

Sir Gawain and The Green Knight

translated by

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FYTTE THE FIRST

1. After the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy, the city been destroyed and burned to brands and ashes, the warrior who wrought there the trains of treason was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.¹ This was Aeneas the noble; he and his high kindred afterwards conquered provinces, and became patrons of well nigh all the wealth in the West Isles. As soon as rich Romulus turns him to Rome, with great pride he at once builds that city, and names it with his own name, which it now has; Ticius turns to Tuscany and founds dwellings; Longobard raises homes in Lombardy; and, far over the French flood, Felix Brutus establishes Britain joyfully on many broad banks, where war and waste and wonders by turns have since dwelt, and many a swift interchange of bliss and woe.

2. And when this Britain was founded by this great hero, bold men loving strife bred therein, and many a time they wrought destruction. More strange things have happened in this land since these days than in any other that I know, but of all the British kings that built here, Arthur was ever the most courteous, as I have heard tell. Therefore, I mean to tell of an adventure in the world, which some count strange and extraordinary even among the wonders of Arthur. If ye will listen to this lay but a little while, I will tell it forthright as I heard it told in town, as it is set down in story that cannot be changed, long written in the land in true words.

3. This King lay royally at Camelot at Christmas tide with many fine lords, the best of men, all the rich brethren of the Round Table, with right rich revel and careless mirth. There full many heroes tourneyed betimes, josted full gaily; then returned these gentle knights to the court to make carols.² For there the feast was held full fifteen days alike with

all the meat and the mirth that men could devise. Such a merry tumult, glorious to hear; joyful din by day, dancing at night. All was high joy in halls and chambers with lords and ladies as pleased them best. With all the weal in the world they dwelt there together, the most famous knights save only Christ, the loveliest ladies that ever had life, and he, the comeliest of kings, who holds the court. For all this fair company were in their prime in the hall, the happiest troop under heaven with the proudest of kings. Truly it would be hard to name anywhere so brave a band.

4. When New Year was fresh and but newly come, the court was served double on the dais. As soon as the king with his knights was come into the hall, the chanting in the chapel came to an end; loud was the cry there of clerks and others. Noel was celebrated anew, shouted full often; and afterwards the great ones ran about to take handsel;³ called aloud for New Year's gifts; ladies laughed full loud, though they had lost; and he that won was not wroth, that may ye well trow. All this mirth they made till the meat time. When they had washed, worthily they went to their seats, the best man ever above, as it best behoved. Queen Guinevere full beauteous was set in the midst, placed on the rich dais adorned all about. Fine silk at the sides, a canopy over her of precious cloth of Toulouse and tapestries of Tars,⁴ that were embroidered and set with the best gems that money could buy. Truly no man could say that he ever beheld a comelier lady than she, with her dancing gray eyes.

5. But Arthur would not eat till all were served. He was so merry in his mirth, and somewhat childlike in his manner; his life pleased him well; he loved little either to lie long or to sit long, so busied him his young blood and his wild brain. And another custom moved him also, that he through chivalry had taken up; he would never eat upon such a dear day before he was told an uncouth tale of some adventurous thing, of some great marvel that he could believe, of ancient heroes, of arms, or of other adventures; or unless some person demanded of him a sure knight to join with him in jousting, to incur peril, to risk life against life, trusting each in the other, leaving the victory to fortune. This was the king's custom whenever he held court at each goodly feast among his

free company in the hall. And so with undaunted face he strides stoutly to his seat on that New Year, making great mirth with everybody.

6. Thus the great king stands waiting before the high table, talking of trifles full courteously. The good Gawain was placed there beside Guinevere, and Agravain of the Hard Hand sat on the other side, both of them the king's sister's sons and full sure knights. Bishop Baldwin at the top begins the table, and Ywain, Urien's son, ate by himself. These were placed on the dais and honorably served, and after them many a good man at the side tables. Then the first course came in with blare of trumpets, which were hung with many a bright banner. A new noise of kettle-drums with the noble pipes, wild and stirring melodies wakened the echoes; that many a heart heaved full high at their tones. Dainties of precious meats followed, foison of fresh viands, and on so many dishes that it was difficult to find place before the people to set on the cloth the silver that held the several courses. Each man as he himself preferred partook without hesitation. Every two⁵ had twelve dishes between them, good beer and bright wine both.

7. Now will I tell you no more of their service, for everybody must well understand that there was no lack of opportunity for the people to take their food.⁶ Another noise full new suddenly drew nigh, for scarcely had the music ceased a moment, and the first course been properly served in the court, than there burst in at the hall door an awesome being, in height one of the tallest men in the world; from the neck to the waist so square and so thick was he, and his loins and his limbs so long and so great, that half giant I believed him to have been, or, at any rate, the largest of men, and withal the handsomest in spite of his bulk, that ever rode; for though his back and breast were so vast, yet his belly and waist were properly slim; and all his form according, full fairly shaped. At the hue of his noble face men wondered; he carried himself in hostile fashion and was entirely green.

8. All green was this man and his clothing; a straight coat sat tight to his sides; a fair mantle above, adorned within; the lining showed, with costly trimming of shining white fur; and such his hood also, that was caught back from his locks and lay on his shoulders, the hem well stretched;⁷ hose of the same green, that clung to his calf; and clean spurs under, of bright gold upon silk bands richly barred, and shoes⁸ on his

shanks as the hero rides. And all his vesture verily was clean verdure, both the bars of his belt, and the other beauteous stones that were set in fine array about himself and his saddle, worked on silk. It would be too difficult to tell the half of the trifles that were embroidered there, with birds and flies, with gay gauds of green,—the good over in the middle; the pendants of the poitrel, the proud crupper, the bits,—and all the metal was enamelled; the stirrups that he stood on were coloured the same, and his saddle bow likewise, and his fine reins⁹ that glimmered and glinted all of green stones. The horse that he rode on was of the same colour too, a green horse, great and thick, a steed full stiff to guide, in gay embroidered bridle, and one right dear to his master.

9. This hero was splendidly dressed in green; and the hair of his head matched that of his horse;¹⁰ fair flowing locks enfolded his shoulders; a beard as big as a bush hung over his breast; and it, together with his splendid hair that reached from his head, was trimmed evenly all round above his elbows, so that half his arms were caught thereunder in the manner of a king's hood,¹¹ that covers his neck. The mane of that great horse was much like it, very curly and combed, with knots full many folded in with gold wire about the fair green,—always one knot of the hair, another of gold. The tail and the forelock were twined in the same way, and both bound with a band of bright green, set with full precious stones the whole length of the dock, and then tied up with a thong in a tight knot; where rang many bells full bright of burnished gold. Such a steed in the world, such a hero as rides him, was never beheld in that hall before that time. His glances were like bright lightning, so said all that saw him. It seemed as if no man could endure under his blows.

10. He had neither helm nor hauberk, nor gorget, armour nor breastplate, nor shaft nor shield to guard or to smite; but in his one hand he had a holly twig, that is greenest when groves are bare, and an axe in his other, a huge and prodigious one, a weapon merciless almost beyond description; the head had the vast length of an ellyard, the blade all of green steel and of beaten gold; the bit¹² brightly burnished, with a broad edge, as well shaped for cutting as sharp razors. The stern warrior gripped it by¹³ the steel of its stout staff, which was wound with iron to the end of the wood and all engraven with green in beauteous work. A lace was lapped about it, that was fastened at the head, and tied up often

along the helve, with many precious tassels attached on rich embroidered buttons of the bright green. This hero turns him in and enters the hall, riding straight to the high dais, fearless of mischief. He greeted never a one, but looked loftily about, and the first word that he uttered was: "Where is the governor of this company? Gladly I would see that hero and speak with him."

He cast his eye on the knights and rode fiercely up and down, stopped and gan ponder who was there the most renowned.

11. All gazed fixedly on the man, for everybody marvelled what it might mean, that a knight and a horse could have such a colour: as green grown as the grass, and greener, it seemed; shining brighter than green enamel on gold. All were amazed who stood there, and stalked nearer to him, with all the wonder in the world what he would do; for many marvels had they seen, but such never before. Therefore for phantom and faery the folk there deemed it; and for that reason many a noble warrior was slow to answer, and all were astonished at his voice and sat stone still in a deep silence through the rich hall. Their voices¹⁴ sank as though they had suddenly fallen asleep. I deem, however, that it was not all for fear, but somewhat for courtesy. But now let him to whom all defer undertake the wight.

12. Then Arthur before the high dais beheld that adventure, and saluted the stranger properly, for never was he afraid, and said, "Sir, welcome indeed to this place. I am called Arthur, the head of this hostel. Light courteously down and tarry, I pray thee; and whatso thy will is we shall wit after."

"Nay, so help me he that sits on high," quoth the hero. "To dwell any time in this house was not my errand; but because the fame of this people is lifted up so high, and thy town and thy men are held the best, the stoutest in steel gear on steeds to ride, the wightest and the worthiest of the world's kind, and proved opponents in other proper sports; and here courtesy is known, as I have heard tell,—it is this that has enticed me hither certainly at this time. You may be sure by this branch that I bear here that I pass in peace and seek no quarrel; for if I had set out with a company in fighting fashion, I have a hauberk at home and a helm both, a shield and a sharp spear shining bright, and other weapons to wield, I ween well also; but since I wished no war, my weeds are softer. Now if

thou be as bold as all men tell, thou wilt grant me graciously the game that I ask."

Arthur knew how to answer, and said: "Sir courteous knight, if it is battle that thou cravest, thou shalt not fail of a fight here."

13. "Nay, I demand no fight; in faith I tell thee there are but beardless children about on this bench. If I were hasped in arms on a high steed there is no man here to match me, their might is so weak. Therefore I crave in this court a Christmas game, for it is Yule and New Year, and here are many gallants. If there be a man in this house who holds himself so hardy, is so bold in his blood, so rash in his head, that he dares stiffly strike one stroke for another, I shall give him as my gift this rich gisarm, this axe, that is heavy enough, to handle as he likes; and I shall abide the first blow as bare as I sit. If any warrior be wight enough to try what I propose, let him leap lightly to me and take this weapon—I quit-claim it forever, let him keep it as his own—and I shall stand him a stroke firmly on this floor. At another time, by our Lady, thou wilt grant me the boon of dealing him another blow; I will give him respite of a twelvemonth and a day. Now hie, and let us see quickly if any herein dare say aught."

14. If he had astonished them at first, stiller were then all the retainers in hall, the high and the low. The warrior on his steed settled himself in his saddle, and fiercely his red eyes he reeled about; bent his thick brows, shining green; and waved his beard, awaiting whoso would rise. When none would answer him he coughed aloud, stretched himself haughtily and began to speak; "What! Is this Arthur's house," said the hero then, "that is famous through so many realms? Where is now your pride and your conquests, your fierceness, and your wrath and your great words? Now is the revel and the renown of the Round Table overcome by the word of a single man; for all tremble for dread without a blow shown."

With this he laughed so loud that the lord grieved; the blood shot for shame into his fair face. He waxed as wroth as the wind; and so did all that were there. The king so keen of mood then stood near that proud man.

15. "Sir," said he, "by heaven thy asking is foolish; and as thou hast demanded folly, it behooves thee to find it. I know no man that is aghast

of thy great words. Give me now this gisarm, for God's sake, and I will grant thy boon that thou has bidden."

Quickly he leaped to him and caught at his hand; and the other alights fiercely on foot. Now Arthur has his axe, and grips the helve; he whirls it sternly about as if he meant to strife with it. The bold stranger stood upright before him, higher than any in the house by a head and more; with stern cheer he stood there, stroked his beard, and with cool countenance drew down his coat, no more afraid or dismayed for Arthur's great strokes than if some one had brought him a drink of wine upon the bench.

Gawain, that sat by the queen, turned to the king: "I beseech now with all courtesy that this affair might be mine."

16. "Would ye, worthy lord," quoth Gawain to the king, "bid me step from this bench and stand by you there,—that I without rudeness might leave this table and that my liege lady liked it not ill—I would come to your help before your rich court; for methinks it is obviously unseemly that such an asking is made so much of in your hall, even though ye yourself be willing to take it upon you, while so many bold ones sit about you on the bench; than whom, I ween, none under heaven are higher of spirit, nor more mighty on the field where strike is reared. I am the weakest, I know, and feeblest of wit; and to tell the truth there would be the least loss in my life. I am only to praise forasmuch as ye are my uncle; no other nobility than your blood know I in my body. And since this adventure is so foolish, it belongs not to you; I have asked it of you first; give it to me. Let this great court decide¹⁵ if I have not spoken well."

