

Wace  
The “Arthurian” Portion  
of the Roman de Brut

translated by  
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Constantine came to Totnes, and many a stout knight with him—there was not one but was worthy of the kingship. The host set forth towards London, and sent messages in every part, bidding the Britons to their aid, for as yet they were too fearful to come from their secret places. When the Britons heard these tidings they drew, thick as rain, from the woodlands and the mountain, and came before the host in troops and companies. To make short a long matter, these marched so far and wrought such deeds that in the end they altogether discomfited those evil men who had done such sore mischief to the land. After these things they held a great council at Cirencester, commanding thereto all the lords and barons of the realm. In that place they chose Constantine as their king, with no long tarrying, none being so bold as to say him nay. So when they had ordained him king, they set the crown on his head with marvellous joy, and owned themselves as his men. Afterwards, by their counsel, Constantine took to wife a dame who was come of gentle Roman blood. On this lady he begat three sons. The eldest—whom the king named Constant—he caused to be nourished at Winchester, and there he made him to be vowed a monk. The second son was called Aurelius, and his surname Ambrosius. Lastly was born Uther, and it was he whose days were longest in the land. These two varlets were held in ward by Gosselyn, the archbishop.

So long as Constantine lived the realm had rest and peace; but he died before his time had come, for he reigned but twelve short years. There was a certain Pict of his household, a traitor, a foul felon, who for a great while had been about his person. I cannot tell the reason why he bore the king so mortal a grudge. This Pict took the king aside privily in an orchard, as though he would speak to him of some hidden matter. The king had no thought to keep himself from this false felon, who whilst he made seeming to speak in his master's ear, drew forth a knife

and smote him therewith so shrewdly that he died. Then he fled forth from the garden. But many a time have I heard tell that it was Vortigern who caused Constantine to be slain. Great was the sorrow the lords and all honest people made above their king, for the realm had now no prince, save only those children of so tender an age. They laid him in his tomb, but in no wise put him from remembrance. The whole realm assembled together that they might make to themselves a king. They doubted sorely which of the two young children they should choose, for of them they knew neither good nor ill, seeing they were but small and frail, and yet in their warden's charge. As to Constant, the eldest son, who was of more fitting years, they dared not to pluck the habit from his back, since all men deemed it shame and folly to hale him forth from his abbey. The council would have ordained one of the two children to be king had it not been for Vortigern, who arose before them all. This Vortigern came from Wales, and was earl in his own land. He was a strong knight of his body, exceeding rich in goods and kin. Very courteous was he of speech; right prudent in counsel; and long since had made straight the road that he coveted to tread. "What reason is here," said he, "for doubtfulness? There is nought else to do but to make this monk, Constant, our king. He is the rightful heir; his brothers are not long from the breast; neither is it fitting that the crown should be placed upon a stranger's head. Let us strip the gown boldly from his shoulders. I charge the sin upon my own soul. My hand alone shall draw him from the abbey, and set him before you as your king." But all the lords of the council kept silence, for a horrible thing it seemed in their eyes that a monk should wear the mantle of a king. Vortigern, purposing evil in his heart, took horse, and rode swiftly to Winchester. He sought Constant at the abbey, praying the prior of his courtesy that he might speak with him in the parlour. "Constant," said he, "thy father is dead, and men seek to bestow his throne upon thy brothers. Such honour is not seemly, for thine is the crown and seat. If thou bearest me love and affianced, and for thy part wilt promise to make richer all the riches that are mine, on my part I will free thee from these sullen rags and array thee in the purple and ermine of a king. Choose now between this monastery and the heritage that is thine own." Very desirous was Constant of the lordship, and little love had he for his abbey. Right weary was he of choir and

psalter, and lightly and easily he made him ready to be gone, He pledged oath and faith to all that Vortigern required, and after he had so done Vortigern took him with a strong hand from the monastery, none daring to gainsay his deed. When Vortigern was assured of his fealty, he caused Constant to put off the monk's serge, and clothe him in furs and rich raiment. He carried him to London, and sat him in his father's chair, though not with the voice and welcome of the people. The archbishop who should have anointed the king with oil was dead, neither was any bishop found to give him unction, or to put his hand to the business. It was Vortigern alone who took the crown and set it on his head. This king had no unction nor blessing, save from the hand of Vortigern alone.

Constant reigned in his father's stead. He who had betrayed the commandment of God, was not one to hold his realm in surety; and thus he came to an evil end. Sorrow not thereat. The man who sells his master with a kiss may not hope to spend the wages of his sin. Vortigern held Constant and his senarchy in the hollow of his hand. The king did all according to his pleasure, and granted freely to his every need. Very quickly, by reason of divers matters, Vortigern perceived that the king knew but little of the world, since he was nourished in a cloister. He remembered that the two princes were of tender age. He saw that the mighty lords of the realm were dead, that the people were in sore trouble and unrest, and judged that the place and time were come. Mark now the cunning craft with which he set about to take his seisin of the realm. "Sire," said he, "I have learned and would bring to your knowledge that the sea folk are gathered together from Norway, and from the country of the Danes. Since our knights are few in number, and because of the weakness of the land, they purpose to descend upon the kingdom, and ravish and spoil your cities. Draw now together thy men, to guard the realm and thee. Set food within the strong places, and keep well thy towers. Above all, have such fear of traitors that thy castles are held of none save those true men who will hold them to the death. If you act not after this counsel right speedily there must reign another king." "I have granted," answered Constant, "everything to thy hand, and have done all according to thy will. Take now this fresh burthen upon thee, for thou art wiser than I. I give you all the realm to thy keeping, so that none shall ravage it or burn. Cities and manors; goods and treasure; they

are thine as constable. Thy will is my pleasure. Do swiftly that which it is seemly should be done." Vortigern was very subtle. None knew better how to hide away his greed. After he had taken the strong towers, the treasure, and the riches to himself, he went again before the king. "Sire," said he, "if it seem good to the king, my counsel would be that he should send to the Picts of Scotland to seek of them horsemen and sergeants to have with him about his household. In that place where the battle is perilous we can call them to our aid. Through these Picts and their kindred we shall hear the talk of the outland men. They will parley between us and these Danes, and serve as embassy between us and our foes." "Do," replied the king, "at thy pleasure. Bring of these Picts as many as you wish. Grant them as guerdon what you deem befits. Do all which it is seemly should be done."

When Vortigern had taken to himself the walled cities, and gathered together the treasure, he sent such messages to the Picts as he desired, so that they came according to his will. Vortigern received them with much honour, giving them greatly to drink, so that they lived in mirth and in solace, altogether drunken and content. Of his bounty Vortigern granted such wages, and spoke so sweetly in the ear of each, that there was not one amongst them who did not cry loudly in the hearing of any who would hearken, that Vortigern was more courteous and of higher valiance than the king—yea, that he was worthy to sit upon the king's throne, or in a richer chair than his. Vortigern rejoiced greatly at these words. He made much of his Picts, and honoured them more sweetly than ever before. On a day when they had sat long at their cups, and all were well drunken, Vortigern came amongst them in the hall. He saluted them sadly, showing the semblance of a woeful man. "Right dear are you to my heart;" said he, "very willingly have I served you, and right gladly would I serve you still, if but the wealth were mine. But this realm belongs altogether to the king. Nought can I bestow, nothing is mine to spend, save only that I render him account of every doit. So little revenue is mine of this land, that it becomes me to seek my fortune beyond the sea. I have set my whole intent to serve my king to the utmost of my might, and for recompense have of him such estate that I can maintain scarce forty sergeants to my household. If all goes well with me we may meet again, for I commend me to your goodwill. This weighs

heavily upon me that I must leave you now. But, beggar as I am, I can do no other; only I entreat you this, that if you hear my business has come to a fair end, you will of a surety seek my love again." For all his piteous speech Vortigern was false, and had falsely spoken, but those who had well drunken gave faith to his words. They held for gospel truth what this vile traitor had told them. They murmured together amongst themselves: "What then shall become of us, since we lose so generous a lord? Let us rather slay this mad king, this shaveling, and raise Vortigern to his seat. Worthy is he of crown and kingdom; so on him we will cast the lot. Too long already have we suffered this renegade monk, whom now we serve." Forthwith they entered in the king's chamber, and laying hands upon him, slew him where he stood. They smote the head from off his shoulders, and bare it to Vortigern in his lodging, crying, "Look now, and see by what bands we bind you to this realm. The king is dead, and we forbid you to go from amongst us. Take now the crown, and become our king." Vortigern knew again the head of his lord. He made semblance of bitter sorrow, but rejoiced privily in his heart, though of his cunning he hid his gladness from the eyes of men. To cover his falseness the deeper, Vortigern called the Romans together in council. He struck the heads from off those traitors, leaving not one to escape alive. But many a citizen was persuaded, and some said openly, that these murderers would not have laid hands upon the king, neither looked evilly upon him, nor thought to do him mischief, had not Vortigern required of them such deed.

When the death of the king was told to them who held the two brothers in ordinance, they were assured that he who slew the king would not scruple to serve the princes in the self-same fashion. For fear of Vortigern they took Aurelius and Uther, and fled beyond the sea to Little Britain, commending themselves to the pity of Budes, the king. Since they were of his kin King Budes welcomed them right courteously. He received them to his table with great honour, and bestowed upon them many rich gifts. Now having taken to himself the strong places, the castles, and the cities of the kingdom, Vortigern proclaimed him to be king with marvellous pride. His joy was the less because the realm was harassed by the Picts, who would avenge their kindred, whom he had slain with the sword. Moreover he was sorely troubled, since it was

noised abroad that the two princes were gathering a company together, purposing in a short space to return to their own land. The rumour ran that the barons were resolved to join this great host, and to own the brothers as their lords, so that in a while Vortigern would be utterly destroyed. Many there were who told of such things.

Whilst men talked thus, there came to a haven in Kent three galleys, bearing a strange people to the land. These folk were fair of face and comely of person. They owned as lords Hengist and Horsa, two brethren of mighty stature, and of outland speech. The tidings came to Vortigern at Canterbury, where he abode that day, that a foreign folk from a far country had drawn to the realm in ships. The king sent messages of peace and goodwill to these strangers, praying that be they whom they might, they would come quickly and speak with him in his palace, and return swiftly to their own place. When they received his commandment they sought him with the more surety. They came into the king's presence and did reverence, with a proud bearing. Vortigern looked closely upon the brethren. Shapely were they of body, bright of visage, taller and more comely than any youth he knew. "From what land have you come," inquired the king "and on what errand? Tell me now the place of your birth." The elder and the mightier of the brethren, called Hengist, made answer in the name of all his fellows. "We be of a country called Saxony," said he, "there were we born and there we abode. If thou wilt learn the chance we seek upon the sea, I will answer truly, if so it be according to thy will." "Say on," said the king, "and hide nothing. No harm shall come to thee of this." "Fair king," answered Hengist, "gentle sire, I know not if I can make it plain. Our race is of a fertile stock, more quick and abounding than any other you may know, or whereof you have heard speak. Our folk are marvellously fruitful, and the tale of the children is beyond measure. Women and men are more in number than the sand, for the greater sorrow of those amongst us who are here. When our people are so many that the land may not sustain nor suffice them, then the princes who rule the realm assemble before them all the young men of the age of fifteen years and upwards, for such is our use and custom. From out of these they choose the most valiant and the most strong, and, casting lots, send them forth from the country, so that they may travel into divers lands, seeking fiefs and houses of their own.

