would kiss and clasp him there –
Eager, they tidings ask, How did his venture fare
And he doth truly tell of all his toil and care;
Of the Green Chapel’s chance, the fashion of the knight,
The lady’s proffered love, last, of the lace aright
He tells, and on his neck he shews them, as a brand,
The cut that, for his fault, he won from that knight’s hand
in blame
Grieving, he spake away,

And groaned for very shame,
The red blood rose, that day,
E'en to his face, like flame.

XXII

“Lo! lord,” so spake the knight, handling the lace so fair,
“See here the brand of blame that on my neck I bear,
Lo! here the harm and loss I to myself have wrought,
The cowardice covetous in which I there was caught,
This token of untruth, wherein I was held fast;
And I this needs must wear long as my life shall last.
For none may hide his harm, nor may that be undone,
Once caught within a snare the net is ne'er unspun!”
The king, he cheered the knight, the courtiers, with their lord,
Laughed loudly at the tale, and sware with one accord,
That lords and ladies all, of this, the Table Round,
Each of the Brotherhood, should bear, as baldric bound,
About his waist, a band, a badge of green so bright,
This would they fitly wear in honour of that knight.
With one accord they sware, those knights so good and true,
And he who bare that badge the greater honour knew.
The best book of Romance, in that 't is written all,
How in King Arthur's days this venture did befall,
The Brutus books thereof, I trow, shall witness bear—
And since Brutus the bold at first did hither fare,
Whose fathers the assault and siege of Troy did share,
I wis,
Many have been of yore
The ventures such as this,
Christ, who a thorn-crown bore,
Bring us unto His bliss! Amen.