The heroes took counsel together and they all gave the same advice,—to free the crowned king and give the game to Gawain.

17. Then the king commanded Gawain to rise from the table; and he right quickly stood up and made himself ready, kneeled down before the king and took the weapon; and Arthur lovingly left it to him, lifted up his hand and gave him God's blessing, and gladly bade him be hardy both of heart and of hand. "Take care, cousin," quoth the king, "that thou give him a cut; and if thou handle him properly, I readily believe that thou shalt endure the blow which he shall give after."

Gawain goes to the man with gisarm in hand; and he boldly awaits him, shrinking never a whit. Then speaks to Sir Gawain the knight in the green; "Rehearse we our agreement before we go farther. First, I conjure thee, hero, how thou art called, that thou tell me it truly, so that I may believe it."

"In good faith," quoth the knight, "Gawain am I called, who give you this buffet, whatever befalls after; and at this time twelvemonth I am to take from thee another with whatever weapon thou wilt, and from no wight else alive."

The other answers again, "Sir Gawain, so thrive I as I am heartily glad that thou shalt give this blow."

18. "By Gog," quoth the green knight, "Sir Gawain, it delights me that I am to get at thy fist what I have requested here; and thou hast readily and truly rehearsed the whole of the covenant that I asked of the king, save that thou shalt assure me, sir, by thy troth, that thou wilt seek me thyself wheresoever thou thinkest I may be found upon the earth, and fetch for thyself such wages as thou dealest me today before this rich company."

"Where should I seek thee?" quoth Gawain. "Where is thy place? I know never where thou livest, by him that wrought me; nor do I know thee, knight, thy court, nor thy name. But tell me truly the way and how thou art called, and I will use all my wit to win my way thither,—and that I swear thee, for a sooth, and by my sure troth."

"New Year will suffice for that; no more is needed now," quoth the man in green to Gawain the courteous. "To tell the truth, after I have received thy tap, and thou hast smitten me well, I shall promptly inform thee of my house and my home and mine own name. Then thou mayest inquire about my journey and hold promise; and if I speak no speech, then thou speedest the better, for thou mayest linger at ease in thy land and seek no further. Take now thy grim tool to thee and let us see how thou knockest."

"Gladly, sir, for sooth," quoth Gawain as he strokes his axe.

19. The green knight on the ground prepared himself properly. With the head a little bowed he disclosed the flesh. His long, lovely locks he laid over his crown, and let the naked nape of his neck show for the blow. Gawain gripped his axe and gathered it on high; the left foot he set

before on the ground, and let the axe light smartly down on the naked flesh,¹⁶ so that the sharp edge severed the giant's bones, and shrank through the clear flesh¹⁷ and sheared it in twain, till the edge of the brown steel bit into the ground. The fair head fell from the neck to the earth, and many pushed it with their feet where it rolled forth. The blood burst from the body and glistened on the green. Yet never faltered nor fell the hero for all that; but stoutly he started up with firm steps, and fiercely he rushed forth where the heroes stood, caught his lovely head, and lifted it up straightaway. Then he turned to his steed, seized the bridle, stepped into the steel bow and strode aloft, holding the head in his hand by the hair; and as soberly the man sat in his saddle as if no mishap had ailed him, though he was headless on the spot. He turned his trunk about—that ugly body that bled. Many a one of them thought that he had lost his reason.

20. For he held the head straight up in his hand; turned the face toward the highest on the dais; and it lifted up the eyelids and looked straight out, and spoke thus much with his mouth, as ye may now hear: "Look Gawain, that thou be ready to go as thou has promised, and seek loyally, hero, till thou find me; as thou has promised in this hall in the hearing of these knights. To the green chapel go thou, I charge thee, to receive such a blow as thou has dealt. Thou deservest to be promptly paid on New Year's morn.¹⁸ As the knight of the green chapel many men know me; therefore, if thou strivest to find me, thou shalt never fail. And so come, or it behooves thee to be called recreant."

With a wild rush he turned the reins, and flew out at the hall door—his head in his hand—so that the fire of the flint flew from the foal's hoofs. To what country he vanished knew none there; no more than they wist whence he was come. The king and Gawain roared with laughter at that green man; but this adventure was reckoned a marvel among men.

21. Though the courteous king wondered in his heart, he let no semblance be seen, but said aloud to the comely queen with courteous speech, "Dear dame, today be never dismayed; well becoming are such tricks at Christmas, in lack of entertainment, to laugh and sing about among these pleasant carols of knights and ladies. Nevertheless I may well go to my meat, for I can not deny that I have seen a marvel." He

glanced at Sir Gawain and said cheerfully, "Now, sir, hang up thine axe; it has hewn enough." And it was put above the dais to hang on the tapestry where all men might marvel at it, and by it avouch the wonderful happening. Then they turned to the board, these heroes together—the king and the good knight—and the keen men served them double of all dainties, as was most fitting; with all manner of meat, and minstrelsy both. They spent that day in joy until it came to an end. Now take care, Sir Gawain, that thou blench not for the pain to prosecute this adventure that thou has taken on hand.

FYTTE THE SECOND

1. This hanel of adventures had Arthur at the beginning, in the young year, since he yearned to hear boasting. Although there was little news when they went to their seats, now they are provided with stern work,¹⁹ their hands quite full. Gawain was glad to begin those games in the hall; but it would not be surprising if the end were heavy; for though men be merry in mind when they have much drink, yet a year runs full swiftly, and yields never the same; the beginning full seldom matches the end. And so this Yule went by, and the year after it, each season in turn following the other. After Christmas came the crabbed Lent, that tries the flesh with fish and more simple food. But then the weather of the world quarrels with winter, and though the cold still clings, the clouds lift; copiously descends the rain in warm showers, and falls upon the fair earth. Flowers show there; green are the garments both of fields and of groves; birds hurry to build, and lustily they sing for the solace of the soft summer, that follows thereafter. Blossoms swell into bloom in rows rich and rank; and lovely notes are heard in the beauteous wood.

2. After the season of summer with the soft winds, when Zephyrus blows on seeds and herbs, happy is the plant that waxes then, when the dank dew drops from the leaves, to await the blissful glance of the bright sun. But then harvest hastens and hardens it soon: warns it to wax full ripe against the winter. He drives with drought the dust to rise,—from the face of the earth to fly full high. The wild wind of the welkin wrestles with the sun. The leaves fall from the bough and light on the ground. The grass becomes all gray that erst was green. Then all ripes and rots that which formerly flourished; and thus runs the year in yesterdays many; and winter returns again without asking any man,²⁰ till

the Michelmas moon has come in wintry wise. Then thinks Gawain full soon of his anxious voyage.

3. Yet till Allhallows day with Arthur he lingers; and Arthur made a feast on that festival for the hero's sake, with great and gay revel of the Round Table. Knights full courteous and comely ladies all for love of that man were in sorrow; but nevertheless they spoke only of mirth; and many a joyless one there made jests for his gentle sake. After meat he mournfully addresses his uncle, and speaks of his passage, and openly he says—"Now, liege lord of my life, leave I ask of you. Ye know the cost of this case; I do not care to tell you even a trifle of its dangers;²¹ but I am ready to start for the fray no later than tomorrow morn, to seek the man in the green, as God will guide me."

Then the best of the castle gathered together, Ywain and Erec, and others full many, Sir Dodinel de Sauvage, the Duke of Clarence, Lancelot and Lyonel and Lucan the Good, Sir Bors and Sir Bedever, big men both, and many other proud ones, with Mador de la Port. All this company of the court came nearer to the king, to counsel the knight, with care at their hearts. There was much deep grief felt in the hall that so worthy a one as Gawain should go on that errand, to endure a sorry dint and deal none himself with his brand. But the knight ever made good cheer, and said, "Why should I swerve from stern and strange destiny? What can a man do but try?"

4. He lingered there all that day, and on the morn made ready. Early he asked for his arms, and they were all brought. First a carpet of Toulouse was stretched over the floor, and much was the gilt gear that gleamed upon it. The brave man stepped thereon and handled the steel, clad in a doublet of costly Tars, and afterwards a well wrought hood, closed on top and bound within with a glistening white fur. Then they put the sabatons²² upon the hero's feet, lapped his legs in steel with fair greaves, to which were attached well polished poleynes²³ fastened about his knees with knots of gold. Fine cuisses then, that well enclosed his thick, brawny thighs, they attached with thongs. Next the decorated burnie²⁴ of bright steel rings upon precious stuff encased the hero, and well burnished braces upon his two arms, with elbow-pieces goodly and gay and gloves of plate, and all the goodly gear that might avail him at

that time, with rich coat armour, gold spurs well fastened, and a sure brand girt about his side by a silken sash.

5. When he was hasped in arms his harness was rich; the least latchet or loop gleamed with gold. So, harnessed as he was, he heard his mass, offered and adored at the high altar. Then he came to the king and his court; courteously took his leave of lords and ladies; and they kissed him, and convoyed him, entrusting him to Christ. By that time was Gringolet ready, and girt with a saddle that gleamed full gaily with many gold fringes; everywhere nailed anew, prepared for that emergency. The bridle, barred about, was bound with bright gold; the decoration of the breastplate and of the fine housings, the crupper and caparison, accorded with the saddle-bow, and all was adorned with rich red gold nails, that glittered and gleamed like the gleam of the sun. Then he took the helm and quickly kissed it. It was stoutly stapled and stuffed within; it was high on his head, hasped behind, with a light urison²⁵ over the ventail,²⁶ embroidered and bound with the best gems on a broad silken border; and birds on the seams like painted popinjays²⁷ preening themselves here and there; turtle-doves and true-loves²⁸ thickly interlaced. As many birds there were as had been in town for seven winters. The circlet that surrounded his crown was even more precious—a device of gleaming diamonds.

6. Then they showed him the shield, that was of sheer gules, with the pentangle painted in pure gold. He took it by the baldric and cast it about his neck; and it became the hero passing fair. And why the pentangle pertains to that noble prince I mean to tell you, though it should delay me. It is a sign that Solomon set formerly as a token of truth, by its own right, for it is a figure that holds five points, and each line overlaps and locks in another; and throughout it is endless; and the English call it everywhere, as I hear, the endless knot. Therefore it suits this knight and his clear arms, forever faithful in five things, and in each of them five ways. Gawain was known for good and as refined gold, devoid of every villainy, adorned with virtues. Therefore, the new²⁹ pentangle he bore on shield and coat, as the man most true of speech, and the knight gentlest of behaviour.

7. First, he was found faultless in his five wits; and again the hero failed never in his five fingers; and all his affianced in this world was in

the five wounds that Christ received on the cross, as the creed tells; and wheresoever this man was hard bestead in the mêlée his pious thought was in this above all other things—to take all his strength from the five joys that the courteous Queen of Heaven had of her child. For this cause the knight had her image comely painted in the greater half of his shield, that when he looked down thereupon, his courage never abated. The fifth five that I find that the hero used, were generosity and fellowship above all things, his purity and his courtesy that never swerved, and pity that passes all qualities. These very five were more surely set upon that warrior than upon any other. Now all these³⁰ were established fivefold in this knight, and each one was fastened in another that had no end, and they were fastened on five points that never failed, nor met anywhere, nor sundered either, but finished always without end at each corner, wherever the game began or concluded. Therefore on his fair shield this knot was painted royally with red gold upon red gules. That is the true pentangle as the people properly call it. Now was the gay Gawain armed. He caught up his lance right there, and with a good-day he went for evermore.

8. He spurred his steed with the spurs and sprang on his way so swiftly that the stone struck out fire after him. All who saw the gentle man sighed in heart, and the heroes said all together to each other in their love for that comely knight, “By Christ, it is a shame that thou, hero, must be lost, who art so noble of life. In faith it is not easy to find his match upon the earth. To have acted more warily would have been better counsel; and to have made yon dear one a duke; it would well become him to be a brilliant leader of people here. This would have been better than to have him utterly destroyed, given over³¹ to an elvish man for mere boasting pride. Who ever knew any king to take such counsel as to suffer knights to be so tricked for a Christmas game.” Much warm water welled from eyes when that seemly sire departed from the dwellings that day. He made no stop, but wightly went his way; many a tiresome path he rode, as I heard the book tell.