Go out they must, since the earth cannot contain them; for the children came more thickly than the beasts which pasture in the fields. Because of the lot that fell upon us we have bidden farewell to our homes, and putting our trust in Mercury, the god has led us to your realm." When the king heard the name of Mercury as the god of their governance, he inquired what manner of men these were, and of the god in whom they believed. "We have," answered Hengist, "gods a many, to whom it is our bounden duty to raise altars. These gods have to name Phoebus and Saturn, Jupiter and Mercury. Many another god we worship, according to the wont of our country, and as our fathers have told us. But above all gods we keep in chiefest honour Mercury, who in our own tongue is called Woden. Our fathers held this god in such reverence that they devoted the fourth day of the week to his service. Because of their hope in Woden they called his feast Wednesday, and yet it bears his name. By the side of this god of whom I have spoken, we set our goddess Freya, who is held in worship of us all. To show forth their love, our fathers consecrated the sixth day to her service, and on the high authority of the past we call Friday by Freya's name." "Ill is your faith," replied the king, "and in an evil god you put your trust. This thing is grievous to me, but nevertheless I welcome your coming right gladly. You are valiant men, as I deem, accustomed to harness, and so you will be my servants, very willingly will I make you of my household, and of wealth you shall find no lack. Certain thieves from Scotland torment me grievously at this time, burning my land and preying on my cities. So it be God's pleasure, your coming may turn to my rich profit, for by His aid and yours, I look to destroy these same Picts and Scots. For from that land come and return these thieves who so harass and damage my realm. You shall find me no grudging master, and when I am avenged upon them, you will have no complaint to find with bounty or wages or gifts." In this manner the Saxons came from out their ships, and the king's court was strengthened by a mighty company. Now in no long time afterwards the Picts entered the king's realm, with a great host, burning, wasting, and pilling at their will. When they would have passed the Humber, the king, who was told thereof, hastened to meet them with his lords, the Britons, and these Saxons. The hosts came together, and the battle was grim and lasting, for many were discomfited to death that day. The Picts, doubting

nothing but that they would gain the victory as they had done before, carried themselves hardily, and struck fiercely with the sword. They fought thus stoutly, and endured so painfully, since they were shamed to do less than was their wont. But their evil custom was broken, for the Saxons gained possession of the field. Since by these Saxons, and their aid, Vortigern was delivered of this peril, he gave them their wages, and added thereto of his bounty. On Hengist he bestowed fair manors, and goods, and great riches, so that love lasted between them for a long space.

When Hengist saw that the king might in no wise pass him by, he sought to turn this to his own profit, as was his undoubted right. He knew well how to flatter the king to his own advantage by specious words. On a day when the king's heart was merry, Hengist opened out what was in his mind. "Thou hast given me many honours," said he, "and bestowed on me plenteously of thy wealth. I am not ungrateful, but am thy servant and will remain thy servant, striving to serve thee better in the future even than I have striven in the past. But the longer I am about the king's person, and the more closely I know his court, the more clearly I see and hear and am assured that thou hast not the love of one only baron of thy realm. Each bears thee hate; each nurses his own grudge. I cannot speak, since nothing I know, of those children who have stolen away the love of thine own house. They are the lawful lords of thy barons, and these are but loyal to the sons of their king. Within a little they will come from over sea, and spoil thee of this realm. Not one of thy men but purposes to do thee a mischief. Evil they wish thee, and evil they hope will be thine end. Horribly art thou abhorred; horribly art thou menaced; for evil is on thy track, and evil purposes shortly to pull thee down. I have considered how best I may help thee in this peril. If it pleases the king to bring my wife and children and all that is mine from my own land, the sweeter hostages will be his, and the more faithful will be my service. So diligently will I keep my trust that no foe, however bold, shall spoil thee of one foot of thy heritage. Moreover, sire, it is now a great while since I became thy servant, and many bear malice against me by reason of thy love. Because of their wrath I dare not tarry at night outside my house, nor go beyond the walls. For this cause, sire, so it may please thee, it would become thy honour to grant me some town or

tower or strong place, where I may lie in peace of nights, when I am wearied in the king's quarrels When thy enemies mark the generosity of the king, they will cease to annoy so large a lord." "As to the folk of thine house," made answer the king, "send thou at thy pleasure, and receive them with all worship. The cost of their sustenance shall be mine. For the rest thou art not of the faith. Pagan thou art, and no Christian man. Men, therefore, will deem that I do very wrongfully should I grant thee the other gift you require." "Sire," replied Hengist, "I would of thy bounty a certain manor. I pray thee of thy courtesy to add thereto so much land—I seek no more—as I may cover with a hide, and as may be compassed therewith. It will be but the hide of a bull, but for the gift's sake I shall go the more surely." Vortigern granted the boon, and Hengist thanked his master. He made ready his messenger, and sent for his kindred from oversea. He took the hide of a bull, and cutting it as small as he might, made one thong of the whole skin. With this thong he compassed a great spoil of land, and gathering good masons together, built thereon a fair castle. In his own tongue he called this place Vancaster, which being interpreted means Thong Castle, forasmuch as the place was compassed by a thong. Now it is hight by many Lancaster, and of these there are few who remember why it was first called after this name.

When Vancaster was well builded there drew near eighteen war galleys, bearing to land Hengist's kindred, together with knights and footmen. With these came Hengist's daughter, Rowena by name, a maiden yet unwed, and most marvellously fair. After all things were made ready Hengist prayed the king to lodge with him awhile, that he might delight himself with meat and drink, and view the new folk of his household, and the castle that he had builded. And the king was pleased to hearken unto his prayer. The king rode to Vancaster with a mean company, since he would not have it noised about the land. He marked the castle and its towers, which were both strong and fair, and much he praised the work. The knights who were freshly come from sea he took to his service, and gave of his bounty. At the feast that day men ate and drank so greatly that for the most part they were drunken. Then came forth from her chamber Rowena, Hengist's daughter, sweetly arrayed and right dainty to see, bearing in her hand a brimming cup of wine. She

kneeled before Vortigern very simply, and saluted him courteously after the fashion of her land, saying, "Washael, lord king." The king, who knew nothing of her language, sought the meaning of the maiden's words. This was made plain to him by Redic, the Breton, a fair scholar, who—as it is related—was the first to become apt in the Saxon tongue. He answered swiftly, "The maiden saluted thee courteously, calling thee lord. It is the wont of her people, sire, that when friend drinks with friend, he who proffers the cup cries, 'Washael,' and that he who receives answers in turn, 'Drinkhael.' Then drinks he the half of this loving cup, and for joy and for friendship of him who set it in his hand, kisses the giver with all fair fellowship." When he had learned this thing, the king said "Drinkhael," and smiled upon the damsel. Rowena tasted of the cup, and placed it in the king's hand, and in taking it from the maiden the king kissed her sweetly. By the Saxon were we first taught in this land to greet, saying, "Washael," and afterwards to answer, "Drinkhael;" to drain the cup in full measure, or to share it with one other; to kiss together when the cup was passed. The custom was commenced as I have shown you, and we observe this ritual yet, as well I know, in the rich feasts of our country.

Now the maiden was gracious of body, and passing fair of face; dainty and tall, and plump of her person. She stood before the king in a web of fine raiment, and ravished his eyes beyond measure. She filled the king's cup willingly, and was altogether according to his wish. So merry was the king, so well had he drunken, that he desired the damsel in his heart. The devil, who has led many a man astray, snared Vortigern with such sorcery, that he became mad with love to possess Hengist's daughter. He was so fast in the devil's net that he saw neither shame nor sin in this love. He denied not his hope, though the maid was of pagans born. Vortigern prayed Hengist that he would grant him the maid in marriage, and Hengist accorded her with goodwill. But first he took counsel with his brother and his friends. These praised the marriage, but counselled Hengist to give the damsel only on such covenant that the king should deliver him Kent as her dowry. The king coveted the maiden so greatly, he doted so dearly, that he made her his queen. She was a pagan woman, and became his wife according to the rites of the paynim. No priest blessed that marriage, there was neither Mass nor prayer. So

hot was the king's love that he espoused her the same evening, and bestowed on Hengist Kent as her dowry.

Hengist went into Kent, and seized all the country into his hand. He drove forth Garagon, the governor, who had heard no word of the business. Vortigern showed more credence and love to the heathen than to christened men; so that these gave him again his malice, and abandoned his counsel. His own sons held him in hatred, forsaking his fellowship because of the pagans. For this Vortigern had married a wife, who long was dead and at peace. On this first wife he had begotten three sons, these only. The first was named Vortimer, the second Passent, and the third Vortiger. Rated was this king by all the barons of his realm, and of all his neighbours. His very kindred held him in abhorrence. He came to an evil end, for he died in his shame, and the pagans he befriended with him. "Sire," said Hengist to the king, "men hold thee in hatred by reason of me; and because of thy love they bear me malice also. I am thy father, and thou my son, since thou wert pleased to ask my daughter for thy wife. It is my privilege to counsel my king, and he should hearken to my counsel, and aid me to his power. If thou wilt make sure thy throne, and grieve those who use thee despitely, send now for Octa my son, and for my cousin Ebissa. There are not two more cunning captains than these, nor two champions to excel them in battle. Give these captains of thy land towards Scotland, for from thence comes all the mischief. They will deal with thy foes in such fashion that never more shall they take of thy realm; but for the rest of thy days we shall live in peace beyond the Humber." Then answered the king, "Do what you will, and send messages for such men as it is good for us to have." At the king's word Hengist sent messages to his son and nephew, who hastened to his help with a fleet of three hundred galleys. There was not a knight of their land, who would serve for guerdon, but they carried him across the water. After these captains were come, in their turn, from day to day, came many another; this one with four vessels, this other with five, or six, or seven, or eight, or nine, or ten. So thickly did the heathen wend, and so closely did they mingle with the Christians, that you might scarcely know who was a christened man and who was not. The Britons were sorely troubled at this matter, and prayed the king not to put such affiance in the outland folk, for they wrought much mischief. They

complained that already were too many pagans in the land, working great shame and villainy to the people. "Separate thyself from amongst them," they said, "at whatever cost, and send all, or as many as may be, from the realm." Vortigern made answer that he might not do this thing. He had entreated the Saxons to the land, and they served him as true men. So when the barons hearkened to his words they went their way to Vortimer.

The Britons assembled themselves together, and taking the road to London, chose Vortimer—the eldest of the king's three sons—to be their lord. The king, who was assotted on his wife, clave to her kindred, and would not forsake the heathen. Vortimer defied the Saxons, and drove them from the walled cities, chasing and tormenting them very grievously. He was a skilful captain, and the strife was right sore between Vortimer and the Britons, against his father and the Saxons. Four times the hosts met together, and four times Vortimer vanquished his foe. The first battle was fought upon the banks of the Darent. The second time the hosts strove together was upon the ford near Aylesford. In this place Vortiger, the king's son, and Horsa the Saxon, contended so fiercely in combat, body to body, that each did the other to death, according to his desire. The other battle was arrayed on the sea shore in Kent. Passing grim was this third battle, for the ships fought together upon the water. The Saxons withdrew before the Britons, so that from beyond the Humber even to Kent they were deceived in their hope. The heathen fled in their galleys to an islet called Thanet. The Britons assailed them in this fastness, and so long as it was day, harassed them with arrows and quarrels, with ships and with barges. They rejoiced loudly, for the pagans were caught in a corner, and those not slain by the sword were fain to die of hunger. For this reason, the Britons raised a mighty tumult and shouting, when they trapped their enemy in the Isle of Thanet. When the Saxons were assured that worse would befall them, save they departed from the realm, they prayed Vortigern to go in embassy to Vortimer his son, persuading him to give them safe conduct from the land, and not to do them further mischief. Vortigern, who was in their company and would in no wise depart from their fellowship, went to his son to procure such truce as the Saxons required. Whilst he was about this business the Saxons entered in their galleys, and with sail

and oar put out to sea as swiftly as they were able. Such was their haste to escape that they left their wives and sons with the Britons, returning to their own country in exceeding fear. After the Saxons had all forsaken the realm, and the Britons were assured of peace, Vortimer gave again to every man that of which the heathen had spoiled him. To build anew the churches, and to declare the law of God, which had fallen into disuse amongst the people because of Hengist and his heathendom, St. Germanus came to Britain, sent by St. Romanus, the Apostle of Rome. With him came St. Louis of Troyes. These two fair bishops, Germanus of Auxerre and Louis of Troyes, crossed the sea to prepare the way of the Lord. By them were the tables of the law redelivered, and men converted again to the faith. They brought many a man to salvation; many a miracle, many a virtue, did God show in their persons, and many a country was the sweeter for their lives.

When the law of God was restored, and Britain made again a Christian land, hearken now what foul work was done by treason and by envy. Rowena, that evil stepmother, caused Vortimer, her husband's son, to be poisoned, by reason of the hatred she bore him, since he chased Hengist from the realm. After Vortimer was certified that he must die, and that no physician might cure him of his hurt, he called together all his barons, and delivered unto them the treasure which he had greatly gathered. Listen well to that he prayed his friends. "Knights," said he, "take into your service warriors not a few and grudge not the sergent his wages. Hold one to another, and maintain the land against these Saxons. That my work may not be wasted, and avenged upon those who live, do this thing for their terror. Take my body, and bury it upon the shore. Raise above me such a tomb, so large and lasting, that it may be seen from far by all who voyage on the sea. To that coast where my body is buried, living or dead, they shall not dare to come." Having spoken in this fashion the gentle king died, finishing his course. His body was borne to London, and in London he was lain to his rest. The barons raised no barrow upon the shore, as with his dying speech he had bidden them.