9. Now rides this hero, Sir Gawain, through the realm of Logres in God’s behalf, though to him it seemed no play. Oft alone companionless he lodged at night in places where he found not before him the fare that he liked. No company had he but his foal by friths and downs, nor

nobody but God to talk with by the way; till that he approached nigh unto North Wales. He kept all the isles of Anglesey on the left side, and fared over the fords by the forelands, over at the Holy Head, till he again took land in the wilderness of Wirrel. There dwelt but few that loved either God or man with good heart. And ever as he fared he asked of men that he met if they had heard any talk of a green knight of the green chapel in any spot thereabout, and all nicked him with nay, that never in their life saw they any man of such green hue. The knight took strange roads by many a rough bank. His cheer changed full oft ere he saw that chapel.

10. Many a cliff he overclimbed in strange countries; far sundered from his friends, lonely he rode. At each ford or water where the hero passed it were strange if he found not a foe before him, and that so foul and so fell that it behooved him to fight. So many marvels in the mountains there the man found that it were too tedious to tell of the tenth part. Sometimes he warred with serpents, and with wolves also, sometimes with savages that dwelt in the cliffs; both with bulls and bears, and boars sometimes; and giants that assailed him from the high fell. Had he not been doughty and stern, and served God, doubtless he had been dead and slain full oft. But the warfare tried him not so much but that the winter was worse, when the cold clear water shed from the clouds, and froze ere it might fall to the barren earth. Near slain with the sleet he slept in his iron more nights than enough on naked rocks, where clattering from the crest the cold burn ran, and hung high over his head in hard icicles. Thus in peril and pain and plights full hard through the country wanders this knight all alone till Christmas Eve. At that tide to Mary he made his moan that she might direct his riding and lead him to some dwelling.

11. Merrily on the morn he rides by a mount into a forest full deep, that was strangely wild. High hills were on each side, and woods beneath of hoar oaks full huge, a hundred together. The hazel and the hawthorn were twined all together, covered everywhere with rough ragged moss, with many unblithe birds upon bare twigs that piteously piped there for pain of the cold. The knight upon Gringolet rides all alone under the boughs, through many a moss and mire, mourning for his trials, lest he should never survive to see the service of that Sire who

on that very night was born of a lady to quell our pain. And therefore sighing he said: "I beseech thee, Lord, and Mary, that is mildest mother so dear, for some harbour where I might properly hear mass and thy matins tomorrow. Meekly I ask it, and thereto earnestly I pray my pater and ave and creed." He rode in his prayer and lamented for his misdeeds. Oft-times he blessed himself, and said, "Christ's cross speed me."

12. The hero had not crossed himself more than thrice ere he was aware in the wood of a dwelling on a hill, above a clearing, on a mount, hidden under the boughs of many a huge tree about the ditches; a castle the comeliest that ever knight owned, set on a prairie, a park all about, with its beautiful palace, pinnacled full thick, and surrounded with many a tree for more than two miles. The hero gazed at the castle on that one side as it shimmered and shone through the fair oaks. Then he humbly doffed his helm and devoutly he thanked Jesus and St. Julian—who are both gentle—who courteously had directed him and harkened to his cry. "Now bon hostel," quoth the man, "I beseech you yet!" Then he spurs Gringolet with his gilt heels, and he full fortunately takes the way to the chief road, that soon brought the hero to the bridge-end in haste. The bridge was securely lifted, the gates locked fast; the walls were well arrayed; no wind blast did it fear.

13. The hero that sat on his horse, abode on the bank of the deep double ditch that stretched to the place. The wall sank in the water wondrous deep, and again a full huge height it towered aloft, of hard hewn stone up to the top courses, corbelled under the battlement in the best manner; and above fine watch-towers ranged along, with many good loop-holes that showed full clean. A better barbican that hero never looked upon. And farther within he beheld the high hall, with towers set full thickly about, and fair and wondrous high filioles with carved tops cunningly devised. Chalk-white chimneys enough he saw that gleamed full white on the battlements. So many painted pinnacles were set everywhere, built so thick among the crenellations of the castle, that it verily appeared cut out of paper. Fair enough it seemed to the noble knight on his horse if he could only attain the shelter within, to harbour in that hostel, while the holiday lasted. He called, and soon there

appeared on the wall a right pleasant porter who took his message and greeted the knight errant.

14. "Good sir," quoth Gawain, "would you go my errand to the high lord of this house to crave harbour?"

"Yea, by Peter," quoth the porter; "and truly I trow that ye are welcome, sir, to dwell while you like."

Then the man went again quickly, and a crowd of folk with him, to receive the knight. They let down the great draw and eagerly poured out, and kneeled down on their knees upon the cold earth to welcome the hero as it seemed to them proper. They opened up wide the broad gate for him and he raised them courteously, and rode over the bridge. Several attendants held his saddle while he alighted, and afterwards good men enough stabled his steed. Then knights and squires came down to bring this hero joyfully into the hall. When he lifted up his helm people enough hurried to take it at his hand, in order to serve the courteous one; his sword and his shield they took too. Then he greeted full courteously the knights each one; and many a proud man pressed there to honour that prince. All hasped in his high weeds, they led him to the hall, where a fair fire burned fiercely upon the hearth. Then the lord of the people came from his chamber to meet courteously the man on the floor. He said, "Ye are welcome to wield as you like what is here; all is your own to have at your will and commandment." "Gramercy," quoth Gawain. "Christ reward you for it." Like glad heroes either folded the other in his arms.

15. Gawain looked on the man who greeted him so goodly, and thought it a bold hero that owned the castle, a huge warrior for the nonce, and of great age. Broad and bright was his beard, and all beaver-hued. Firm-gaited was he on his stalwart limbs; with a face as fierce as fire, and a free speech; and to the hero he seemed well suited indeed to govern a nation of good people.

The lord turned to a chamber and promptly commanded to give Gawain a retinue to serve him in lowly wise; and there were ready at his bidding men enough, who brought him to a bright bower where the bedding was curtains of pure silk with clear gold hems, and covertures right curious with comely borders, adorned above with bright fur. Curtains running on ropes, red gold rings, tapestries of Toulouse and

Tars hung on the wall, and under foot on the floor of the same pattern. There with mirthful speeches the hero was despoiled of his burnie and of his bright weeds. Quickly men brought him rich robes that he might pick and choose the best for his change. As soon as he took one and was wrapped therein, that sat upon him seemly with sailing skirts, the hero by his visage verily seemed to well nigh every man in looks glowing and lovely in all his limbs; it seemed to them that Christ never made a comelier knight. Wherever in the world he were, it seemed as if he might be a prince without peer in the field where fell men fight.

16. A chair before the chimney,³² where charcoal burned, was prepared for Sir Gawain richly with cloths and cushions, upon counterpanes that were both fine. And then a beauteous mantle was cast on the man, of a brown fabric richly embroidered, and fairly furred within with the best skins, all of ermine; the hood of the same. And he sat on that settle in seemly rich attire, and warmed him thoroughly; and then his cheer mended. Soon a table was raised up on trestles full fair, and set with a clean cloth that showed clear white, napkins, salt-cellar, and silver spoons. The hero washed when he would and went to his meat. Men served him seemly enough,—double fold as was proper—with pottages various and suitable, seasoned in the best manner; and many kinds of fish, some baked in bread, some broiled on the coals, some boiled, some in sauces savoured with spices; and always discourse so pleasant that it pleased the warrior. Full freely and often the hero called it a feast right courteously, when all the retainers together praised him as courteous.³³ “Do this penance now, and soon things will be better!” Right mirthful was he for the wine that went to his head.

17. Then they questioned and inquired sparingly in skilful queries put to the prince himself, till he courteously acknowledged that he was of the court which noble Arthur holds alone, who is the rich, royal king of the Round Table; and that it was Gawain himself that sits in the house, by chance come for that Christmas. When the lord had learned that he had that hero, he laughed aloud, so dear it seemed to him; and all the men in the castle made much joy at appearing promptly in the presence of him who contains in his own person all worth and prowess and gracious traits, and is ever praised; above all the men in the world his renown is the greatest. Each warrior said full softly to his companion—“Now shall

we see courteous turns of behaviour, and the blameless forms of noble talking; what profit there is in speech may we learn without asking since we have taken that fine father of nurture. God has indeed given us his grace, who grants us to have such a guest as Gawain, on account of whose birth men sit and sing for joy. This hero will now teach us what distinguished manners are; I think that those who hear him will learn how to make love.”

18. When the dinner was done and the dear ones risen, the time was nigh arrived at the night. Chaplains took their way to the chapels, and rang full loudly, as they should, to the melodious evensong of the high time. The Lord turns thither, and the lady also. Into a comely closet daintily she enters. Gawain joyfully proceeds, and goes thither straightway. The lord takes him by the mantle and leads him to his seat, recognizes him openly and calls him by his name, and says he is the welcomest wight in the world. And Gawain thanked him thoroughly and either embraced the other, and they sat soberly together during the service. Then the lady desired to look on the knight, and came from her closet with many fair maidens. But she was fairer than all the others in flesh and face, in skin and form, in complexion and demeanour—more beautiful than Guinevere, it seemed to the hero. He walked through the chancel to greet that gracious one. Another lady led her by the left hand, that was older than she; an ancient lady it seemed, and one highly honoured by the knights about her; but unlike to look on were the ladies, for if the younger was fair, yellow was the other. Rich red on the one bloomed everywhere; rough wrinkled cheeks rolled on the other. The kerchiefs of the one broidered with many clear pearls, openly displayed her breast and her bright throat, which shone clearer than snow that falls on the hills. The other covered her neck with a gorget, that wrapped her black chin in milk-white pleats. Her forehead was completely enveloped in silken folds, adorned and tricked³⁴ with small ornaments; and naught was bare of that lady but the black brows, the two eyes, the nose, and the naked lips; and those were ugly to behold and oddly bleared. A gracious lady in the land one might call her forsooth! Her body was short and thick, her hips round³⁵ and broad. More pleasant to look on was the being she led.

19. When Gawain looked on that beauteous one who gazed graciously, he took leave of the lord, and went toward them. The elder he saluted, bowing full low; the lovelier he took a little in his arms; he kissed her comely, and knightly he greeted her. They welcomed him, and he quickly asked to be their servant if it pleased them. They took him between them and led him conversing to the fireplace in the parlour; and straightway they called for spices, which men speeded to bring them unsparingly, and the pleasant wine therewith each time. The lord leaped merrily up full often, and saw to it that the mirth never faltered. Gaily he snatched off his hood and hung it on a spear, and exhorted them to win it as a prize—he to have it³⁶ who should make the most mirth that Christmas tide. “And I shall try, by my faith, with the help of my friends³⁷ to compete with the best, ere I lose my apparel.” Thus with laughing mien the lord makes merry in order to glad Sir Gawain with games in the hall that night. When it came time the king commanded lights; Sir Gawain took his leave and went to his bed.

20. On the morn when as every man knows God was born to die for us, joy waxes in every dwelling in the world for his sake. So it did there on that day, with many dainties at meats and meals, right quaint dishes, and brave men on the dais dressed in their best. The old ancient wife sits in the highest, the courteous lord placed by her, as I trow; Gawain and the gay lady together just in the middle, as the courses³⁸ properly come; and afterwards the rest throughout all the hall, as it seemed to them, each man in his degree was properly served. There was meat, there was mirth, there was much joy, that it were arduous for me to tell thereof, though to note it I took pains belike.³⁹ But yet I know that Gawain and the lovely lady took comfort in each other’s company, in the choice play of their of their sharp wits, and the pure courtesy of their modest talk; their disport surpassed indeed that of any royal game. Trumps and drums came playing loudly; each man minded his own business, and they two minded theirs.

21. Much delight was taken there that day, and the second; and the third followed as pleasantly. The joy of St. John’s day was gentle to hear of; and it was the last of the festival, the people considered. There were guests to go upon the grey morn; therefore wondrous late they sat up and drank the wine, danced full gayly with sweet carols. At the last,

when it was late, they took their leave, each good man to wend on his way. Gawain gave his host good day; but the good man takes him, and leads him to his own chamber, by the fireplace; and there he draws him aside and properly thanks him for the great worship that he had granted him in honouring his house on that high tide, in embellishing his castle with his good cheer. "Indeed, sir, while I live I shall be the better that Gawain has been my guest at God's own feast."

"Gramercy, sir," quoth Gawain, "in good faith the merit is yours; all the honour is your own,—the high King reward you; and I am your man to work your behest in high and in low as I am bound by right."

The lord eagerly strives to hold the knight longer; but Gawain answers him that he can in no wise.

22. Then the hero asked of him full fairly what extraordinary deed had driven him at that dear time from the king's court, to go all alone so boldly, ere the holidays were wholly over.

"For sooth, sir," quoth the hero, "ye say but the truth; a high errand and a hasty had me from these dwellings; for I am summoned to such a place as I know not in the world whitherward to wend to find it. I would not for all the land in Logres fail to reach it on New Year's morn—so our Lord help me. Therefore, sir, this request I require of you here, that ye tell me truly if ever ye heard tale of the green chapel, where in the world it stands, and of the knight green in colour that keeps it. There was established by statute an agreement between us that I should meet that man at that landmark if I could but survive. And of that same New Year there now lacks but little, and by God's Son I would gladlier look on that person—if God would let me—than wield any possession in the world. Therefore, indeed—by your good will—it behooves me to wend; I have now at my disposal barely three days; and I were as fain fall dead as fail of mine errand."

Then laughing quoth the lord, "Now it behooves thee to stay; for I shall direct you to that spot by the time's end—the green chapel upon the ground. Grieve you no more; for ye shall be in your bed, sir, at thine ease some days yet, and set out on the first of the year and come to that place at mid-morn, to do what you like. Stay till New Year's day; and rise and go then. One shall set you on your way; it is not two miles hence."

23. Then was Gawain full glad, and merrily he laughed; "Now I thank you especially for this above all other things; now that my quest is achieved, I shall dwell at your will, and do whatever else ye decide."

Then the sire seized him and set him beside him, and let the ladies be fetched to please them the better. Fair entertainment they had quietly among themselves; the lord in his jovial, friendly demeanor behaved as a man out of⁴⁰ his wits that knew not what he did. Then he spake to the knight, crying loud, "Ye have agree to do the deed that I bid. Will ye hold this hest here at once?"

"Yea, sir, forsooth," said the true hero, "while I stay in your castle I shall be obedient to your hest."

"Since ye have travelled from afar," quoth the warrior, "and then have sat late with me, ye are not well nourished, I know, either with sustenance or with sleep. Ye shall linger in your loft and lie at your ease tomorrow till mass time; and go to meat when ye will with my wife, who shall sit with you and comfort you with her company till I return home; and I shall rise early and go hunting." Gawain grants all this, bowing courteously.

24. "Yet further," quoth the hero, "let us make an agreement. Whatsoever I win in the wood, it shall be yours; and whatsoever fortune ye achieve, exchange with me therefor. Sweet sir, swap we so, swear truly, whichever one of us gets the worse or the better."

"By God," quoth Gawain the good, "I consent thereto; and whatever game you like, agreeable it seems to me."

"On this beverage just brought the bargain is made," said the lord of that people; and both laughed.

Then they drank and played and amused⁴¹ themselves, these lords and ladies, so long as it pleased them; and then with polite demeanour and many fair gestures, they stood up and lingered a while, and talked quietly, kissed full comely, and took their leave. With many a gay servant and gleaming torches each hero was brought to his bed full softly at the last. Yet before they went to bed they oft rehearsed the covenants. The old lord of that people knew well how to keep up a jest.

FYTTE THE THIRD

1. Full early before the day the folk arose; the guests that would go called their grooms, and these hastened to saddle the horses, arrange their gear, and truss their mails. The great ones arrayed themselves to ride, leaped up lightly and caught their bridles, each wight on his way where it well pleased him.

The dear lord of the land was not the last; arrayed for the riding, with retainers full many, he ate a sop⁴² hastily after he had heard mass, and took his way quickly with his bugle to the field. By the time that any daylight gleamed upon the earth, he with his heroes were mounted on their high horses. Then these hunters that understood it, coupled their hounds, unclosed the kennel doors and called them thereout, blew blithely on bugles three simple calls. At this the brachets⁴³ bayed and made a wild noise, and the hunters chastised and turned back those that wandered off,—a hundred hunters of the best there were, as I have heard tell. To their stations the trackers went; hunters cast off the couples; and then arose for the good blasts great uproar in that forest.

2. At the first noise of the quest the game quaked; the deer moved down into the dale, dazed for dread; hurried to the height; but quickly they were hindered by the beaters, who cried stoutly. They let the harts with the high head go their way, the wild bucks also with their broad palms,⁴⁴ for the generous lord had forbidden that there should any man meddle with the male deer in the close season. But the hinds were held back with “Hay!” and “Ho!” and the does driven with great din to the deep glades. There might one see as they ran the flight of arrows; at each turn under the boughs out flew a shaft, that savagely bit on the brown hide with full broad heads. How they leaped and bled and died by the banks! And ever the hounds with a rush eagerly followed them; hunters

with shrill horn hastened after with such a resounding cry as if cliffs had cracked. What game escaped the men who shot was all run down and torn at the stands. The deer⁴⁵ were pestered at the heights, and worried at the waters; the people were so alert at the low stations, and the greyhounds so great, that got them quickly and pulled them down as fast as a man could see. The lord, shouting for joy, shot and alighted full oft, and passed the day thus with joy till the dark night.

3. So this lord sports by the eaves of the linden wood, and Gawain the good man lies in his gay bed; reposes till the day light gleams on the walls, under the beautiful coverlets, curtained about. And as he fell into a doze, faintly he heard a little din at the door, then distinctly; and he heaved up his head out of the clothes, caught up a corner of his curtain a little, and watched warily in that direction to see what it might be. It was the lady, loveliest to behold, who drew the door to after her right slyly and quietly, and turned toward the bed. The hero grew bashful and laid himself down cunningly and pretended that he slept. And she stepped quietly, and stole to his bed, cast up the curtain, and crept within, and seated herself full softly on the bedside, and stayed there surprisingly long, to see when he should awake. The man lay pretending a full great while, bothered in his conscience what this affair might mean or amount to. Marvellous it seemed to him. But yet he said to himself, "More seemly would it be to find out by asking what she would." Then he waked, and stretched, and turned to her; unlocked his eyelids, and made believe he was amazed, and crossed himself with his hand, to be the safer for his prayer. With chin and cheek full sweet, of mingled white and red, right lovely she looked, with her small laughing lips.

4. "Good morrow, Sir Gawain!" said that fair lady. "Ye are a careless sleeper when one can enter thus. Now ye are certainly taken; unless we can make a truce I shall bind you in your bed, ye may be sure of that!" All laughing the lady shot those jests.

"Good morrow, fair one," quoth Gawain the blithe. "I shall be at your disposal, and that pleases me well, for I yield me outright and pray for grace,—and that is the best course, I judge, for I am in straits." And thus he returned the jests with many a blithe laugh. "But would ye, lovely lady, grant me leave, free your prisoner and bid him rise, I would

leave this bed and dress myself better. Then I could talk with you in more comfort."

"Nay, forsooth, fair sir," said that sweet one, "ye shall not rise from your bed; I shall manage you better. I shall tie you up securely,⁴⁶ and afterwards talk with my knight that I have caught; for I ween well, ye are indeed Sir Gawain, whom all the world worships whereso ye ride. Your honour, your courtesy, is heartily praised, by lords, by ladies, by all alive; and now ye are here, forsooth, and we all alone. My lord and his people are gone far away; the other men in their beds, and my maidens also; the door shut and closed with a strong hasp; and since I have in this house him whom all like, I shall make good use of my time while it lasts. Ye are welcome to my person, to do whatever you wish; I am perforce, and must remain, your servant."

5. "In good faith," quoth Gawain, "a great privilege it seems to me—though I be not now he that ye speak of. To reach such reverence as ye rehearse here, I am a man unworthy, I know well. By God, I should be glad—if it seemed good to you—to do what I might in speech or in service to enhance your worship;⁴⁷—it were a pure joy."

"In good faith, Sir Gawain," quoth the gay lady, "if I should speak ill of the fame and the prowess that pleases all others, or esteem it light, it would show but small discernment.⁴⁸ But there are ladies enough who were liefer have this courteous one in their power—as I have thee here,—to dally dearly with your dainty words, to comfort themselves and dispel their cares,—than much of the treasure and gold that they have. But I praise the Lord who rules the skies that through his grace I have wholly in my hand that which all desire."

Great cheer she that was so fair of face made him; the knight with discreet speeches answered her every proposal.

6. "Madame," quoth the merry man, "Mary reward you, for in good faith I have found your generosity noble. People judge a person's deeds largely from the accounts of others;⁴⁹ but the praise that they accord my deserts is but idle. It is simply your own nobility, who know nothing but good."

"By Mary," quoth the gracious one, "methinks it is otherwise; for were I worth all the store of women alive, and all the wealth of the world were in my hands, and I should bargain and choose to get me a

lord, then for the good traits that I have found in the knight here, of beauty and graciousness and gay seeming, and from what I have heard before and hold in this case to be true, there should no hero in the world be chosen before you."

"Indeed, worthy one," quoth the hero, "ye might⁵⁰ have chosen much better; but I am proud of the estimation that ye put upon me; and as your devoted servant I hold you my sovereign, and your knight I become; and Christ pay you for it."

Thus they spoke of various things till past the midmorn; and ever the lady behaved as if she loved him much. But the hero fared with caution and made courteous pretences. "Though I were the fairest of women," mused the lady, "little love would he show, because of the danger that he seeks without reproach—the blow that may slay him, but must needs be undergone." The lady then asked leave, and he granted her full soon.

7. Then she gave him good day, and of a sudden laughed; and as she stood there she astonished him with right sharp words; "Now may he that speeds each speech, pay you for this entertainment; but that ye are Gawain, it goes not in my mind."⁵¹

"Wherefore?" quoth the hero; and eagerly he asks, afraid lest he had failed in the performance of his design.⁵² But the lady blessed him and spake in this wise: "A man as good as Gawain is properly held—and courtesy is closed so entirely in him—could not easily have lingered so long with a lady but he had on some trifling excuse or other⁵³ courteously craved a kiss."

Then said Gawain, "Indeed, be it as you like; I shall kiss at your commandment as becomes a knight, and fear⁵⁴ lest he displease you; so urge that plea no more." She comes nearer at that and takes him in her arms; stoops graciously down and kisses the man. They courteously entrust each other to Christ. She goes forth at the door without more ado, and he prepares to rise, and hurries amain; calls to his chamberlain, chooses his weeds, steps forth blithely to mass when he is ready; and then he goes to his meat, behaving always courteously, and makes merry all day till the bright moon rises. Never was a hero fairer entertained by two such worthy dames, the other and the younger. Much disport they make together.

8. And ever the lord of the land is bound in his sport, to hunt in holts and heath at barren hinds. Such a sum of does and of other deer he slew there by the time the sun was low, that it were a marvel to estimate. Then eagerly they all flocked together at the last; and quickly of the slain deer they made a quarry. The leaders hastened thereto with men enough; gathered the greatest of grease,⁵⁵ and proceeded properly to undo⁵⁶ them as the occasion demands. Some that were there tried them at the assay⁵⁷ and found two fingers of fat on the leanest of all. Afterwards they slit the slot,⁵⁸ seized the arber,⁵⁹ cut it free with a sharp knife, and tied it⁶⁰ up. Next they cut down along the four limbs and rent off the hide; then they opened the belly, took out the paunch, cutting eagerly, and laid aside the knot.⁶¹ They began at the throat again and skilfully divided the weasand from the windpipe and threw out the guts. Then they cut out the shoulders with their sharp knives, and pulled them through by a little hole, so as to have whole sides. Next they divided the breast, and cut it in two; and once more they began at the throat, split the beast quickly right up to the crotch, took out the advancers,⁶² and immediately severed all the fillets by the ribs, and took them off properly along the backbone even to the haunch,—all of which hung together. Then they heaved it up whole and cut it off there; and that they took for the numbles,⁶³ as it is rightly called. At the fork of the thighs they cut the flaps behind; hastily they hewed the carcass in two, and severed it along the backbone.