After Vortimer's death, the Britons made Vortigern their king, even as he had been in days before. At the entreaties of his wife he sent messages to his father-in-law, Hengist. Him he prayed to return to the

kingdom, but with a small company, so that the Britons should not give heed to the matter; for since Vortimer his son was dead, there was no need of a host. Hengist took ship gladly, but with him he carried three hundred thousand men in mail. For dread of the Britons, he made him ready as never he had done before. When the king learned that Hengist drew to land with so mighty a host, he was altogether fearful, and knew no word to say. The Britons assembled together in great wrath, promising amongst themselves that they would join them in battle, and throw the heathen from the realm. Hengist was cunning and felon of heart. He sent false messages to the king, praying for a truce and love-day to be granted, that they might speak together as friend with friend. Peace above all he desired; peace he ensued; peace was his love, and he sought her with tears. Nothing was further from his wish than war, and he would rather be banished from the realm than remain by force of arms. It was for the Britons to elect those whom they willed to stay, and for the others they would return whence they came.

The Britons granted the love-day, and the two peoples took pledges, one of the other; but who can trust the oath of a liar? A time was appointed when this council should be holden. The king sent messages to Hengist that he must come with few companions; and Hengist plighted troth right willingly. Moreover, it was commanded that none should bear weapons at the council, for fear that men should pass from words to blows. The two parties met together near the Abbey of Ambresbury, on the great Salisbury plain. The day was the kalends of May. Hengist had taught his comrades, and warned them privily, that they should come each with a sharp, two-edged knife hidden in his hose. He bade them to sit in this Parliament, and hearken to the talk; but when he cried, "Nimad eowre seax" (which being interpreted means "Pluck forth your knives," and would not be understood of the Britons), they were to snatch out their daggers and make each a dead man of his neighbour. Now when the council was met, and men were mingled together, the naked Briton near by the false heathen, Hengist cried loudly, "Nimad eowre seax." The Saxons, at his word, drew forth the knives from their hose, and slew that man sitting at their side. Hengist was seated very close the king. He held the king fast by his mantle, so that this murder passed him by. But those who gripped the knives thrust the keen blade through cloak and

mantle, breast and bowels, till there lay upon back or belly in that place nigh upon four hundred and sixty men of the richest and most valiant lords of the kingdom. Yet some won out and escaped with their lives, though they had nought to defend their bodies save the stones.

Eldof, Earl of Gloucester, got a great club in his right hand, which he found lying at his feet, though little he recked who had carried it to the council. He defended his body stoutly with this mighty staff, striking and smiting down, till he had slain fully sixty and ten of the pagan. A mighty champion was he, and of rich worth. He clave a path through the press, without taking a wound; for all the knives which were flung at his body he escaped with not a hurt to the flesh. He won at the end to his horse, which was right strong and speedy, and riding swiftly to Gloucester, shut himself fast in his city and victualled tower. As to Vortigern, the Saxons would have slain him with his batons, but Hengist stood between them, crying, "Harm not the king, for nothing but good have I received at his hand, and much has he tolled for my profit. How then shall I suffer my daughter's lord to die such a death! Rather let us hold him to ransom, and take freely of his cities and walled places, in return for his life." They, therefore, slew not the king, but binding him fast with fetters of iron, kept him close in bonds for so long a space that he swore to render them all that they would. In quittance of his ransom, and to come forth from prison, Vortigern granted Sussex, Essex, and Middlesex to Hengist as his fief, besides that earldom of Kent which he had held before. To remember this foul treason, knives were long hight seax amongst the English; but names alter as the world moves on, and men recall no more the meaning of the past. In the beginning the word was used to rebuke the treason that was done. When the story of the seax was forgotten, men spoke again of their knives, and gave no further thought to the shame of their forefathers.

When Vortigern was a naked man he fled beyond the Severn, and passing deeply into Wales, dwelt there, taking counsel with his friends. He caused his wise clerks and magicians to be summoned, inquiring of them in what fashion he should maintain his right, and what they would counsel him to do, were he assailed of a mightier than himself. This he asked because he feared greatly the two brothers of Constant, who were yet living, and knew not how to keep him from their hate. These

sorcerers bade him to build so mighty a tower, that never at any time might it be taken by force, nor beaten down by any engine devised by the wit of man. When this strong castle was furnished and made ready, he should shut himself within, and abide secure from the malice of his foes. This pleased the king, who searched throughout the land to make choice of a fitting place to raise so strong a keep. Such a place he met, altogether according to his mind, on mount Snowdon. He brought masons together, the best that might be found, and set them to the work as quickly as they were able. The masons began to build, getting stones ready and making them fast with mortar, but all the work that the builders raised by day, adown it fell to the ground by night. They laboured therefore with the more diligence, but the higher they builded the tower the greater was its fall, to the very foundations they had digged. So it chanced for many days, till not one stone remained upon another. When the king knew this marvel, and perceived that his travail came in nowise to an end, he took counsel of his wizards. "By my faith," said he, "I wonder sorely what may be amiss with my tower, since the earth will not endure it. Search and inquire the reason of this thing; and how these foundations shall be made sure." Then the magicians by their lots and divinations—though, for that matter, it may well be that they lied—devised that the king should seek a man born of no earthly father; him he must slay, and taking of his blood, slake and temper therewith the mortar of the work, so that the foundations should be made fast, and the castle might endure. Thereat the king sent messengers throughout all the land to seek such a man, and commanded that immediately he were found he should be carried to the court. These messengers went two by two upon their errand. They passed to and fro about the realm, and entered into divers countries, inquiring of all people, at the king's bidding, where he might be hid. But for all their labour and diligence they learned nothing. Now it came to pass that two of the king's embassy went their road until they came together to the town called Caermerdin. A great company of youths and children was gathered before the gate at the entrance to the city, and the messengers stayed awhile to mark their play. Amongst those who disported themselves at this gate were two varlets, named Merlin and Dinabus. Presently the two youths began to chide and jangle, and were passing wroth the one with

the other. One of the twain spake ill of his fellow, reproaching him because of his birth. "Hold thy peace, Merlin," said Dinabus, "it becomes you not to strive with me, whose race is so much better than thine own. Be heedful; for I know of such an evil matter that it were well not to tempt me beyond my power. Speak then no more against my lineage. For my part I am come from earls and kings; but if you set out to tell over your kindred, you could not name even your father's name. You know it not, nor shall learn it ever; for how may a son tell his father's name when a father he has never had?" Now the king's messengers, who were in quest of such a sireless man, when they heard this bitter jibe of the varlet, asked of those around concerning the youth who had never seen his sire. The neighbours answered that the lad's father was known of none; yea, that the very mother who had borne him in her womb, knew nothing of the husbandman who had sown the seed. But if his father was hidden, all the world knew of the mother who nourished him. Daughter was she to that King of Dimetia, now gone from Wales. Nun she was of her state, a gentlewoman of right holy life, and lodged in a convent within the walls of their city.

When the messengers heard these tidings, they went swiftly to the warden of the city, adjuring him, by the king's will, to lay hands upon Merlin—that sireless man—and carry him straightway to the king, together with the lady, his mother. The warden durst not deny their commandment. He delivered Merlin and his mother to the embassy, who led them before the king. The king welcomed the twain with much honour, and spake kindly unto them. "Lady," said he, "answer me truly. By none, save by thee, can I know who was the father of Merlin, thy son." The nun bowed her head. After she had pondered for a little, she made reply, "So God have me in His keeping, as I know nothing and saw nothing of him who begat this varlet upon me. Never have I heard, never may I tell, if he were verily man by whom I had my child. But this I know for truth, and to its truth will I pledge my oath. At that time when I was a maid growing tall, I cannot tell whether it was a ghostly man, but something came often to my chamber, and kissed me very close. By night and by day this presence sought me, ever alone; but always in such fashion as not to be perceived. As a man he spake soft words in my ear; as a man he dealt with me. But though many a time he had speech with

me, ever he kept himself close. He came so often about me, so long were his kisses on my mouth, that he had his way, and I conceived; but whether he were man in no wise have I known. I had of him this varlet; but more I know not, and more I will not say."

Now the king had a certain clerk, named Malgantium, whom he held for very wise. He sent for this learned clerk, and told over to him the whole matter, that he might be assured whether things could chance as this woman had said. The clerk made answer, "In books I have found it written that a certain order of spirit ranges between the moon and our earth. If you seek to learn of the nature of these spirits, they are of the nature partly of man, and partly of a loftier being. These demons are called incubi. Their home and region is the air, but this warm world is their resort. It is not in their power to deal man great evil, and they can do little more mischief than to trick and to annoy. However they know well how to clothe themselves in human shape, for their nature lends itself marvellously to the deceit. Many a maid has been their sport, and in this guise has been deceived. It may well be that Merlin was begotten by such a being, and perchance is of a demon born." "King," cried Merlin suddenly, "you brought me here; tell me now what you would, and wherefore you have sent after me." "Merlin," answered the king, "know it you shall. Hearken diligently, so shall you learn of all. I commenced to build a high tower, and got mortar together, and masons to set one stone upon another; but all the work that the builders raised by day, adown it fell to the ground, and was swallowed up of night. I know not if you have heard tell thereof. The day has not so many hours to labour, as the night has hours to destroy; and greatly has my substance been wasted in this toll. My councillors tell me that my tower may never stand tall, unless its stones and lime are slaked with thy blood—the blood of a fatherless man." "Lord God," cried Merlin, "believe not that my blood will bind your tower together. I hold them for liars who told over such a gab. Bring these prophets before me who prophesy so glibly of my blood; and liars as they are, liars I will prove them to be." The king sent for his sorcerers, and set them before Merlin. After Merlin had regarded them curiously, one by one, "Masters," said he, "and mighty magicians, tell us now I pray you the reason why the king's work faileth and may not stand. If you may not show me why the tower is swallowed up of

the earth, how can your divinations declare to you that my blood will cause it to endure! Make plain to us now what troubles the foundation, so that the walls tumble so often to the ground; and when you have certified this thing, show to us clearly how the mischief may be cured. If you are not willing to declare who labours secretly to make the house to fall, how shall it be credited that my blood will bind the stones fast? Point out this troubler to the king, and then cry the remedy." But all the wizards kept silence, and answered Merlin never a word. When Merlin saw them abashed before him, he spake to the king, and said, "Sire, give ear to me. Beneath the foundations of your tower there lies a pool, both great and deep, and by reason of this water your building falleth to the ground. Right easily may this be assured. Bid your men to delve. You will then see why the tower was swallowed up, and the truth will be proven." The king bade therefore that the earth should be digged, and the pool was revealed as Merlin had established. "Masters and great magicians," cried Merlin, "hearken once more. You who sought to mix your mortar with my blood, say what is hidden in this pond." But all the enchanters kept silence and were dumb; yea, for good or ill they made answer never a word. Merlin turned him again to the king. He beckoned with his hand to the king's servants, saying, "Dig now trenches, to draw off the water from this pool. At the bottom shall be found two hollow stones, and two dragons sleeping in the stones. One of these dragons is white, and his fellow, crimson as blood." Thereat the king marvelled greatly, and the trenches were digged as Merlin had commanded. When the water was carried about the fields, and stood low in the pool, two dragons got them on their feet, and envisaged each the other very proudly. Passing eager was their contention, and they strove together right grievously. Well might be seen the foam within their mouths, and the flames that issued from their jaws. The king seated himself upon the bank of the pool. He prayed Merlin to show him the interpretation of these dragons which met together so furiously. Merlin told the king what these matters betokened, as you have oft-times heard. These dragons prophesied of kings to come, who would yet hold the realm in their charge. I say no more, for I fear to translate Merlin's Prophecies, when I cannot be sure of the interpretation thereof. It is good to keep my lips from speech, since the issue of events may make my gloss a lie.

The king praised Merlin greatly, and esteemed him for a true prophet. He inquired of the youth in what hour he should die, and by what means he would come to his end. For this king was marvellously fearful of death. "Beware," said Merlin, "beware of the sons of Constantine. By them you shall taste of death. Already have they left Armorica with high hearts, and even now are upon the sea. Be certified of this, that their fleet of fourteen galleys comes to land on the morrow. Much evil hast thou done to them; much evil will they do to thee, and avenge them of their wrongs. In an ill day you betrayed their brother to his death: in an ill day you set the crown on your head; in an ill day, to your own most bitter loss, you entreated this Saxon heathenry to your help. You are as a man against whom arrows are loosed, both this side and that; and I know not whether your shield should be arrayed to left or to right. On the one road the Saxon host draws near, eager to do you a mischief. Along this other comes the rightful heirs, to pluck the realm from your hand, the crown from your head, and to exact the price of their brother's blood. If you yet may flee, escape quickly; for the brethren approach, and that speedily. Of these brethren Aurelius shall first be king, but shall also die the first, by poison. Uther Pendragon, his brother, will sit within his chair. He will hold the realm in peace; but he, too, will fall sick before his time, and die, by reason of the brewage of his friends. Then Arthur of Cornwall, his son, like to a boar grim in battle, will utterly devour these false traitors, and destroy thy kinsfolk from the land. A right valiant knight, and a courteous, shall he be, and all his enemies shall he set beneath his feet." When Merlin had come to an end, he departed from Vortigern, and went his way. On the morrow, with no longer tarrying, the navy of the brethren arrived at Totnes, and therein a great host of knights in their harness. The Britons assembled themselves together, and joined them to the host. They came forth from the lurking places whence they had fled, at that time Hengist harried them by mount and by dale, after he had slain the lords by felony, and destroyed their castles. At a great council the Britons did homage to Aurelius as their king. These tidings came to Vortigern in Wales, and he prepared to set his house in order. He fled to a strong castle, called Generth, and there made him ready, taking with him the most valiant of his men. This tower was on the banks of a fair running water, called by

the folk of that country the Wye. It stood high upon Mount Droac, in the land of Hergin, as testify the people of these parts. Vortigern furnished his fortress with a plenteous store of arms and engines, of food and sergeants. To keep himself the surer from his foes, he garnished the tower with all that wit might devise. The lords of the country, having joined themselves to the brethren, sought so diligently for King Vortigern, that in the end they arrayed them before the castle where he lay. They cast stones from their engines, and were ever about the gates, paining themselves grievously to take it, for they hated him beyond measure. Much cause had the brethren to nurse so bitter a grudge against Vortigern, since by guile and treason he had slain their brother Constant, and Constantine, their father, before him, as all men held to be the truth. Eldof, Earl of Gloucester, had done homage to Aurelius, and was with him in the host. Much he knew of this land of Wales. "Eldof," said Aurelius, "hast thou forgotten my father who cherished thee, and gave his faith to thee; and dost thou remember no more my brother who held thee so dear! These both honoured thee right willingly, with love and with reverence in their day. They were foully slain by the device of this tyrant, this cozener with oaths, this paymaster with a knife. We who are yet alive must bestir ourselves that we perish not by the same means. Let us think upon the dead, and take bitter vengeance on Vortigern for these wrongs." Aurelius and Eldof laced them in their mail. They made the wild fire ready and caused men to cast timber in the moat, till the deep fosse was filled. When this was done they flung wild fire from their engines upon the castle. The fire laid hold upon the castle; it spread to the tower, and to all the houses that stood about. The castle flared like a torch; the flames leaped in the sky; the houses tumbled to the ground. In that place the king was burned with fire, and all his household who fled to Generth with him. Neither dame nor damsel got her living from that pyre; and on the same day perished the king's wife, who was so marvellously fair.

When the new king had brought the realm into subjection to himself, he devised to seek the pagans, that he might deliver the country from their hand. Right fearful was Hengist to hear these tidings, and at once set forth for Scotland. He abandoned all his fiefs, and fled straightway beyond the Humber. He purposed to crave such aid and succour from

the Scots as would help him in his need, and made haste to get him to Scotland with all the speed he might. The king pursued him swiftly with his host, making forced marches day by day. On the road his power was increased by a great company of Britons; till with him was a multitude which no man could number, being innumerable as the sand of the sea. The king looked upon his realm, and saw it gnawed to the bone. None drave the plough, nor cast seed in the furrow. The castles and the walled cities were breached and ruined. He marked the villages blackened by fire, and the houses of God stripped bare as a peasant's hovel. The heathen pilled and wasted, but gathered neither corn into barns nor cattle within the byre. He testified that this should not endure, so he returned in safety from the battle.

When Hengist knew that the king followed closely after, and that fight he must, he strove to put heart and hardihood into the breasts of his fellows. "Comrades," said he, "be not dismayed by reason of this rabble. We know well enough what these Britons are, since they never stand before us. If but a handful go against them, not one will stay to fight. Many a time, with but a mean company, have I vanquished and destroyed them. If they be in number as the sand, the more honour is yours. A multitude such as this counts nothing. A host like theirs, led by a weak and foolish captain, what is it worth? These are a trembling folk, without a chief, and of them we should have little fear. The shepherd of these sheep is a child, who is yet too young to bear a spear, or carry harness on his back. For our part we are heroes and champions, proven in many a stour, fighting for our very lives, since for us there will be no other ransom. Now be confident and bold. Let our bodies serve us for castles and for wall. Be brave and strong, I say, for otherwise we are but dead men." When Hengist ceased heartening his comrades, the knights arrayed them for the battle. They moved against the Britons as speedily as their horses might bear them, for they hoped to find them naked and unready, and to take them unawares. The Britons so misdoubted their adversary that they watched in their armour, both day and night. As soon as the king knew that the heathen advanced to give battle, he ordered his host in a plain that seemed good for his purpose. He supported the spearmen with three thousand horsemen, clothed in mail, his own trusty vassals, who had come with him from Armorica. The

Welsh he made into two companies. The one part he set upon the hills, so that the Paynim might not climb there if they would. The other part he hid within the wood, to stay them if they sought shelter in the forest. For the rest he put every man into the plain, that it should be the more strongly held and defended. Now when he had arrayed the battle, and given his commandment to the captains, the king placed himself amidst the chosen men of his own household, those whom he deemed the most loyal to his person. He spoke apart with his friends concerning the battle. Earl Eldof was near the king's side that day, together with many another baron. "God," said Eldof, "what joy will be mine that hour when Hengist and I meet face to face, with none between us. I cannot forget the kalends of May, and that murder at Ambresbury, when he slew all the flower of our chivalry. Right narrowly escaped I from his net."

Whilst Eldof spake these reproachful words, making complaint of Hengist, the Saxons drew near the field, and sought to take it. With no long tarrying the battle was joined. What time the two hosts looked on each other they hastened together. There you might see the vassals striving, hand to hand. They fought body to body, those assailing, these defending. Mighty blows with the sword were given and received among them. Many a champion lay stark upon the ground, and the living passed over the bodies of the dead. Shields were hewn asunder; spears snapped like reeds; the wounded were trampled beneath men's feet, and many a warrior died that day. The Christians called on Christ, and the heathen answered, clamouring on their gods of clay. Like men the pagans bore them; but the Christians like heroes. The companies of the heathen flinched, giving ground on the field. The Britons pressed about them, redoubling their blows, so that the Saxons were discomfited, and turning their backs, strove no more.

When Hengist saw his champions turn their backs, like children, to the stroke, he fled to the town called Caerconan, where he was persuaded of shelter. The king followed fast after him, crying to the hunters, "On, on." Hengist heard the noise of the pursuit, and had no care to be trapped in his castle. Better to fight in the open at the risk of his body, than to starve behind walls, with none to bring succour. Hengist checked the rout, and rallying the host, set it again in order of battle. The combat was passing sharp and grievous, for the pagans

advanced once more in rank and by companies. Each heartened his fellow, so that great damage and loss were sustained by the Christians. The host fell in disarray, and began to give back before the onset of the foe. All would have been lost were it not for those three thousand horsemen, who rode upon the Saxon in one mighty troop, bringing succour and help to the footmen when they were overborne. The pagans fought starkly and grimly. Well they knew not one would escape with his life, if they did not keep them in this peril. In the press, Eldof the Earl lighted on Hengist. Hatred gave him eyes, and he knew him again because of the malice he owed him. He deemed that the time and the means were come to satisfy his lust. Eldof ran in upon his foe, striking him mightily with his sword. Hengist was a stout champion, or he had fallen at the stroke. The two closed together, with naked brands and lifted shields, smiting and guarding. Men forgot to fight, and stared upon them, watching the great blows fall and the gleaming swords.

Whilst the heroes strove, Gorlois, Earl of Cornwall, came hastening like a paladin to the battle. Eldof saw him come, and being assured of the end, arrayed himself against his adversary yet more proudly. He sprang upon Hengist, and seizing him by the nasal of his helmet, dragged him, with fallen head, amongst the Britons. "Knights," he cried, "thanks be to God Who has given me my desire. He is vanquished and taken who has caused such trouble to the land." Eldof showed the captive to his company, who demanded that he should be slain with the sword. "A short shrift for the mad dog," they clamoured, "who knows neither mercy nor pity. This is the source of the war. This is the shedder of blood. Smite the head from his body, and the victory is in your hands." Eldof made answer that Hengist should have the law, good law and just. He bound him fast in fetters, and delivered him to King Aurelius. The king chained him, hands and feet, and set him in a strong prison to await judgment.

Now Octa, Hengist's son, and Ebissa, his cousin, who were in the field, hardly escaped from the battle, and fleeing, entered into York. They strengthened the city, and made all ready, till men might come to their aid. As for the others they hid in divers places, in the woods and valleys, in caves and in the hills. But the power of the paynim was broken, for many were dead, and of the living most were taken, and in

bonds, or held as thralls. The king made merry over his victory, and gave the glory to God. He abode three full days at Caerconan to heal the wounded of their hurt, and to give a little leisure to the weary. At that place he called a council of his captains, to know what it were good to do with the traitor Hengist; whether he should be held in prison or slain outright. Eldad got him to his feet. A right learned clerk was he, a bishop of his orders, and brother by blood to that Earl Eldof, of whom you have heard. "My counsel to the king," said the bishop, "is to do to the traitor Hengist—our earthly adversary—that which holy Samuel did in old days to King Agag, when he was made captive. Agag was a prince, passing proud, the right glorious king of the people of Amalek. He set a quarrel upon the Jews, that he might work them a mischief, since he sought to do them evil. He seized their lands; he burned their goods with fire, and very often he slew them for his pleasure. Then on a day this King Agag was taken at a battle, the more to his sorrow. He was led before Saul, whom these Jews so greatly desired for their king. Whilst Saul was considering what it were well should be done with Agag, who was delivered into his hand, Samuel stood upon his feet. This Samuel was a holy prophet of Israel; a saint of God of the utmost sanctity; never has there lived his like amongst the sons of men. This holy Samuel seized on Agag, the proud king. He hewed him in many pieces, dividing him limb from limb, and his members he sent throughout the realm. Harken and learn what Samuel said whilst he was hewing Agag small. 'Agag, many a man hast thou tormented for thy pleasure; many a fair youth hast thou spoiled and slain. Thou hast drawn out many a soul from its body, and made many a mother troubled for her son. Many a babe hast thou rendered fatherless; but, O Agag, things evil and good come to the like end. Now your mother presently will I make barren, and from thy body shall the soul of thee be wrung.' Mete therefore to your captive, O king, the measure which Samuel counted out to his." Eldof, Earl of Gloucester, was moved by the example furnished by the bishop. He rose in the council, and laying hands on Hengist led him without the city. There Eldof struck the head from Hengist with his own sword. The king caused the head to be set again on the shoulders, and gave Hengist's body seemly burial, according to the rite and fashion of those who observe the law of the paynim.

The king made no long stay at Caerconan, but followed eagerly after his enemies. He came to York with a great host, and sat himself down before the city. Octa, the son of Hengist, was within, and some of his kindred with him. When Octa was persuaded that none might win to his aid, he considered within himself whether he should render him to the king's mercy. If he took his fate in his hand, and humbly besought pity of the king, so mercy were given him all would be well, but if his prayer was scorned, then he would defend himself to the death. Octa did as he devised, and as his kinsfolk approved. He came forth from the gate of the city with a company of all his barons. Octa wore a chain of iron upon his wrists, and walking at the head of his companions, came first to the king. "Sire," said he, "I beseech you for mercy and pity. The gods in whom we put our trust have failed us at need. Your gods are mightier than they. They have wrought wonders, and set strength upon you, since we are stricken to the dust. I am vanquished, and own myself thy servant. Behold the chain of thy bondman! Do with me now according to thy will, to me, and these my men. Life and limb, yea, all that we have, are at thy pleasure. But if it seem good to the king to keep us about his person, we will toil early and late in his service. We will serve him loyally in his quarrels, and become his liege men."