9. Both the head and the neck they hewed off then, and afterwards they sundered the sides swiftly from the chine, and corbie's fee⁶⁴ they cast in a green tree. Then they pierced either thick side through by the rib, and hung them each by the hocks of the haunches—each man for his fee, as it befell him to have it. Upon a skin of a fair beast they fed their hounds with the liver and the lights, the leather of the paunches, and bread bathed in blood mingled thereamong. Loudly they blew the prize, and bayed their hounds; then they started to carry home their meat, blowing full stoutly many loud notes. By the time daylight was done the band had all arrived at the comely castle, where the knight is quietly waiting in comfort beside a bright fire. When the lord arrived and Gawain met him, there was joy enough.

10. Then the lord commanded to gather in the hall all the household, and both the ladies to come down with their maids. Before all the folk on the floor he bade men fetch his venison before him; and all in merry sport he called Gawain, told him the number of the choice beasts, and showed him the fat meat cut from⁶⁵ the ribs; "How like you this play? Have I won the prize? Have I properly earned thanks by my woodcraft?"

"Yes, indeed," quoth the other hero; "here is the fairest store that I saw this seven year in the season of winter."

"And all I give you, Gawain," quoth the host, then; "for by our plighted covenant you can claim it as your own."

"That is true," replied the hero, "and I say to you the same; I too have won this worthy thing within doors; and I am sure that with quite as good will it belongs to you." He throws his arms about his fair neck and kisses him as courteously as he know how. "Take you there my merchandise; I have won no more; though I should give it up willingly even if it were greater."

"It is good," quoth the good man; "gramercy therefor. Perchance it might be better if you would tell me where you won this same favour by your own⁶⁶ wit."

"That was not the agreement," said he; "ask me no more, for ye have got all that belongs to you, be sure of that."

They laughed and made merry in low tones; then they went quickly to supper with new dainties enough.

11. And afterwards as they sat by a fireplace in a chamber, servants poured to them oft the choice wine; and again in their jesting they agreed to make the same bargain on the morning that they made before,—whatsoever chance betide to exchange their winnings at night when they met, whatsoever new they win. They made this agreement before all the court, and the beverage was brought forth merrily at that time.⁶⁷ Then at length they politely took leave; and everybody hurried to bed. When the cock had crowed and cackled but thrice, the lord had leaped from his bed; likewise his followers each one, so that the meat and the mass were promptly despatched, and the troop ready for the chase in the wood ere any day sprang. With hunters and horns they passed through the plains, and uncoupled the racing hounds among the thorns.

12. Soon they heard the cry of the dogs by a marsh side. The huntsman encouraged the hounds that first caught the scent, hurled sharp words at them with a great noise. The hounds that heard it hastened thither quickly, and fell immediately to the scent, forty at once. Then there rose such a resounding cry of gathered hounds that the rocks about rang. The hunters cheered them with horn and with mouth; then all together they swung in a troop between a pool in that wood and a wild crag. On a hill, beside a cliff at the side of the bog, where the rough rock was rudely fallen, they fared to the finding, and the hunters after them. The men surrounded both the rock and the hill, because they knew well that he was within them,—the beast that the bloodhounds were proclaiming there. Then they beat on the bushes and bade him rise up, and he savagely rushed out athwart the men, the most formidable of swine. Long since had he left the herd on account of his age, for he was a huge beast, the greatest of boars. His grinders when he grunted grieved many, for at his first burst he thrust three to the earth, and sped hastily forth at great speed without respite. And they hallooed “High!” full loudly, and cried “Hay, hay!” With horns to mouth lustily they blew the recheat.⁶⁸ Many were the merry cries of men and of hounds that hastened after this boar with hue and cry to kill him. Full oft he bides at bay, and maims the pack in the mêlée. He hurts many of the hounds and grievously they howl and yell.

13. The hunters pushed forward then to shoot at him, aimed at him with their arrows and hit him often. But the shafts that struck on his shields,⁶⁹ give way at the pith, and the barbs would not bite on his brawn though the shaven shafts shivered in pieces; the head hopped out again wheresoever it hit. But when the dints of their keen strokes scared him, then mad for destruction he rushed on the men, did them sore hurt where he hurled forth, and many a one grew wary thereat and gave back a little. But the lord on a light horse hurries after him, blowing his bugle like a bold hero. He winds the recheat as he rides through thick groves, following this wild swine till the sun declined. Thus they drive on the day with such doings while our lovely hero lies comfortably in his bed at home in clothes full rich of hue. The lady did not forget; she came to greet him; full early she was by him to change his mind.

14. She comes to the curtain and peeps at the knight. Sir Gawain at once welcomes her worthily, and she returns his greeting right promptly, seats herself softly by his side, laughs opens, and with a lovely look addresses these words to him: "Sir, if ye be Gawain, it seems to me a very strange thing that a man of such quality should not follow the conventions of good society; and should after making acquaintance with a person cast him utterly from his mind. Thou hast already forgotten what I taught you yesterday in the best language that I knew."

"What is that?" quoth the hero. "Forsooth I know not. If what ye say be true, I am to blame."

"Yet I taught you about kissing," replied the fair lady; "wherever a countenance is known, quickly to claim a kiss; that becomes every knight who practices courtesy."

"Cease such speech, my dear lady," said the ready man. "I durst not claim it lest I should be denied. If I proposed and were refused, I should certainly be wrong in proffering."

"By my faith," quoth the lovely dame, "ye cannot be refused. Ye are strong enough to compel it by strength if ye pleased, supposing any were so ill-bred as to deny you."

"Yea, by God," said Gawain, "your speech is good; but violence is considered discourteous among my people, as is any gift that is not given with a good will. I am at your command to kiss when ye like. Ye may begin when ye please, and leave off whenever it likes you."

The lady stoops down and gracefully kisses his face. They converse long of the fears and joys of love.

15. "I should like to know from you, sir," said the peerless lady, "if it vexes you not,—what might be the reason that so young and so gallant person as ye now are, one so courteous and so knightly as ye are known everywhere to be, have never spoken of love.⁷⁰ For in relating the pains of true knights, the chief thing praised in all of chivalry is the royal sport of love,—and the science of arms: it is the title, token, and text of their works; how heroes for their true love adventured their lives, endured for their sweethearts doleful hours, and afterwards avenged themselves by their valour; dispersed their care, and brought bliss to bower, with plenteous rewards for themselves. And ye are the most renowned knight of your time; your fame and your worship walks everywhere,—and now

I have sat by you here two separate times, yet have I never heard from your head a single word that pertained at all to love, less or more. And ye, that are so courteous and so distinguished in your vows, ought willingly to show and teach to a young thing some tokens of the art of true love. Why are ye so rude who are so praised? Is it that ye deem me too dull to hearken to your dalliance? For shame! I came hither all alone to sit and learn from you some accomplishment; do teach me part of your skill while my lord is from home."

16. "In good faith," quoth Gawain, "God reward you! Great is the entertainment, and huge the pleasure to me. that so worthy a one as ye should come hither, and take pains with so poor a man, and play with your knight in any wise; it delights me. But to take upon myself the task of expounding true love, of touching upon the themes of that text, and tales of arms before you, who I wot well have more knowledge of that sort by the half than I or a hundred such have, or ever shall have so long as I live,—that were a manifold folly by my troth, dear one. But I would work your will with all my might, highly beholden to you as I am; and I wish evermore to be your servant, so God save me."

Thus the fair lady besought him, and tried him oft, for to have won him to wrong,—whatever it was she purposed; but he defended himself fairly that no fault appeared, nor any evil on either side; they knew nought but joy. They laughed and played a long time, till at last she kissed him, took her leave fairly, and went her way.

17. Then the hero bestirred himself and rose to the mass; and afterwards their dinner was dight and splendidly served. The hero sported with the ladies all day, but the lord raced over the land full oft, following his uncouth swine, that rushed along the banks and bit in sunder the backs of his best brachets.⁷¹ There he abode at his bay till bowmen broke it, and maugre his head made him move forth. Many fell arrows there flew when the folk gathered about, but yet at times he made the stoutest to start; till at the last he was so weary he could no more run; but with the haste that he might he won to a hole in a cleft by a rock, where the burn runs. He got the bank at his back and began to scrape; the ugly froth foamed from the corners of his mouth, and he whet his white tusks. It was not pleasant for all the bold hunters that stood about him to approach him even remotely; and to go nigh him

durst none for fear of harm. He had hurt so many before, that all seemed then full loath to be more torn with the tusks of that savage and crazed beast.

18. When the knight came himself, reining his steed, and saw him bide at the bay near his men, he lighted nimbly down, left his courser, pulled out a bright brand and boldly strode forth, and hurried fast through the stream where the fell one abode. The wild creature was ware of the wight with weapon in hand, and heaved on high his hairs; so fiercely he snorted that many feared for their lord lest to him befell the worse. The swine rushed directly upon the hero, so that man and boar were both in a heap in the wildest of the water; but the boar had the worse, for the man marked him well as they first met and skilfully set his point exactly in the slot,⁷² pierced him up to the hilt so that his heart split, and he gave way squealing and went quickly down the water. A hundred hounds seized him and fiercely bit on him. Men brought him to land and the dogs finished him.⁷³

19. There was blowing of the prize⁷⁴ on many a loud horn, high halloing aloft by mighty hunters; brachets bayed the beast as the masters bade who were the chief huntsmen of that swift chase. Then a wight that was wise in woodcraft begins skilfully to unlace⁷⁵ this boar. First he hews off its head and sets it on high; and afterwards splits him all down his rough back, and takes out the bowels and singes them on the coals; then with bread mingled with these, he rewards his hounds. Afterwards he cuts the brawn in fine broad shields, and has out the hastlets⁷⁶ in the proper manner. And now they bind the halves all whole together, and afterwards stoutly hang them on a stiff staff. Now with this same swine they take their way home. The boar's head was borne before the warrior who slew him at the stream through the force of his own strong hand. It seemed long to him until he saw Sir Gawain in the hall; then he called, and Gawain came promptly to take his fees there.

20. The lord jested⁷⁷ full loudly, and merrily he laughed when he saw Sir Gawain; with pleasure he spoke. The good ladies were called and the household gathered. He showed them the shields and told them the tale of the girth⁷⁸ and the length of the wild swine; and also of his viciousness in the wood where he fled. That other knight full comely commended his deeds, and praised it as a great bag that he had made:

for such a brawn of a beast, the bold man said, nor such sides of a swine, saw he never before. Then they handled the huge head; the courteous man praised it and made much of it to honour the lord.

“Now Gawain,” quoth the good man, “this game is your own, by fine and fast forward, truly ye know.”

“It is sooth,” quoth the hero; “and as truly all my getting I shall give you in turn, by my troth.” He took the warrior about the neck and courteously kissed him, and another time he served him the same. “Now we are even,” quoth the warrior, “tonight of all the covenants that we knit by law since I came hither.”

Said the lord, “By St. Giles, ye are the best that I know! Ye will be rich in a short time, if ye drive such chaffer!”

21. Then they raised tables aloft on trestles, and cast cloths upon them. The clear light then appeared along the walls, as men set and distributed waxen torches all about the hall. Much mirth and glee rose up therein, about the fire on the hearth, and in various wise at supper and after. Many noble songs they sang, as Christmas carols and new dance tunes, with all the mannerly mirth that a man can tell of. And ever our lovely knight sat beside the lady. Such seemly cheer she made to the hero, sought with such sly stolen⁷⁹ glances to please the stalwart one, that the wight was all amazed, and wroth with himself. But he would not on account of his breeding reprove her, but responded in all courtesy, howsoever outrageous she might be. When they had played in the hall as long as their will lasted, the lord called to bedwards, and to the room with a fireplace they passed.