The king was a devout man, very piteous of heart. He looked around him to learn what his barons thought of this matter, and what would be their counsel. Eldad, the fair bishop, spake first as a wise elder. "Good it is, and was, and ever shall be, to show mercy on him who requires mercy to be shown. He who forgives not another his trespass, how may he hope that God will pardon him his sin? These cry loudly upon thee for mercy; mercy they implore, and mercy they must have. Britain is a great realm, long and wide, and in many a place is inhabited of none, save the beast. Grant them enough thereof that they may dig and plant, and live of the increase. But take first of them such hostages, that they will serve thee loyally, and loyally content them in their lot. We learn from Holy Writ that the children of Gibeon sought life and league from the Jew when the Israelites held them in their power. Peace they prayed, peace they received; and life and covenant were given in answer to their cry. A Christian man should not be harder than the Jew proved himself to be in

his hour. Mercy they crave; mercy they should have; so let not death deceive them in their hope."

The king granted land to the Saxons, according to the counsel of Eldad. The lot was appointed them in Scotland, and they set out speedily to the place where they must dwell. But first they gave to the king hostages of the children of their proudest blood and race. After the king was fifteen days in the city, he sent messages commanding his people to attend him in council. Baron and clerk, abbot and bishop, he summoned to his court. At this council the rights of the heir and the privileges of the orders were re-affirmed. He bade and assured that the houses of religion, destroyed by the Romans, should be rebuilt. He dismissed his soldiers to their homes, making viscounts and provosts to keep his fiefs in peace, and to ensure his revenues and rent. He sought masons and carpenters and built anew the churches. Such chapels in his realm as were hurt or damaged in the wars, the king restored to their former estate for the fairer service and honour of God. After the council was done the king set forth towards London, where his presence was greatly desired of the citizens. He found the city but the shadow of its former splendour, for the streets were emptied of people, and houses and churches were alike fallen or decayed. Right grievously the king lamented the damage done to his fair city. He founded anew the churches, and bade clerks and burgesses to attend the service of God, as was of wont and right. From thence the king went to Ambresbury, that he might kneel beside the graves of those who were foully slain at Hengist's love-day, near the abbey. He called together a great company of masons, carpenters, and cunning artificers; for it was in his mind to raise to their worship a monument of stone that would endure to the world's end.

Thereat spake to the king a certain wise man, Tremonius, Archbishop of Caerleon, praying him to send for Merlin, and build according to his bidding, since there was none so skilled in counsel or labour, more truthful of word or apter in divination. The king desired greatly to behold Merlin, and to judge by hearing of his worth. At that time Merlin abode near the Well of Labenes. This fountain springs in a hidden place, very deep in Wales, but I know not where, since I have never been. Merlin came straightway to the king, even as he was bidden. The king welcomed him with marvellous joy, honouring him right gladly. He

cherished him richly, and was ever about him with prayers and entreaties that he would show him somewhat of things that were yet to come, for these he was on itch to hear. "Sire," replied Merlin, "this I may not do. I dare not open my lips to speak of such awful matters, which are too high for me, save only when needs speak I must. Should my tongue be unloosed by greed or lightness, should I be puffed up by vanity, then my familiar spirit—that being by whom I know that which I know—would withdraw his inspiration from my breath. My knowledge would depart from me, and the words I speak would be no weightier than the idle words on every gossip's lips. Let the future take care of itself. Consider rather the concerns of to-day. If thou art desirous to make a fair work and a lasting, of which men will brag till the end of time, cause to be brought hither the carol that a giant wrought in Ireland. This giant laboured greatly in the building of a mighty circle of stones. He shaped his carol, setting the stones one upon another. The stones are so many, and of such a kind; they are so huge and so weighty; that the strength of man—as men are in these times—might not endure to lift the least of his pebbles." The king laughed loudly. "Merlin," said he, "since these stones are of such heaviness that it passes the strength of the strong to move them, who shall carry them to my masons? Have we not in this realm stones mighty enough, and to spare?" "King," answered Merlin, "knowest thou not that wit is more than strength! Muscle is good, but craft is better. Skill devises means when strength fails. Cunning and engines bring many matters to a good end, that strength would not venture even to begin. Engines can move these stones, and by the use of engines we may make them our own. King, these stones were carried from Africa: there they were first shapen. The giant who ravished them to Ireland, set up his carol to his own content. Very serviceable were these stones, and right profitable to the sick. It was the custom of the surgeons of that land to wash these stones with fair water. This water they would make hot in baths, and set therein those who had suffered hurt, or were grieved by any infirmity. They washed in this water, and were healed of their sickness. However sore their wound, however grievous their trouble, other medicine needed they none." When the king and his Britons heard of the virtue residing in the stones, they all desired them very greatly. Not one but would gladly have ventured on the quest

for these stones, of which Merlin told such marvels. They devised therefore to pass the sea with fifteen thousand men to make war upon the Irish, and to ease them of the stones. Uther, at his own desire, was chosen as their captain. Merlin also went with them to furnish engines for their toll. So Uther and his company crossed to Ireland on such quest. When the King of Ireland, that men called Guillomer, heard tell that strangers were arrayed in his land, he assembled his household and the Irish, and menaced them proudly, seeking to chase them from the realm. After they had learned the reason of this quarrel, and that for stones the Britons were come, they mocked them loudly, making them their mirth and their song. For mad it seemed in the eyes of these Irish that men should pain themselves so grievously by land and sea to gain a treasure of naked stones. "Never a stone," said these, "shall they have; not one shall they carry with them to their homes." Very lightly you may scorn your enemy in your heart, but at your peril you seek to do him mischief with your hands. The Irish mocked and menaced the stranger, and sought him until they found. The combat was joined directly the hosts met together, but the Irish were men of peace, unclad in mail, and not accustomed to battle. The Britons were their jest, but they were also their victors. The King of Ireland fled from the battle discomfited. He went from town to town, with no long tarrying in any place, so that the Britons might not make him their captive.

After the Britons had laid aside their armour, and taken rest from the battle, they were brought by Merlin, their companion, into a mountain where the carol was builded. This high place was called Hilomar, by the folk whom they had vanquished, and the carol was upon the summit of the mount. The Britons stared upon the stones. They went about them, saying each to his fellow that none had seen so mighty a building. They marvelled how these stones were set one upon another, and how they should be got across the sea. "Comrades," said Merlin, "you are strong champions. Strive now if of your strength you may move these stones, and carry them from their seat." The young men therefore encompassed the stones before, behind, and on every side, but heave and tug as mightily as they could, the stones for all their travail would not budge one single inch. "Bestir yourselves," cried Merlin, "on, friends, on. But if by strength you can do no more, then you shall see that skill and

knowledge are of richer worth than thews and fleshly force." Having spoken these words Merlin kept silence, and entered within the carol. He walked warily around the stones. His lips moved without stay, as those of a man about his orisons, though I cannot tell whether or no he prayed. At length Merlin beckoned to the Britons. "Enter boldly," cried he; "there is nought to harm. Now you may lift these pebbles from their seat, and bear and charge them on your ships." So at his word and bidding they wrought as Merlin showed them. They took the stones and carrying them to the ships, bestowed them thereon. Afterwards the mariners hoisted their sails, and set out for Britain. When they were safely come to their own land, they bore the stones to Ambresbury, and placed them on the mountain near by the burying ground. The king rode to Ambresbury to keep the Feast of Pentecost. Bishops, abbots, and barons, he had bidden them all to observe the Feast. A great company of folk, both rich and poor, gathered themselves together, and at this fair festival the king set the crown upon his head. Three days they observed the rite, and made merry. On the fourth—because of his exceeding reverence—he gave pastoral crosses to two prelates. Holy Dubricius became Bishop of Caerleon, and York he bestowed upon holy Sampson. Both these fair prelates were great churchmen, and priests of devout and spotless life. At the same time Merlin ranged the stones in due order, building them side by side. This circle of stones was called by the Britons in their own tongue The Giant's Carol, but in English it bears the name of Stonehenge.

When the rich feast was come to its appointed end, the court departed, each man unto his own place. Now Passent, that was a son of Vortigern, had fled from Wales and Britain, for fear of Aurelius and his brother Uther. He sought refuge in Germany, and there purchased to himself ships, and men who would serve him for guerdon; but of these he had no great company. This Passent arrived in the north country and ravaged it, burning the towns and spoiling the land. He dared make no long stay, for the king hastened to the north to give him battle, and this he might not endure. Passent took again to his ships, and fearing to return whence he came, fared so far with sail and oar that in the end he cast anchor off the coast of Ireland. Passent sought speech of the king of that realm. He told over his birth and state, and showed him his bitter

need. Passent prayed the king so urgently; the twain took such deep counsel together; that it was devised between them to pass the sea, and offer battle to the Britons. This covenant was made of Passent that he might avenge his father's death, and dispute his heritage with Aurelius; but of the King of Ireland to avenge him upon the Britons, who had vanquished him in battle, robbed his folk, and taken to themselves the carol with a strong hand. Thus they plighted faith to satisfy each the other for these wrongs. Guillomer and Passent made ready as many soldiers as they might. They ordained their ships, and with a fair wind crossed the sea, and came safely to Wales. The host entered in Menevia, that city so praised of the Welsh, and now called of men, Saint David. It befell that King Aurelius lay sick at Winchester. His infirmity was sore upon him, for the trouble was long and grievous, and the surgeons knew not whether he would mend or die. When Aurelius learned that Passent and the King of Ireland were come together in Wales to make sorrow in the land, he sent for Uther his brother. He grieved beyond measure that he could not get him from his bed. He charged Uther to hasten into Wales, and drive them from the realm. Uther sent messages to the barons, and summoned the knights to the war. He set out from Winchester; but partly by reason of the long journey, and partly to increase the number of his power, he tarried for a great while upon the road. Very long it was before he arrived in Wales. Whilst he dallied in this fashion a certain pagan named Appas, a man born in Saxony, craved speech of Passent. This Appas was meetly schooled, and apt in parts. He spoke to many people in their own tongues; he was wise in all that concerned medicine and surgery; but he was felon and kept bad faith. "Passent," said Appas privily, "thou hast hated this King Aurelius for long. What should be mine if I were to slay him?" "Ease and riches I will give thee," answered Passent. "Never a day but I will stand thy friend, so only thy word be fulfilled, and the king taste death at thy hand." "May your word," said Appas, "be true as mine." So the covenant was ordained between them that Passent should count out one thousand livres, what time Appas had done to death the king. Appas was very cunning, and right greedy and covetous of wealth. He put upon him a habit of religion; he shaved his crown, and caused his hair to be polled close to his head. Like a monk he was shaven; like a monk he seemed; in

gown and hood he went vested as a monk. In this guise and semblance Appas took his way to the royal court. Being a liar he gave out that he was a good physician, and thus won to the king's bed. Him he promised to make whole very speedily, if he would trust himself to his hand. He counted the pulse, and sought for the trouble. "Well I know," said he, "the cause of this evil. I have such a medicine as will soon give you ease." Who could misdoubt so sweet a physician? The gentle king desired greatly to be healed of his hurt, as would any of you in a like case. Having no thought of treason, he put himself in this traitor's care. Appas made ready a potion, laced with venom, and gave the king to drink. He then wrapped the king warmly in a rich coverlet, and bade him lie in peace and sleep. After the king was heated, and the poison had lain hold upon his body, ah, God, the anguish, there was nothing for him but death. When Aurelius knew that he must die, he took oath of his household, that so truly as they loved him they would carry his body to Stonehenge, and bury him within the stones that he had builded. Thus died the king and was buried; but the traitor, Appas, escaped and fled with his life.

Uther entered in Wales with his host, and found the folk of Ireland abiding yet at Menevia. At that time appeared a star, which was seen of many. This star was hight Comet, and according to the clerks it signified death and the passing of kings. This star shone marvellously clear, and cast a beam that was brighter than the sun. At the end of this beam was a dragon's head, and from the dragon's mighty jaws issued two rays. One of these rays stretched over France, and went from France even to the Mount of St. Bernard. The other ray went towards Ireland, and divided into seven beams. Each of these seven beams shone bright and clear, alike on water and on land. By reason of this star which was seen of all, the peoples were sorely moved. Uther marvelled greatly what it might mean, and marvellously was he troubled. He prayed Merlin that he would read him the sign, and the interpretation thereof. Merlin answered not a word. Sorrow had him by the heart, and he wept bitterly. When speech returned to his mouth he lamented with many words and sighed often. "Ah, God," said he, "sorrow and trouble and grief have fallen on Britain this day. The realm has lost its great captain.