22. And there they drank and talked, and the lord proposed again to make the same arrangement for New Year’s Eve. But the knight craved leave to depart, for it was nigh at the term that he must keep. The lord hindered him from that, persuaded him to linger, and said, “As I am a true man, I pledge my troth thou shalt reach the green chapel to do thy tasks, sir, by New Year’s light, long before prime. Therefore lie in thy loft and take thine ease; and I shall hunt in this holt and keep the covenant—change merchandise with thee when I return hither; for I have tried thee twice, and faithful I find thee; now ‘third time, best time.’⁸⁰ Think on the morrow. Make we merry while we may, and be joyful: for a man can catch trouble whensoever he likes.”

This was readily granted and Gawain stayed. Drink was quickly brought to them, and to bed they went with lights. Sir Gawain lay and slept full still and soft all night; the lord, mindful of his hunting, was dight full early.

23. After mass he and his men took a morsel. Merry was the morning. He asks for his mount, and all the sportsmen who should accompany him on horse were ready mounted on their steeds before the hall gates. Wondrous fair was the field, for the frost still lingered. The sun rose in a rack of ruddy red, and drove all the clouds from the welkin. The hunters uncoupled by a holt side, and the rocks in the forest rang for the noise of their horns. Some dogs fell on a scent where the fox had loitered; followed it obliquely⁸¹ through the cunning of their wiles. A kennet⁸² cried upon it; the huntsman encouraged him, and his fellows hastened after, panting thickly. They ran forth in a rabble on Reynard's very track, and he hurried before them. Soon they found him; and when they actually saw him they chased him fast, baying him full fiercely with a huge noise. And he trants⁸³ and runs through many a rough grove; doubles and hearkens by hedges full often. At the last by a little ditch he leaps over a spinny, and steals out full stilly by a rough rand.⁸⁴ Half escaped from the wood he turns with wiles from the hounds; but then he arrived, ere he knew it, at a chosen stand, where in an instant three stout hunters in gray threatened him at once. He blenched again quickly, and bravely started off; with all the woe in the word, he turned away to the wood.

24. Then was it a pure joy to listen to the hounds, when all the gathered mute⁸⁵ got view of him. The cry they set on his head at the sight was as if all the resounding cliffs had clattered down in a heap. Here he was halloed loudly when the hunters met him, loudly cried upon with noisy calls; there he was threatened and often called thief; and ever the ticklers were at his tail so that he could not tarry. Oft was he run at when he raked out, and oft he reeled in again, so wily was Reynard. And ever he led the bespattered lord and his troop in this manner among the hills, now in them, now over, now under, while the courteous knight at home slept wholesomely within the comely curtains on the cold morn.

But the lady for love cared not to sleep nor to give up the purpose that bode in her heart; but up she rose quickly and took her way thither

in a gay mantle meetly reaching to the earth, and furred full fine with skins of the best. No ornaments of gold on her head; but only the bright stones set above her tressour⁸⁶ in clusters of twenty. With her fair face and her lovely throat all naked, her breast bare before and behind too, she comes within the chamber door and closes it after her, throws up a window and calls out the wight, and smartly thus stirred him with her fair cheery words. "Ah man, how can you sleep, this morning is so clear!" Though he was drowsing deep, yet could he hear her.

25. In the dreary depths of a dream the noble was sunk, like a man suffering from many sad thoughts, how destiny should dight him⁸⁷ his weird at the green chapel that day when he met the man, and had to abide his buffet without more debate. But when he had fairly recovered his wits, he emerged from his dreams and answered with haste. The lovely lady came laughing sweetly, stooped over his fair face and courteously kissed him. He welcomed her worthily with choice cheer. To see her so glorious, and so gaily attired, so faultless of feature, and so lovely of colour, warmed his heart with welling joy. With smooth and gracious smiling they straightway waxed mirthful. All was bliss and good cheer that passed between them. They exchanged goodly words; much happiness they felt, and great was the peril between them, unless Mary thought of her knight.

26. For that beauteous princess constrained him so sorely, and the danger pressed him so nigh, that of necessity it behooved him either to accept her love or rudely refuse it. He thought much of his courtesy, lest he should prove a clown; and more on his villainy if he should do sin, and be traitor to the hero who owned the castle. "God shield!" quoth the warrior, "that shall not befall!" With a little love-dalliance he laid aside all the pointed speeches that sprang from her mouth.

Quoth the lady to the hero: "Ye deserve blame if ye love not her who is so near you,—of all creatures in the world most wounded in heart;—unless indeed ye have a sweetheart, a dearer being, that pleases you better, and ye have plighted faith so firmly to that gentle one that ye care not to loosen it.—Verily now that is what I believe, and I pray you that you tell me truly; for all the loves in the world deny not the truth with guile."

“By St. John!” said the knight, and courteously he smiled, “I have none, and none will I have.”

27. “That is the worst of all!” quoth the lady. “I am answered indeed, to my sorrow. Kiss me now comely and I shall go hence. I can only mourn in the world as a maid that loved much.”

Sighing she stooped down and kissed him seemly; and then she severed from him, and said as she stood, “Now, dear, at this departing do me this comfort; give me somewhat of thy gift, thy glove if it might be, that I may think on thee, sir, to lessen my mourning.”

“Now in truth,” quoth that man, “I would I had here for thy love, the dearest thing that I wield; for truly ye have right oft in reason deserved a greater reward than I could reckon. But to exchange with you love-tokens, that would profit but little. It is not for your honor to have at this time a glove of Gawain’s gift for a keepsake; and I am here on an errand in lands uncouth, and have no men with mails full of precious things for remembrance at this moment; and that mislikes me, lady. But every man must act according to his circumstances, and none should take it ill or repine.”

“Now, courteous and honourable one,” quoth that lovesome lady, “though I shall have nothing of yours, yet shall ye have of mine.”

28. She reached him a rich ring of red gold work with a gleaming stone standing aloft, that shed blushing beams like the bright sun; know ye well it was worth wealth full huge. But the man refused it, and readily he said: “I desire no great gifts, my gay one, at this time. I have naught to give you, and naught will I take.”

She offered it him full pressingly, and he refused her offer, and swore swiftly on his sooth that he would not take it. And she sorrowed that he refused, and said thereafter, “If ye refuse my ring, since it seems too rich, and ye would not be so highly beholden to me, I shall give you my girdle, that will enrich you less.”

She lightly caught a lace that went about her sides, knit upon her kirtle under the bright mantle. It was adorned with green silk, and ornamented with gold, broidered all around, decked with fringes;⁸⁸ and that she offered to the hero, and gaily besought that, though it were unworthy, he would take it. And he denied that he would in any wise take either gold or present ere God sent him grace to achieve the chance

that he had chosen there. "And therefore, I pray you, be not displeased, and give over your attempt; for I intend never to consent. I am dearly beholden to you because of your entertainment; and ever in hot and in cold I will be your true servant."

29. "Now refuse ye this silk," said the lady then, "because it is simple in itself, as it certainly seems to be? Lo! little it is, and less it is worth; but whoso knew the virtues that are knit therein, he would esteem it at a greater price peradventure; for whatsoever man is girt with this green lace, while he has it fittingly wrapped about him, there is no warrior under heaven that can wound him; for he could not be slain by any device in the world."

Then the knight paused, and it came to his heart that it would be a jewel for the peril that awaited him when he arrived at the chapel to undergo his ordeal. Could he manage to be unslain, that were a noble device. Then he indulged her entreaties and suffered her to speak; and she pressed the belt on him and offered it to him eagerly. And he accepted it, and she gave it him with a good will, and besought him for her sake never to discover it, but to conceal it loyally from her lord. The man agreed that never person should know it indeed but they twain. Full oft he thanked her, right glad in heart and thought. By that she had kissed the stout knight three times.

30. Then she takes her leave and leaves him there, for more entertainment she could not get from that man. When she was gone, Sir Gawain bestirs himself, rises and dresses in noble array. He lays up the love-lace the lady had given him, hides it full cleverly where he can find it again. Then promptly he takes his way to the chapel; quietly approaches to the priest and prays him there that he would elevate his life, and teach him better how his soul should be saved when he should go hence. Then he shrives him cleanly and shows his misdeeds, both the more and the less, beseeches mercy, and begs for absolution. And the priest assoils him thoroughly and set him as clean as if doomsday had been due on the morrow. And afterwards Gawain makes more mirth among the fair ladies that day with comely carols and all kinds of joy than ever he did before, till the dark night. Everyone had pleasure of him there, and said indeed that he had never been so merry since he came hither.

31. Now let him linger in that place, where may love betide him. The lord is still in the field leading his men. He has overtaken the fox that he followed so long, as he sprinted over a spinny to spy the rascal, where he heard the hounds that hastened fast after him. Reynard came running through a rough grove, and all the rabble in a rout right at his heels. The man was ware of the game, and warily abode; pulled out his bright brand and struck at the beast; and he dodged from the sharp weapon and would have turned; but a dog seized him ere he could, and right before the horses' feet they all fell on him and worried the wily one with a great noise. The lord lighted quickly, and caught him forthwith; pulled him full hastily out of the dogs' mouths, and holding him high over his head, halloed fast; and there many fierce hounds bayed him. Hunters hied them thither with horns full many, ever blowing the recheat⁸⁹ till they saw the hero. As soon as his noble company was come, all that bare bugle blew at once, and all the others that had no horns halloed. It was the merriest mute⁹⁰ that ever men heard—the rich riot that there was raised for Reynard's soul. They rewarded the hounds there, stroked them and rubbed their heads; and afterwards they took Reynard and turned off his coat.

32. And then they hastened home, for it was nigh night, blowing full stoutly in their great horns. The lord alighted at last at his dear home, found fire on the floor, and the hero beside it, Sir Gawain the good, that glad was withal among the ladies; in their love he had much joy. He wore a mantle of blue that reached to the earth; his surcoat, that was softly furred, became him well; and his hood of the same hung on his shoulder. Trimmed all about with fine fur were both. He met this good man in the middle of the floor, and all joyfully he greeted him, and goodly he said: "Now I shall fulfill our covenant, that we have just made, where no drink was spared." Then he embraces the knight and kisses him thrice with as much gusto and as soberly as he could give them.

"By Christ!" quoth the other knight, "ye get much bliss in the profits of this business—if ye drive good bargains!"

"Of the bargain no matter," quoth curtly that other, "so long as the debts that I owed are properly paid."

"Mary!" quoth the other man, "my offering is the worse, for I have hunted all this day, and naught have I got but this foul fox-fell; the fiend

have the good ones! And that is full poor to pay for such fine things as ye have given me here, three such rare kisses."

"It is enough," quoth Sir Gawain; I thank you, by the rood." And as they stood there the lord told him how the fox was slain.

33. With mirth and minstrelsy, with meats at there will, they made as merry as any men could. With laughing of ladies, with merry jests, Gawain and the good man were both as glad as if the court were mad, or else drunk. Both the man and his retinue made many jokes till the season arrived when they must sever; the men had to go to their beds at last. Then humbly this gentle man takes his leave of the lord first; and fairly he thanks him. "For such a joyous sojourn as I have had here, for the honor you have shown me at this high feast, the high king reward you! I can only give you myself to be one of your men, if that pleases you. For I must needs, as ye know, proceed, tomorrow, if ye will grant me some man to show, as you promised, the way to the green chapel, as God will suffer me to take on New Year's day the doom of my fate."

"In good faith," quoth the good man, "with a good will! All that ever I promised you, I will perform." Therewith he assigns a servant to set him in the way, and conduct him by the downs, that he should without hesitation travel through the forest and fare at the best in the woods. The lord thanked Gawain for the worship he had been willing to show him. Then the knight took his leave of the beautiful ladies.

34. With care and with kissing he speaks to them, and many earnest thanks he presses upon them. And they returned the same again promptly; they entrusted him to Christ with sighings full sad. Afterwards he graciously departs from the household; each man that he met he thanked him for his service and his solace, and the various pains with which they had been busy to serve him. And each man was as sad to sever from him there as they had ever dwelt worthily with that hero. Then with people and with light he was led to his chamber and blithely brought to bed to be at his rest. Whether he slept soundly I dare not say, for he had much to think of on the morrow if he would. Let him lie there; he was near what he sought. If ye will be still a while I shall tell you how they fared.