The king is dead – that stout champion who has delivered the land from such evil and shame, and plucked his spoil from the pagan.”

When Uther was certified that his brother and good lord had finished his course, he was right heavy, and much was he dismayed. But Merlin comforted him as he might. “Uther,” said he, “be not altogether cast down, since from Death there is no return. Bring to an end this business of the war. Give battle to thine enemies, for to-morrow shall see Passent and the King of Ireland vanquished. Fight boldly on the morrow; so shalt thou conquer, and be crowned King of Britain. Hearken to the interpretation of the sign. The dragon at the end of the beam betokens thee thyself, who art a stout and hardy knight. One of the two rays signifies a son born of thy body, who shall become a puissant prince, conquering France, and beyond the borders of France. The other ray which parted from its fellow, betokens a daughter who shall be Queen of Scotland. Many a fair heir shall she give to her lord, and mighty champions shall they prove both on land and sea.” Uther lent his ear to the counsel of Merlin. He caused his folk to rest them the night, and in the morning arm them for the battle. He thought to take the city by assault, but when the Irish saw him approach their walls, they put on their harness, and setting them in companies, issued forth to fight without the gates. The Irish fought valiantly, but right soon were discomfited, for on that day the Britons slew Passent, and the King of Ireland, his friend. Those who escaped from the field fled towards the sea, but Uther following swiftly after, harried them to the death. Such as reached the water climbed wildly upon their ships, and with sail and oar set out to sea, that Uther should work them no more mischief.

When Uther had brought his business to a good end, he took his way towards Winchester, and the flower of his chivalry with him. On his road a messenger met him who told him of a surety the king was dead, and as to the manner of his death. He related how the bishops had laid Aurelius to rest with great pomp in the Giant’s Carol, even as he had required of his sergeants and barons whilst he was yet alive. At these tidings Uther pressed on to Winchester, sparing not the spur. The people came before him on his passage clamouring shrilly. “Uther, sire,” cried the common folk, “since he is dead who maintained the poor, and did nought but good to his people, we have none to defend us, save thee. Take then the

crown, as thine by heritage and right. Fair sire, we thy poor commons pray this thing, who desire nothing but thy worship and thy gain." Uther rejoiced greatly at their words. He saw clearly where his profit lay, and that no advancement is possible to a king. He hastened, therefore, to do as the folk entreated. He took the crown, and becoming king, loved well his people, and guarded the honour of the realm. In remembrance of the dragon, and of the hardy knight who should be king and a father of kings, which it betokened, Uther wrought two golden dragons, by the counsel of his barons. One of these dragons he caused to be borne before him when he went into battle. The other he sent to Winchester to be set up in the church of the bishop. For this reason he was ever after called Uther Pendragon. Pendragon was his name in the Britons' tongue, but Dragon's head in that of Rome.

Uther was a mighty lord, who had confidence in his power. His sacring at Winchester he held for proof and token that he was a king who would beget puissant princes, by whom great deeds should be done. This faith in his destiny gave him increase of strength. He determined in his heart that he would accomplish all that was foretold of him, and that through good report and ill, never would he turn back. He knew and was persuaded that whatever the task he took in hand, he must in fulness of time bring it to a good end. Merlin was a true prophet; and since no lying spirit was in his mouth, it was impossible to doubt that very swiftly all these things would come to pass.

Now Octa, the son of Hengist, had received from Aurelius broad lands and fair manors for him and his companions. When Octa knew that the mighty captain was dead, he kept neither loyalty nor faith with a king whom he despised in his heart. He called together a great company of his friends and kinsmen, and amongst them Ossa, his cousin. Octa and Ossa were hardy champions, and they were the lords of the host. With them moreover were such folk as had escaped from Uther at the slaying of Passent. These Octa had taken to himself, so that his fellowship was passing strong. This host overran the realm from Humber to Scotland, and subdued it in every part. Octa then came before York, and would have seized it by violence, but the burgesses of the city held it stoutly against him, so that the pagans might not enter within the walls. He sat down, therefore, before the gates, and invested the city straitly, by

reason of the numbers of his host. Uther had no thought but to succour his city, and to rescue his friends who were shut within. He marched hot foot to York, calling his men together from every part. Being resolved at all cost to force the heathen to give over the siege, Uther offered them battle without delay. The melley was right sharp and grievous. Many a soul was parted from the body. The heathen played their parts as men, and contended boldly with the sword. The Britons could do them no mischief. They might not force their way into the city, neither could those within prevail to issue forth. The Britons might endure the battle no longer. They gave back in the press, and as they fled, the pursuing Saxons did them marvellous damage. The pursuit lasted until the Britons took refuge in a fastness of those parts, and the night parted the adversaries one from the other. This mountain was named Damen. The peak was very sharp. About its flanks were rocks and precipices, whilst close at hand stood a thicket of hazel trees. Upon this mountain the Britons climbed. By this way and that, they ascended the height, until they sought safety on the summit. There the heathen shut them fast, for they sat beneath them in the plain, whilst all about them stretched the mountain.

The king was very fearful, and not for himself alone. He was in sore straits and perplexity as to what he should do to get his spearmen from the trap. Now Gorlois, Earl of Cornwall, was with the king. This lord was very valiant and courteous, though stricken in years, and was esteemed of all as a right prudent councillor. To him the king went, and unravelled all the coil. Uther prayed Gorlois to counsel him as became his honour, for he knew well that the earl regarded honour beyond the loss of life or limb. "You ask me my counsel," said Gorlois. "My counsel—so it be according to your will—is that we should arm ourselves forthwith, and get down from this hill amongst our foes. They are assuredly sleeping at this hour, for they despise us overmuch to deem that we shall challenge them again to battle. In the morning they will come to seek us—so we await them in the trap. Let us take our fate in our hands like men, and fall upon them suddenly. The foe will then be confused and bewildered, for we must come upon them silently, without battle cry or blowing of trumpets. Before they are awakened from sleep, we shall have slain so many in our onset, that those who escape from our swords

will not dare to rally against us in their flight. Only this thing first. Let every man have penitence for that he has done amiss. Let us ask God's pardon for the sins that we have wrought, and promise faithfully to amend our lives. Let us turn from the wickedness wherein we have walked all these days; praying the Saviour to hold us in His hand, and grant us strength against those who fear not His name, and make war upon His Christians. If we do these things God will sustain our quarrel; and if God be with us who then can do us wrong?"

This counsel seemed good to the king and his captains. They did as Gorlois said, and humbled themselves before God with a contrite heart, promising to put away the evil from their lives. After they had made an end of prayer, they took their arms, and stole down the hillside to the valley. The Britons came amongst the pagans lying naked upon the ground, and fast in sleep. The swordplay was right merry, for the slaughter was very great. The Britons thrust their glaives deep in the breasts of the foe. They lopped heads and feet and wrists from their bodies. The Britons ranged like lions amongst their enemies. They were as lions anhungered for their prey, killing ewes and lambs, and all the sheep of the flock, whether small or great. Thus the Britons did, for they spared neither spearman nor captain. The heathen were altogether dismayed. They were yet heavy with sleep, and could neither get to their harness, nor flee from the field. No mercy was shown them for all their nakedness. Armed or naked the sword was thrust through their breast or heart or bowels. In that place the heathen perished from the land, since the Christians destroyed them utterly. Octa and Ossa, the lords of their host—these troublers of Britain—were taken alive. They were led to London, and set fast in a strong prison, bound in iron. If any of their fellows escaped from the battle, it was only by reason of the blackness of the night. He who was able to flee, ran from the field. He tarried not to succour his own familiar friend. But many more were slain in that surprise than got safely away.

When Uther parted from York he passed throughout Northumberland. From Northumberland he entered into Scotland, having many ships and a great host with him. He went about the length and breadth of the land, and purged it thoroughly in every part. Such folk as were oppressed of their neighbours he confirmed in their rights.

Never before had the realm such rest and peace as in the days of Uther the king. After Uther had brought his business in the north to an end, he set forth to London, where he purposed to take the crown on Easter Day. Uther desired the feast to be very rich and great. He summoned therefore dukes, earls, and wardens, yea, all his baronage from near and far, by brief and message, to come with their wedded dames and privy households to London for his feast. So all the lords came at the king's commandment, bringing their wives as they were bidden. Very richly the feast was holden. After the Mass was sung, that fair company went in hall to meat. The king sat at the head of his hall, upon a daïs. The lords of his realm were ranged about him, each in his order and degree. The Earl of Cornwall was near the king's person, so that one looked upon the other's face. By the earl's side was seated Igerne, his wife. There was no lady so fair in all the land. Right courteous was the dame, noble of peerage, and good as she was fair.

The king had heard much talk of this lady, and never aught but praise. His eyes were ravished with her beauty. He loved her dearly, and coveted her hotly in his heart, for certainly she was marvellously praised. He might not refrain from looking upon her at table, and his hope and desire turned to her more and more. Whether he ate or drank, spoke or was silent, she was ever in his thought. He glanced aside at the lady, and smiled if she met his eye. All that he dared of love he showed. he saluted her by his privy page, and bestowed upon her a gift. He jested gaily with the dame, looking nicely upon her, and made a great semblance of friendship. Igerne was modest and discreet. She neither granted Uther's hope, nor denied. The earl marked well these lookings and laughings, these salutations and gifts. He needed no other assurance that the king had set his love upon his wife. Gorlois deemed that he owed no faith to a lord who would supplant him in her heart. The earl rose from his seat at table; he took his dame by the hand, and went straight from the hall. He called the folk of his household about him, and going to the stables, got him to horse. Uther sent after Gorlois by his chamberlain, telling him that he did shame and wrong in departing from the court without taking leave of his king. He bade him to do the right, and not to treat his lord so despitefully, lest a worse thing should befall him. He could have but little trust in his king, if he would not return for

a space. Gorlois rode proudly from the court without leave or farewell. The king menaced him very grievously, but the earl gave small heed to his threats, for he recked nothing of what might chance. He went into Cornwall, and arrayed his two castles, making them ready against the war. His wife he put in his castle of Tintagel, for this was the home of his father and of his race. It was a strong keep, easily holden of a few sergeants, since none could climb or throw down the walls. The castle stood on a tall cliff, near by the sea. Men might not win to enter by the gate, and saving the gate, there was no door to enter in the tower.

The earl shut his lady fast in the tower. He dared hide his treasure in no other place, lest thieves broke through, and stole her from him. Therefore he sealed her close in Tintagel. For himself he took the rest of his men-at-arms, and the larger part of his knights, and rode swiftly to the other strong fortress that was his. The king heard that Gorlois had garnished and made ready his castle, purposing to defend himself even against his lord. Partly to avenge himself upon the earl, and partly to be near his vassal's wife, the king arrayed a great host. He crossed the Severn, and coming before the castle where the earl lay, he sought to take it by storm. Finding that he might not speed, he sat down before the tower, and laid siege to those within. The host invested the castle closely for full seven days, but could not breach the walls. The earl stubbornly refused to yield, for he awaited succour from the King of Ireland, whom he had entreated to his aid. King Uther's heart was in another place. He was wearied beyond measure of Gorlois and his castle. His love for Igerne urged and called him thence, for the lady was sweeter to his mind than any other in the world. At the end he bade to him a baron of his household, named Ulfin, who was privy to his mind. Him he asked secretly of that which he should do. "Ulfin," said the king, "my own familiar friend, counsel me wisely, for my hope is in thee. My love for Igerne hath utterly cast me down. I am altogether broken and undone. I cannot go or come about my business; I cannot wake nor sleep; I cannot rise from my bed nor lay my head on the pillow; neither can I eat or drink, except that this lady is ever in my mind. How to gain her to my wish I cannot tell. But this I know, that I am a dead man if you may not counsel me to my hope." "Oh my king," answered Ulfin, "I marvel at your words. You have tormented the earl grievous with your war, and

have burned his lands. Do you think to win a wife's heart by shutting her husband close in his tower? You show your love for the dame by harassing the lord! No, the matter is too high for me, and I have one only counsel to give you. Merlin is with us in the host. Send after him, for he is a wise clerk, and the best counsellor of any man living. If Merlin may not tell you what to do, there is none by whom you may win to your desire."

King Uther, by the counsel of Ulfin, commanded Merlin to be brought before him. The king opened out his bitter need. He prayed that for pity's sake Merlin would find him a way to his hope, so he were able; since die he must if of Igerne he got no comfort. But let the clerk seek and buy so that the king had his will. Money and wealth would be granted plenteously, if gold were needed; for great as was the king's evil, so large would be his delight. "Sire," answered Merlin, "have her you shall. Never let it be said that you died for a woman's love. Right swiftly will I bring you to your wish, or evil be the bounty that I receive of the king's hand. Harken to me. Igerne is guarded very closely in Tintagel. The castle is shut fast, and plenteously supplied with all manner of store. The walls are strong and high, so that it may not be taken by might; and it is victualled so well, that none may win there by siege. The castle also is held of loyal castellans; but for all their vigils, I know well how to enter therein at my pleasure, by reason of my potions. By craft I can change a man's countenance to the fashion of his neighbour, and of two men each shall take on his fellow's semblance. In body and visage, in speech and seeming, without doubt I can shape you to the likeness of the Earl of Cornwall. Why waste the time with many words! You, sire, shall be fashioned as the earl. I, who purpose to go with you on this adventure, will wear the semblance of Bertel. Ulfin, here, shall come in the guise of Jordan. These two knights are the earl's chosen friends, and are very close to his mind and heart. In this manner we may enter boldly in his castle of Tintagel, and you shall have your will of the lady. We shall be known of none, for not a man will doubt us other than we seem." The king had faith in Merlin's word, and held his counsel good. He gave over the governance of the host, privily, to a lord whom he much loved. Merlin put forth his arts, and transfigured their faces and vesture into the likeness of the earl and his people. That very night the

king and his companions entered in Tintagel. The porter in his lodge, and the steward within his office, deemed him their lord. They welcomed him gladly, and served him with joy. When meat was done the king had his delight of a lady who was much deceived. Of that embrace Igerne conceived the good, the valiant, and the trusty king whom you have known as Arthur. Thus was Arthur begotten, who was so renowned and chivalrous a lord.

Now the king's men learned very speedily that Uther had departed from the host. The captains were wearied of sitting before the castle. To return the more quickly to their homes, they got into their harness and seized their arms. They did not tarry to order the battle, or make ready ladders for the wall, but they approached the tower in their disarray. The king's men assaulted the castle from every side, and the earl defended himself manfully; but at the last he himself was slain, and the castle was swiftly taken. Those who were fortunate enough to escape from the tower fled lightfoot to Tintagel. There they published the news of this misadventure, and the death of their lord. The sorrow and lamentation of those who bewailed the earl's death reached the ears of the king. He came forth from his chamber, and rebuked the messengers of evil tidings. "Why all this noise and coil?" cried he. "I am safe and sound, thank God, as you may see by looking on my face. These tidings are not true; and you must neither believe all that the messengers proclaim, nor deem that they tell naught but lies. The cause is plain why my household think me lost. I came out from the castle taking leave and speaking to no man. None knew that I went secretly through the postern, nor that I rode to you at Tintagel, for I feared treachery upon the way. Now men cry and clamour of my death, because I was not seen when the king won within the tower. Doubtless it is a grievous thing to have lost my keep, and to know that so many goodly spearmen lie dead behind the walls. But whilst I live, my goods at least are my own. I will go forth to the king, requiring a peace, which he will gladly accord me. I will go at once, before he may come to Tintagel, seeking to do us mischief; for if he falls upon us in this trap we shall pipe to deaf ears."

Igerne praised the counsel of him she deemed her lord. The king embraced her by reason of her tenderness, and kissed her as he bade farewell. He departed straightway from the castle, and his familiars with

him. When they had ridden for a while upon the road, Merlin again put forth his enchantments, so that he, the king, and Ulfin took their own shapes, and became as they had been before. They hastened to the host without drawing rein; for the king was with child to know how the castle was so swiftly taken, and in what manner the earl was slain. He commanded before him his captains, and from this man and that sought to arrive at the truth. Uther considered the adventure, and took his lords to witness that whoever had done the earl to death, had done not according to his will. He called to mind Earl Gorlois' noble deeds, and made complaint of his servants, looking upon the barons very evilly. He wore the semblance of a man in sore trouble, but there were few who were so simple as to believe him. Uther returned with his host before Tintagel. He cried to those who stood upon the wall asking why they purposed to defend the tower, since their lord was dead and his castle taken, neither could they look for succour in the realm, or from across the sea. The castellans knew that the king spake sooth, and that for them there was no hope of aid. They therefore set open the gates of the castle, and gave the fortress and its keys into the king's hand. Uther, whose love was passing hot, spoused Igerne forthwith, and made her his queen. She was with child, and when her time was come to be delivered, she brought forth a son. This son was named Arthur, with the rumour of whose praise the whole world has been filled. After the birth of Arthur, Uther got upon Igerne a daughter cleped Anna. When this maiden came of age she was bestowed upon a right courteous lord, called Lot of Lyones. Of this marriage was born Gawain, the stout knight and noble champion.

Uther reigned for a long time in health and peace. Then he fell into a great sickness, failing alike in mind and strength. His infirmity lay so sore upon him, that he might not get him from his bed. The warders, who watched over his prison in London, were passing weary of their long guard. and were corrupted also by fair promises that were made. They took rich gifts from Octa, that was Hengist's son, and from Ossa, his cousin, and delivering them out of their bonds, let them go free from their dungeon. Octa and Ossa returned swiftly to their own place. They purchased war galleys to themselves, and gathering their men about them menaced Uther very grievously. With a great company of knights,

and spearmen, and archers they passed the marches of Scotland, burning and spoiling all the realm. Since Uther was sick, and could do little to defend his life and land, he called Lot, the husband of his daughter, to his aid. To this lord he committed the guidance of his host, and appointed him constable of his knights. He commanded these that they should hearken Lot as himself, and observe all his biddings. This Uther did because he knew Lot for a courteous and liberal lord, cunning in counsel, and mighty with the spear.

Now Octa vexed the Britons very sorely. He boasted himself greatly, by reason of the number of his folk, and of the king's weakness. To avenge his father's death and his own wrongs, he made Britain fearful of his name; for he neither granted truce nor kept faith. Lot met Octa once and again in battle. Many a time he vanquished his foe; but often enough the victory remained with Octa. The game of war is like a game of tables. Each must lose in his turn, and the player who wins to-day will fail to-morrow. At the end Octa was discomfited, and was driven from the country. But it afterwards befell that the Britons despised Lot. They would pay no heed to his summons, this man for reason of jealousy, this other because of the sharing of the spoil. The war, therefore, came never to an end, till the king himself perceived that something was amiss, whilst the folk of the country said openly that the captains were but carpet knights, who made pretence of war. At this certain men of repute came before the king, praying him to remain no longer hidden from his people. "Come what may," said these counsellors, "you must get to the host, and show yourself to the barons." The king took them at their word. He caused himself to be set within a horse litter, and carried, as though in a bier, amongst his people. "Now we shall see," said these, "which of these recreant lords will follow him to the host." The king sent urgent messages to the knights who were so disdainful of Lot, summoning them on their allegiance to hasten to his aid. For himself he was carried straight to Verulam. This once was a fair city where St. Alban fell upon his death, but was now altogether ravaged and destroyed of the heathen. Octa had led his people to the city, and seized thereon, making fast the gates. The king sat down without the town. He caused great engines to be arrayed to break through the wall, but it was very strong, and he might make no breach. Octa and his friends made

merry over the catapults set over against them. On a morning they opened wide their gates, and came forth to do battle with the king. A vile matter it seemed to them that the door should be locked and barred because of a king lying sick within a litter. They could not endure to be so despised that he should fight against them from his coffin. As I deem their pride went before a fall. That captain won who was deserving of the victory. The heathen were defeated, and in that battle Octa and his fair cousin Ossa were slain. Many who escaped from the field fled into Scotland. There they made Colgrin their chieftain, who was a friend of Octa and his cousin. Uther rejoiced so greatly by reason of his victory, and of the honour God had shown him, that for sheer joy he was as a man healed and altogether whole. He set himself to hearten his barons, and inspire them with his own courage. He said to his men, with mirth, "I like rather to lie on my bier, languishing in long infirmity, than to use health and strength in fleeing from my foe. The Saxons disdained me, holding me in despite because I cannot rise from my bed; but it has befallen that he who hath one foot in the grave hath overthrown the quick. Forward then, and press hardly on their heels who seek to destroy our religion from the land."

When the king had rested him for a space, and had encouraged the lords with his words, he would have followed after the heathen. Seeing that his sickness was yet heavy upon him, the barons prayed that he would sojourn awhile in the city, until it pleased God to give him solace from his hurt. This they said fearing lest his courage should bring him to his death. It chanced, therefore, that the host departed, leaving Uther at Verulam, because of his infirmity, none being with him, save the folk of his private household. Now the Saxons who were driven from the land, when they had drawn together, considered within themselves that if the king were but dead, he had no heir who might do them a mischief, and despoil them of their goods. Since they had no trust in their weapons, doubting that they could slay him with the sword, they devised to murder the king by craft and poison. They suborned certain evildoers, whose names I do not know, by promises of pennies and of land. These men they conveyed to the king's court, arrayed in ragged raiment, the better to spy in what fashion they might draw near his person and carry out their purpose. The malefactors came to Verulam, but for all their

cunning and craft of tongues, in no way could they win anigh the king. They went to and fro so often; they listened to the servitors' talk so readily; that in the end they knew that the king drank nothing but cold water, that other liquor never passed his lips. This water was grateful to his sickness. It sprang from a well very near his hall, and of this water he drank freely, for none other was to his mind. When these privy murderers were persuaded that they might never come so close to the king's body as to slay him with a knife, they sowed their poison in the well. They lurked secretly about the country, until it came to their ears when and how he died, and then fled incontinent whence they came. Presently the king was athirst, and called for drink., His cupbearer gave him water, laced with venom, from the spring. Uther drank of the cup, and was infected by the plague, so that there was no comfort for him save in death. His body swelled, becoming foul and black, and very soon he died. Right quickly all those who drank of the water from that fountain died of the death from which their lord lay dead. After this thing became known, and the malice of these evildoers was made clear, the burgesses of the city met together, and choked the well for evermore. They cast therein so much earth, that a pyre stood above the source, as a witness to this deed. Uther the king having fallen asleep, his body was borne to Stonehenge, and laid to rest close by Aurelius, his brother; the brethren lying side by side. The bishops and barons of the realm gathered themselves together, and sent messages to Arthur, Uther's son, bidding him to Cirencester to be made their king. Arthur at the time of his coronation was a damoiseau of some fifteen years, but tall and strong for his age. His faults and virtues I will show you alike, for I have no desire to lead you astray with words. He was a very virtuous knight, right worthy of praise, whose fame was much in the mouths of men. To the haughty he was proud; but tender and pitiful to the simple. He was a stout knight and a bold: a passing crafty captain, as indeed was but just, for skill and courage were his servants at need: and large of his giving. He was one of Love's lovers; a lover also of glory; and his famous deeds are right fit to be kept in remembrance. He ordained the courtesies of courts, and observed high state in a very splendid fashion. So long as he lived and reigned he stood head and shoulders above all princes of the earth, both for courtesy and prowess, as for valour and

liberality. When this Arthur was freshly crowned king, of his own free will he swore an oath that never should the Saxons have peace or rest so long as they tarried in his realm. This he did by reason that for a great while they had troubled the land, and had done his father and his uncle to their deaths. Arthur called his meinie to his aid. He brought together a fair company of warriors, bestowing on them largely of his bounty, and promising to grant largely of the spoil. With this host he hastened into the land that lay about York. Colgrin—who was the chief and captain of these Saxons since the slaying of Octa—had many Picts and Scots in his fellowship, besides a goodly company of his own people. He desired nothing more hotly than to meet Arthur in battle, and to abate his pride. The armies drew together upon the banks of the Douglas. The two hosts fell one upon the other furiously, and many a sergeant perished that day, by reason of lance thrust, or quarrel, or dart. At the end Colgrin was discomfited, and fled from the field. Arthur followed swiftly after, striving to come upon his adversary, before he might hide him in York. But Colgrin, for all his pains, took refuge in the city; so Arthur sat him down without the walls.