FYTTE THE FOURTH

1. Now nighs the New Year, and the night passes. The day drives on to the dark, as God bids; but outside wild storms wakened in the world; clouds cast the cold keenly to the earth; with discomfort enough to the naked, the snow from the north flew sharply, and nipped the game. The blustering wind blew from the heights, and drove each dale full of great drifts. The man who lay in his bed heard it right well; though he locks his lids, full little he sleeps. By each cock that crew he knew well the hour. Promptly he leaped up ere the day sprang, for there was the light of a lamp that gleamed in his chamber. He called to his chamberlain, who quickly answered him, and bade him bring his burnie and saddle his horse. The chamberlain gets up and fetches him his weeds, and arrays Sir Gawain in proper fashion. First he dressed him in his clothes to keep out the cold, and then he put on the rest of his harness, that had been well kept, both mail and plate, and brightly polished. The rings of his rich burnie had been rocked from the rust,⁹¹ and all was fresh as at first; and Gawain was fain to give thanks for it. The attendant had wiped each piece well and often. Then the noblest man betwixt here and Greece bade his steed be brought.

2. Meanwhile, he threw upon himself his finest weeds; his surcoat with its cognisance of excellent work, virtuous stones set upon velvet, all wrought about and bound with embroidered seams, and fairly furred within with rare skins. Yet left he not the lace, the lady's gift,—that forgot not Gawain for his own good. When he had belted his brand upon his broad haunches, he dressed his love-token double about him, the knight swathed sweetly about his waist the girdle of green silk, which became him well, upon the royal red cloth that was fair to see. But this hero wore not the girdle for its wealth, for pride of the pendants, though

they were polished, and though the glittering gold gleamed on the ends; but to save himself when it behoved him to suffer, to await his doom without resistance, with no brand or knife to defend him. By this the good man is ready and goes out quickly. Full often he thanks the distinguished company.

3. Gringolet the huge and strong was ready, who had been kept skilfully in the safest manner. The proud horse in his splendid condition longed for spurring. The hero approached him, noticed his coat, and said soberly, and by his sooth swore—"Here, in this castle, is a company that are mindful of courtesy. The man who maintains them, joy may he have; the dear lady, love betide her in this life, since they for charity cherish a guest and uphold honor in their hand. May the Being reward them who holds the heavens on high—and also you all. And if I might live any longer in the world I should give you some reward if I could." Then he stepped into stirrup and strode aloft. His servant offered him his shield; he put it on his shoulder. He spurred Gringolet with his gilt heels, and the steed jumped on the stone; no longer he stood still, but pranced. Gawain's servant, who bore his lance and helm, was by then on the horse. "This castle I entrust to Christ; may he give it aye good chance!"

4. The bridge was let down, and the broad gates unbarred and borne open on both sides. The hero crossed himself quickly and passed the boards, praised the porter, who knelt down before him giving good day and praying God that he save Gawain. And so he went on his way with his one man that should teach him how to find that dismal place where he should receive the rueful blow. They rode by banks where boughs are bare; they climbed by cliffs where the cold clings; the sky was upheld, but it was ugly beneath; mist hung on the moor and melted on the mount; each hill had a hat, a huge mist-cloak. Brooks boiled and broke from their banks about, shattering sheer on their shores where they showered down. Dreary was the way, where they should travel by the wood, till soon came the season when the sun rises at that time. They were on a hill full high, the white snow about them, when the man that rode beside him bade his master abide.

5. "I have brought you hither, sir, at this time; and now ye are not far from that famous spot that ye have asked and inquired so specially after. But I shall say to you forsooth, since I know you, and ye are a man that I

love well, if ye would work by my wit ye should be the better for it. The place that ye press to is held full perilous. There dwells in that waste a wight the worst upon earth; for he is stiff and stern and loves to strike; and greater he is than any man in the world, and his body bigger than the four best that are in Arthur's house, and bigger than Hector or any other. He maintains that adventure at the green chapel. There passes by that place none so proud in arms but he dints him to death with dint of his hand. For he is a man without measure and uses no mercy; for be it churl or chaplain that rides by the chapel, monk or mass-priest, or any man else, he likes as well to kill him as to go alive himself. Therefore I tell ye as truly as ye sit in the saddle, come ye there ye shall be killed—trust me well—though ye had twenty lives to spend. He has dwelt here full long and caused much strife in the land. Against his sore dints ye cannot defend yourself.

6. "Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the fellow alone, and go away some other road, for God's sake. Repair to some other country, where Christ may speed you; and I shall hie me home again, and promise you further—which I will swear by God and all his good saints, so help me God and the halidom and oaths enough—that I will loyally conceal you, and never tell tale that ever ye fled for any man that I know of."

"Gramercy," quoth Gawain. And sternly he added, "Well worth thee, man, who wishes my good; and I well believe thou wouldst loyally conceal me. But if thou kept promise never so faithfully, and I gave up here, sought for fear to fly as you advise, I were a knight coward; I could not be excused. But I will go to the chapel whatever chance may fall, and talk with that same man the tale that I like, be it good or evil, as it pleases fate to have it. Though he be a stern champion to cope with, and armed with a club, full well can God manage to save his servants."

7. "Mary!" quoth that other man, "now thou sayest as much as that thou wilt take upon thyself thine own destruction; if it pleases thee to lose thy life, I shall not let nor hinder thee. Have here thy helm on thy head, thy spear in thy hand; and ride down this same lane by yon rock-side till thou be brought to the bottom of the rugged valley; then look a little up the grassy slope on thy left hand, and thou shalt see in that ravine the chapel itself, and the burly man on the field who keeps it. Now farewell in God's name, Gawain the noble, for all the gold in the

world I would not go with thee nor bear thee fellowship through this wood a foot further."

At that the man turned his bridle in the wood, hit the horse with his heels as hard as he could; leaped over the land, and left the knight there all alone.

"By God's self," quoth Gawain, "I will neither grieve nor groan. To God's will I am full obedient, and to him I have entrusted myself."

8. Then he spurs Gringolet and follows the path; pushes in by a hollow beside a thicket; rides through the rough slope right to the dale; and then he looked about him, and wild it seemed to him. He saw no sign of dwelling anywhere around, but on both sides high steep banks, and rough hunched crags with projecting stones; the shadows of the cliffs seemed to him terrible. Then he paused and held back his horse, and oft changed his cheer while seeking the chapel. He saw none such on any side, and strange it seemed to him. But soon, a little distance off on a grassy spot he descried a mound as it were, a smooth hill by the bank of the stream near a ford of the flood that ran there. The burn babbled there as if it were boiling. The knight urges his steed, and comes to the hill; lights nimbly down, and ties the rein and his rich bridle to a tree by a rough branch; then he turns to the hill and walks about it, debating with himself what it might be. It had a hole at the end and on either side, and was overgrown with grass in clumps everywhere, and was all hollow within—nothing but an old cave or a crevice of an old crag. He could not understand it at all. "Alas, Lord," quoth the gentle knight, "can this be the green chapel? Here about midnight the devil might tell his matins."

9. "Now," quoth Gawain, "it certainly is mysterious here; this oratory is ugly, overgrown with herbs. Well it beseems the wight clad in green here to do his devotions in the devil's wise. Now I feel in my five wits it is the fiend that has made this bargain with me, to destroy me here. This is a chapel of mischance; may ill fortune betide it! It is the cursedest kirk that ever I came in!"

With high helm on his head, his lance in his hand, he strides up to the rock of the rude dwelling. Then he heard from that high hill, in a rough cave, on a bank beyond the brook, a marvellously savage noise. Lo, the cliff clattered as though it would split, as if one were grinding a scythe

on a grindstone. It whirred and screeched like water at a mill; it rushed and rang that it was ruth to hear.

“By God,” quoth Gawain then, “that gear, I fancy, is being prepared to give me a good reception. Yet though I must lose my life, fear shall never make me change colour.”

10. Then the knight called full high: “Who dwells in this place to keep covenant with me? For now the good Gawain is passing right here. If any wight wishes ought, let him come hither fast, now or never, to fulfill his need!”

“Abide!” quoth one on the bank over his head. “Thou shalt have in all haste that which I promised thee once.”

Yet he kept on with that noise sharply for a while, turning and whetting, ere he would come down. And then he crossed by a crag and came from a hole, whirling out of a dark place with a fell weapon—a Danish axe new dight, to give the blow with. It had fast to the helve a great head, sharpened on the stone. Four feet long was the weapon—no less, by that lace that gleamed full bright. And the man in the green was arrayed as before—both his skin and limbs, locks, and beard; save that on foot he strides fairly on the earth. He set the steel shaft to the stone and stalked beside it. When he came to the water, where he did not wish to wade, he hopped over on his axe, and fiercely advanced, with savage ferocity pacing the broad snow-covered glade. Sir Gawain met the knight and bowed to him, not at all low. The other said, “Now, sweet, sir, in a covenant a man can trust thee.”

11. “Gawain,” quoth the green warrior, “may God preserve thee. Indeed thou art welcome, hero, to my place; and thou hast timed thy travel as a true man should. And thou knowest the covenants made between us; at this time twelve month, thou tookest what fell to thee,—and I at this New Year was to repay you handsomely. And now we are in this valley entirely alone; here are no men to part us, however we may behave. Have thy helm off thy head, and have here thy pay. Make no more debate than I offered thee then, when thou whipped off my head at one blow.”

“Nay,” quoth Gawain, “by God that lent me life, I shall grudge thee not a whit whatever misfortune falls. But arrange thee for thy one

stroke, and I shall stand still and hinder thee not the least from doing the work as you like."

He bent the neck and bowed down, showing the flesh all bare; and behaved as if he cared not. For no dread would he flinch.

12. Then the man in green got ready quickly, gathered up his grim tool to smite Gawain. With all the might in his body he bare it aloft, and aimed a savage blow as though he wished to kill him. Had it driven down as earnestly as he feinted, the ever doughty one would have been dead of his dint. But Gawain glanced to one side on the gisarm as it came gliding down to slay him there in the glade, and shrank a little with the shoulders from the sharp iron. The other warrior with a quick motion withheld the bright weapon, and then he reproved the prince with many proud words. "Thou art not Gawain," said the man, "who is held so good, who never flinched for any army by hill nor by vale; and now thou fleest for fear before thou feelest any harm. Such cowardice I never heard of that knight. I neither winced nor fled, sir, when thou didst strike, nor tried any tricks in King Arthur's house. My head flew to my foot, and yet I never budged; and thou, ere any harm taken, art fearful in heart. Wherefore the better man I ought to be called for it."

"I flinched once," quoth Gawain, "and will do so no more. Yet if my head should fall on the stones, I cannot restore it."

13. "But make ready, sir, by thy faith, and bring me to the point. Deal to me my destiny, and do it promptly; for I shall stand thee a stroke, and not start again till thine axe has hit me—have here my troth."

"Have at thee then!" quoth the other, and heaves it aloft, and aims as savagely as if he were mad. He strikes at him mightily, but touches the man not; for he withheld his hand cleverly ere it could hurt. Gawain awaits it properly and flinches with no member, but stands as a stone, or a stump that is twisted into the rocky ground with a hundred roots.

Then merrily spoke the man in the green: "So, now thou hast thy heart whole it behoves me to hit. Now keep back the fine hood that Arthur gave thee, and see if thou canst keep thy neck whole from this stroke."

Said Gawain in great anger: "Why, thrash on, thou wild man! Thou threatenest too long. I guess that thine own heart is timid!"

“Forsooth,” quoth the other warrior, “thou speakest so fiercely that I will not delay thine errand a bit longer.” Then he takes his stride to strike and knits both brow and lip. No wonder Gawain mislikes it and gives up all thought of escape.

14. Lightly he lifts his axe and lets the edge come down fairly on the bare neck. Yet though he smote rudely, it hurt him but little; only cut him on one side so that it severed the skin. The sharp bit reached the flesh through the fair fat, so that the bright blood shot over his shoulders to the earth. And when the hero saw the blood glint on the snow, he leaped forth more than a spear’s length, eagerly seized his helm, cast it on his head, threw his shoulders under his fair shield, pulled out a bright sword and fiercely spoke. Never in this world since he was born of his mother was he half so blithe.

“Cease, sir, of thy blow! Offer me no more. I have without strife taken a stroke in this place; and if thou givest me more, I shall promptly repay and yield quickly again, trust thou that! Only one stroke falls to me here. The covenant which we made in Arthur’s halls provided just that; and therefore, courteous sir, now hold!”

15. The warrior turned from him and rested on his axe. He set the shaft on the ground, leaned on the head, and beheld how the doughty hero stood his ground grimly, fully armed and devoid of fear. In his heart it pleased him. Then with a great voice, and a huge laugh, he spoke merrily to the hero: “Bold sir, in this place be not so savage. Nobody has here unmannerly mishandled thee, nor done but according to the covenant made at the king’s court. I promised thee a stroke and thou hast it; hold thee well paid. I release thee of the remnant, of all other rights. If I had been skilful peradventure I could have given you a worse buffet. First I menaced you merrily with a pure feint, and gave thee no blow; which was but justice, considering the covenant we made on the first night, and which thou held with me trustily; for truly all the gain thou gave me as a good man should. The second feint this morning, sir, I proffered thee, because thou didst kiss my fair wife and didst hand the kisses over to me; for these two occasions I gave thee here but two bare feints without harm. A true man truly restores; such an one need dread no harm. At the third time thou didst fail; and so take thee that tap.

16. "For it is my weed that thou wearest, that same woven girdle. Mine own wife gave it thee, I know well, forsooth. Now know I well thy kisses, and thy virtues also. And as for the wooing of my wife, I managed it myself. I sent her to try thee, and truly it seems to me thou art the most faultless hero that ever went on foot. As a pearl is of greater price than white peas, so is Gawain, in good faith, compared with other gay knights. But in this case, sir, you lacked a little, and loyalty failed you. But that was for no amorous work, nor wooing either, but because ye loved your life,—the less I blame you."

That other brave man stood a great while in a study; so stricken was he for grief that he groaned within. All the blood of his breast rushed to his face; and he shrank for shame when the warrior talked. This was the first word that the man spoke—"Cursed be cowardice and covetousness both! In you is villainy and vice, that destroy virtue." Then he caught at the knot and loosed the fastening; fiercely reached the belt to the warrior himself. "Lo! there is the deception, foul may it fall! For fear of thy knock cowardice taught me to make a truce with covetousness, to forsake my nature, which is generosity and loyalty, that belong to knights. Now am I faulty and false, and a coward have ever been. From treachery and untruth ever come sorrow and care. Here I confess to you, knight, that my conduct is all faulty. Let me but please you now, and after I shall beware."

17. Then the other laughed and said courteously: "I hold it quite remedied, the harm that I had. Thou hast made a clean confession, acknowledging all thy misdeeds, and hast received the penance openly from the point of my edge. I hold thee quit of that plight, and purified as clean as if thou hadst never forfeited since thou wast first born. And I give thee, sir, the girdle that is gold hemmed. Since it is green, as is my gown, Sir Gawain, ye may think upon this same adventure where thou goest forth among great princes; and this shall be a genuine token among chivalrous knights of the adventure of the green chapel, and ye shall come again this New Year to my dwelling, and we shall revel the remnant of this rich feast full well." The lord pressed the invitation and said, "With my wife, who was your great enemy, I think we shall reconcile you."

18. "Nay, forsooth," quoth the hero; and seizing his helm, he took it off quickly and thanked the warrior. "I have had a good visit, bliss betide you; and may He pay you well who directs all mercies. Commend me to that courteous one, your comely mate; both the one and the other, my honoured ladies, who have thus with their craft quaintly beguiled their knight. But it is no wonder that a fool should rave, and through wiles of women be won to sorrow. For so was Adam beguiled by one, and Solomon by many, indeed; and Samson also, Delilah dealt him his weird; and David thereafter was deceived by Bathsheba, who suffered much sorrow. Since these men were plagued by their wiles, it were a huge gain to love them well and believe them not—if a person but could; for these men were of old the best, and the most fortunate, excellent above all others under the heavens; and all they were beguiled by women whom they had to do with.⁹² If I be now deceived, meseems I might be excused.

19. "But your girdle," quoth Gawain, "God reward you for it! That will I keep with good will; not for the precious gold, nor the samite nor the silk, nor the wide pendants, for its wealth nor for its beauty nor for its fine work; but in sign of my fault I shall behold it oft; when I ride in renown I shall lament to myself the fault and the deceit of the crabbed flesh, how tender it is to catch stains of filth; and thus when pride shall prick me for prowess of arms, a look on this love-lace shall moderate my heart. But one thing I would pray you—may it displease you not—since ye are lord of the land yonder where I have stayed worshipfully with you—may the Being who upholds the heaven and sits on high repay you for it!—how name ye your right name? and then no more."

"That shall I tell thee truly," quoth the other then. "Bernlak de Hautdesert I am called in this land, through the might of Morgen la Fay, who dwells in my house. She has acquired deep learning, hard-won skill, many of the masteries of Merlin;—for she has at times dealt in rare magic with that renowned clerk, who knows all your knights at home. Morgan the Goddess is therefore her name; no person is so haughty but she can tame him.

20. "She sent me in this wise to your rich hall to assay its pride and try if it were true that circulates about the great renown of the Round Table. She prepared for me this wonder to take away your wits, to have

grieved Guinevere and caused her to die through fright of that same man, that ghostly speaker with his head in his hand before the high table. That is she, the ancient lady at home. She is even thine aunt, Arthur's half-sister, the daughter of that Duchess of Tintagel upon whom dear Uther afterwards begot Arthur, that is now king. Therefore, I beg you, sir, to come to thine aunt; make merry in my house; my people love thee, and I like thee as well, sir, by my faith, as I do any man under God for thy great truth."

But he answered him nay, he would in no wise. They embraced and kissed, each entrusted other to the Prince of Paradise, and they parted right there in the cold. Gawain on horse full fair rides boldly to the king's court, and the knight all in green whithersoever he would.

21. Wild ways in the world Gawain now rides on Gringolet, he who had got the boon of his life. Oft he harboured in houses, and oft without; and many an adventure in vale he had, and won oft; but that I care not at this time to mention in my tale. The hurt was whole that he had got in his neck; and he bare the glistening belt about him, crossed obliquely like a baldric, the lace fastened under his left arm with a knot, in token that he was taken in a fault. And thus he comes to the court, the knight all sound. There wakened joy in that dwelling when the great ones knew that good Gawain had come; joyous it seemed to them. The king kisses the knight, and the queen also; and afterwards many a sure knight, who sought to embrace him and asked him of his journey. And wondrously he tells it, confessing all the trials that he had, the adventure of the chapel, the behavior of the knight, the love of the lady—and, at the last, the lace. He showed them the nick in his neck that he caught at the lord's hands for his unloyalty. He grieved when he had to tell it; he groaned for sorrow, and the blood rushed to his face for shame when he declared it.

22. "Lo! lord," quoth the hero, as he handled the lace, "this that I bear in my neck is the badge of this blame. This is the evil and the loss that I have got from the cowardice and covetousness that I showed there. This is the token of untruth that I am taken in, and I must needs wear it while I may last; for none may hide his shame without mishap, for where it once is incurred, depart it will never."

The king and all the court comfort the knight. They laugh loud at his tale, and lovingly agree that the lords and the ladies that belong to the Table, each knight of the brotherhood, should have a baldric, an oblique band about him of a bright green, and wear that for the sake of the hero. And that emblem was accorded the renown of the Round Table, and he was ever after honoured that had it.

As it is told in the best book of romance, thus in Arthur's day this adventure betid, which the Brutus books bear witness of. After Brutus the bold hero first came hither, when the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy, many adventures of this sort happened. Now may He that bore the crown of thorns bring us to his bliss. AMEN.

HONY SOIT QUI MAL PENCE

Notes

1. Construction clear, though sense odd. Antenor and Aeneas were the traitors who in the mediaeval story of Troy handed over the city to the Greeks. Antenor remained unpopular, but Aeneas suffered no loss of reputation. See Lydgate's *Troy Book* in the publications of the Early English Text Soc., Bk. IV, l. 4539f.
2. Dancing and singing in a ring.
3. New Year's gifts of good omen.
4. Oriental figured stuff.
5. It was extremely sumptuous having only two at a mess; i.e. only two sharing the same cup and platter.
6. It seems to make somewhat better sense if we transpose, as has here been done, lines 132 and 133; otherwise this passage means that a second course came in heralded by new music.
7. Translation doubtful.
8. Translation doubtful.
9. Our "reins" is a mere stop-gap. The MS. has the puzzling *sturtres*.
10. Translating *hors swete* of the MS. as "horse's suite."
11. The word *capados* here translated as "hood" is rare. It might conceivably mean "camail," a protection of mail for the neck and part of the head, that hung down from or under the helm.
12. "Bit" is still used for the cutting edge of an axe.
13. Not in the MS.
14. Possibly "faces" or "looks."
15. This word is supplied. Perhaps "speak" would be more conservative.
16. Some such word has to be supplied after naked.
17. "Grease" in the original.
18. Morris's punctuation of this passage has been altered.
19. Morris's punctuation of this passage has been altered.
20. Passage a bit vague.
21. Morris's punctuation altered.
22. steel shoes.
23. knee pieces.
24. coat of mail.
25. scarf.

26. visor.
27. parrots.
28. true lover's knots.
29. Should it be *now*?
30. These five larger virtues.
31. The meaning of the verb is doubtful.
32. In the old meaning of fireplace, fire-back, or grate.
33. Possibly the host, and not Gawain, is the subject of this sentence, which then might be translated: "Full freely and oft the host called it a feast (i.e. made the feaster welcome) right courteously, when all the retainers praised him (Gawain or the host?) as courteous." In the next two sentences the host is pretty certainly the subject. With this interpretation cf. *Macbeth*, III, 4, 31: "The feast is sold that is not often vouch'd, while 't is a-making, 't is given with welcome."
34. The precise, but not the general, meaning of the two participles is uncertain.
35. The meaning of *bay* is doubtful.
36. These four words supplied.
37. This phrase may go with "lose," thus aggravating the joke.
38. This word (*messe*) can refer to the courses (the food), or to the "mess" (the two persons eating together, i.e. using the same goblet, platter, etc.).
39. The clause literally translated is insignificant; we expect something like "and yet I should fail for all my pains."
40. *Wolde* in the text is translated as a corruption of some such word as "was lacking," or "wandered."
41. Word doubtful.
42. Took a light repast.
43. Hounds that hunt by scent.
44. The flat, broad part of the horn.
45. Subject supplied.
46. A mere guess: the line appears to be literally "I shall cover you here the other half also."
47. The passage is none too clear.
48. The last clause is obscure in the text.
49. The passage is obscure.
50. "might" supplied.

51. The negative is supplied.
52. Possibly, "in some form of courtesy."
53. Literally, "By some touch of some trifle at some tale's end."
54. "Fear" is an emendation by Morris; the clause is obscure.
55. The correct hunting term for "the fattest."
56. Cut up.
57. Probably at the side of the neck, or on the brisket.
58. Probably at the hollow of the breast bone.
59. The gullet probably.
60. The *schyre* is presumably the "arber"; though in l. 2256 it appears to be the skin of the neck or nape.
61. i.e. the entrails, with the gullet knotted to prevent the filth from escaping.
62. This titbit is sometimes called a part of the numbles.
63. A choice cut; hence, capriciously, our humble-pie.
64. A bit of the offal for the crows.
65. Literally "upon."
66. Possessive uncertain.
67. A drink ratifies the agreement—as before.
68. A call for collecting the hounds.
69. The tough skin of the flanks.
70. These last five words are rashly supplied by the translator. For several lines here the construction is unclear.
71. hounds.
72. The proper piercing spot in the chest.
73. Present and past are oddly mixed in this stanza, as often in the poem. This time they have been normalized.
74. The horn-blowing for the game's death.
75. cut up.
76. cutlets.
77. Two words not clear.
78. Translating *largesse* as "largeness."
79. A guess for *stollen*.
80. The line is not clear; literally, perhaps, "third time, throw best."
81. Word obscure.
82. small hound.

83. twists.
84. Unploughed strip by woodside.
85. pack.
86. headdress, caul.
87. These two words supplied by Morris.
88. Reading *frynges* for MS. *fynGRES*; or we may keep the text and translate, "wrought, embroidered by fingers."
89. The note that recalled all the dogs.
90. Noise of the whole band.
91. That is, in a barrel of sand.
92. This passage is none too clear.