Now Baldulph, the brother of Colgrin, tarried by the shore, awaiting the coming of Cheldric, the king, and his Saxons from Germany. When he heard the tidings of what had befallen Colgrin at the Ford of Douglas, and of how he was holden straitly by Arthur in York, he was passing heavy and sorrowful, for with this Colgrin was all his hope. Baldulph made no further tarrying for Cheldric. He broke up his camp, and marching towards York, set his comrades in ambush, within a deep wood, some five miles from the host. Together with the folk of his household, and the strangers of his fellowship, Baldulph had in his company six thousand men in mail. He trusted to fall upon Arthur by night, when he was unready, and force him to give over the siege. But certain of the country who had spied Baldulph spread this snare, ran to the king, and showed him of the matter. Arthur, knowing of the malice of Baldulph, took counsel with Cador, Earl of Cornwall, a brave captain, who had no fear of death. He delivered to the earl's care seven hundred horsemen, and of spearmen three thousand, and sent him secretly to fall upon Baldulph in his lurking place. Cador did the king's bidding. The Saxons heard no rumour of his coming; for the host drew to the wood

privily without trumpet or battle cry. Then when Cador was near the foe, he cried his name, and burst fiercely upon the heathen with the sword. In this combat there perished of the Saxons more than three thousand men. Had it not been for the darkness of the night, and the hindrance of the wood, not one might have fled on his feet. Baldulph, the cunning captain, got him safely from the field, by hiding beneath every bush and brake. He had lost the fairer and the stronger half of his meinie, and was at his wits' end to know how to take counsel with his brother, or to come to his aid. But speak with him he would, so that craft and courage might find a way. Baldulph devised to seek the besiegers' camp in the guise of a jongleur. He arrayed himself in all points as a harper, for he knew well how to chant songs and lays, and to touch the strings tunably. For his brother's sake he made himself as a fool. He shaved off one half of his beard and moustache, and caused the half of his head to be polled likewise. He hung a harp about his neck, and showed in every respect as a lewd fellow and a jester. Baldulph presently went forth from his abode, being known again of none. He went to and fro harping on his harp, till he stood beneath the walls of the city. The warders on the towers hearkened to his speech, so that they drew him up by cords upon the wall. At Baldulph's tale the folk within the city despaired of succour, and knew not how to flee, nor where to escape. In their extremity the news was bruited amongst them that Cheldric had come to a haven in Scotland, with a fleet of five hundred galleys, and was speeding to York. Cheldric knew and was persuaded that Arthur dared not abide his onset. This was a right judgment, for Arthur made haste to begone. The king called a council of his captains, and by their rede decided not to await Cheldric at York, neither to give him battle, because of the proud and marvellous host that was with him, "Let the king fall back upon London," said the lords, "and summon his meinie about him. The king's power will increase daily, and if Cheldric have the hardihood to follow, with the more confidence we shall fight." Arthur took his captains at their word. He let well the siege, and came to London, that he might strengthen his castle, choose his own battle ground, and trouble his adversary the more surely. Arthur, by the rede of his counsellors, sent letters to his nephew, the son of his sister, Hoel, King of Little Britain. For in that country dwelt many strong barons, sib

to his flesh, and the stoutest knights of his race. In these letters, and by the mouth of his ambassadors, Arthur prayed the king to hasten to his rescue. If Hoel came not swiftly over sea—wrote the king—certainly his realm would be taken from him, and shame would always be on those who watched tamely their cousin stripped of his heritage.

When this bitter cry came to Hoel he sought neither hindrance nor excuse. His vassals and kinsmen got in their harness forthwith. They arrayed their ships, and set thereon the stores. Within these ships there entered twelve thousand knights alone, without taking count of the sergeants and archers. So in a good hour they crossed the sea, coming with a fair wind to the port of Southampton. Arthur welcomed them with great joy, showing them the honour which it became him to offer. They made no long tarrying at Southampton, nor wasted the day in fair words and idle courtesies. The king had summoned his vassals, and had brought together his household. Without speeches and blowings of trumpets the two hosts set forth together towards Lincoln, which Cheldric had besieged but had not yet taken. Arthur came swiftly and secretly upon Cheldric. He fell silently upon the Saxons, making no stir with horns and clarions. King Arthur and his men slew so many in so grim and stark a fashion, that never was seen such slaughter, such sorrow and destruction, as they made of the Saxons in one single day. The Saxons thought only of flight. They stripped off their armour to run the more lightly, and abandoned their horses on the field. Some fled to the mountains; others by the valleys; and many flung themselves into the river, and were drowned miserably, striving to get them from their foe. The Britons followed hotly at their heels, giving the quarry neither rest nor peace. They struck many a mighty blow with the sword, on the heads, the necks, and bodies of their adversaries. The chase endured from Lincoln town to the wood of Celidon. The Saxons took refuge within the thick forest, and drew together the remnants of their power. For their part, the Britons watched the wood, and held it very strictly. Now Arthur feared lest the Saxons should steal from their coverts by night, and escape from his hand. He commanded, therefore, his meinie to cut down the trees on the skirts of the forest. These trunks he placed one upon another, lacing the branches fast together, and enclosing his foe. Then he sat down on the further side of his barrier, so that none might

issue forth, nor enter in. Those within the wood were altogether dismayed, since they might neither eat nor drink. There was no man so cunning or strong, so rich or valiant, who could devise to carry bread and wine, flesh and flour, for their sustenance. Three days they endured without food, till their bodies were weak with hunger. Since they would not die of famine, and might not win forth from the wood by arms, they took counsel as to what it were well to do. They approached Arthur, praying him to keep raiment and harness and all that they had, saving only their ships, and let them depart to their own land. They promised to put hostages in his power, and render a yearly tribute of their wealth, so only the king allowed them to go on foot to the shore, and enter naked in the ships. Arthur set faith in their word. He gave them leave to depart, receiving hostages for assurance of their covenant. He rendered them the ships, but kept their armour as a spoil; so that they left the realm without a mantle to their bodies, or a sword for their defence. The Saxons set out across the water, until their sails were lost to sight. I know not what was their hope, nor the name of him who put it in their mind, but they turned their boats, and passed through the channel between England and Normandy. With sail and oar they came to the land of Devon, casting anchor in the haven of Totnes. The heathen breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the folk of the country. They poured forth from their ships, and scattered themselves abroad amongst the people, searching out arms and raiment, firing homesteads and slaying Christian men. They passed to and fro about the country, carrying off all they found beneath their hands. Not only did they rob the hind of his weapon, but they slew him on his hearth with his own knife. Thus throughout Somerset and a great part of Dorset, these pirates spoiled and ravaged at their pleasure, finding none to hinder them at their task. For the barons who might have made head against them were in Scotland with the king. So by road and country, laden with raiment and all manner of spoil, the Saxons came from their ships to Bath. But the citizens of the town shut fast their gates, and defended the walls against them.

Arthur was in Scotland, punishing the folk of that realm, because of the war they had made upon him, and of the aid they had afforded Cheldric. When the king learned what mischief the pagans had done to

his land, and of the siege they laid to Bath, he hanged his hostages straightway. He dared tarry no longer in Scotland, but hastened south, leaving Hoel of Brittany lying sick at Dumbarton, I know not of what infirmity. With what men he might, Arthur came to Bath as swiftly as he was able, since he was resolved to chase the Saxons from before the gates, and succour the burgesses of his city. Now, near this town a wood stands within a wide country, and there Arthur arranged his men and ordered the battle. He saw to the arming of his meinie, and for himself got him into his harness. Arthur donned thigh pieces of steel, wrought strong and fairly by some cunning smith. His hauberk was stout and richly chased, even such a vesture as became so puissant a king. He girt him with his sword, Excalibur. Mighty was the glaive, and long in the blade. It was forged in the Isle of Avalon, and he who brandished it naked in his hand deemed himself a happy man. His helmet gleamed upon his head. The nasal was of gold; circlets of gold adorned the headpiece, with many a clear stone; and a dragon was fashioned for its crest. This helm had once been worn by Uther, his sire. The king was mounted on a destrier, passing fair, strong, and speedy, loving well the battle. He had set his shield about his neck, and, certes, showed a stout champion, and a right crafty captain. On the buckler was painted in sweet colours the image of Our Lady St. Mary. In her honour and for remembrance, Arthur bore her semblance on his shield. In his hand the king carried his lance, named Ron. Sharp it was at the head, tough and great, and very welcome at need in the press of battle. Arthur gave his commands to his captains, and ordained the order of the combat. He caused his host to march in rank and company at a slow pace towards the foe, so that when the battle was joined none might flinch but that he was sustained of his comrades. The host drew near to a certain mountain of those parts, and began to climb the hill. The Saxons held this mountain strongly, and defended the height, as though they were shut fast and safely behind walls. Small cause had the heathen for such assurance of safety, for a mighty captain was upon them, who would not endure their presence in his realm. Arthur led his spearmen upon the slope, and there admonished his men. "Behold," said he, "and see before you those false and scornful heathen, who have destroyed and ravished your kith and kin, your near ones and neighbours, and on your own goods and bodies

have done so much mischief. Avenge now your friends and your kinsfolk: avenge the great ruin and burnings: avenge all the loss and the travail that for so long a space we have suffered at their hands. For myself this day I will avenge me for all these bitter wrongs. I will avenge the oaths these perjurers have broken. I will silence the crying of my fathers' blood. This day I will exact the price for all they have cost me in loss and in sorrows, and avenge the bad faith which led them to return to Totnes. If but this day we bear us in the battle like men, and smite the heathen in their fastness, never again will they array themselves proudly against us, but will be for ever before us as naked men without a shield." With these words Arthur set his buckler before him, and hastened to the playing of the swords. I know not the name of the Saxon who ran upon him in the stour, but the king smote him so fiercely that he died. Before Arthur passed across the body he cried aloud, "God aid, Saint Mary succour. He gives twice," said he, gaily, "who gives quickly. Here lies one whose lodging for the night I have paid." When the Britons saw this deed they aided the king mightily, beating down and slaying the Saxons very grievously. They pressed upon them from every side, thrusting shrewdly with the spear, and striking lustily with the sword. Arthur was of marvellous hardihood. Strong beyond the common strength and of great prowess, with lifted shield and terrible sword he hewed a path towards the summit of the mount. He struck to right and to left, slaying many, so that the press gave back before so stout a champion. To himself alone he slew four hundred heathen that day, working them more mischief than was done by all his men. To an evil end came the captains of these Saxons. Baldulph lay dead upon the mount, and dead also was Colgrin. Cheldric and some others fled from the field, and would have got them to their ships that they might enter therein and garnish for their needs.

When Arthur heard tidings of Cheldric's flight, and that he sought again his ships, he bade Cadur of Cornwall to follow swiftly after the fugitives, giving ten thousand horsemen to his keeping, chosen from his best and closest friends. For his part, Arthur himself turned his face to Scotland; for a messenger came who told that the wild Scots held Hoel close within his city, and for a little would take him where he lay. Cheldric made in all haste to his ships, but Cadur was a crafty captain,

and by a way that he knew well he rode swiftly to Totnes, before Cheldric might come to the town. He seized the galleys, manning them with archers and country folk, and then hastened hotly on the track of the fugitives. Two by two, and three by three, these drew near the shore, as best they might hide them from the pursuers. To go the more lightly, to run the more nimbly, they had thrown away their harness, and carried nothing save their swords. They pained themselves to get to the ships, deeming that if they might enter therein their troubles would be at an end. As they strove to ford the river Teign, Cador, the huntsman, came winding upon their slot. The Saxons were dismayed beyond measure, and without stay or delay fled from their foe. Cador lighted upon Cheldric in the steep mountain, called Tenedic, and slew him in that place. As Cador came on Cheldric's companions he killed them with the sword, in sore sorrow. For those who escaped from Cador they made their way from every part to the ships. There they were slain by the archers, or perished miserably in the sea. The Britons took no captives; he who cried for mercy perished alike with him who strove with his sword. The rest of the Saxons fled to the coverts of the woods and the mountains. by large companies. In such desolate and waste places they lurked and hid from their enemies until hunger and thirst put a term to their miseries.

When Cador had made an end of his slaying, and given quiet to the land, he followed after Arthur, and took the road towards Scotland. He came upon the king at Dumbarton, where he had brought succour to his nephew, Hoel of Brittany. Arthur found Hoel safe in body and in wealth, and altogether whole of his infirmity. The Scots had departed from before the city when they heard that Arthur drew near, and hastening to Murray, made strong the towers, and set barriers at the gates. This they did because they were resolved to await Arthur in the city, thinking to hold themselves against him behind the walls. Arthur knew well that the Scots were gathered together to make head against him in that place. He came therefore to Murray with all his power, but they dared not abide his coming, and for dread fled to Lake Lomond, scattering themselves abroad amongst the isles thereof. Passing wide and deep is this fair mere. From the hills and valleys round about sixty rivers fall therein, and making together one sweet water, pass swiftly by a single river to the

sea. Sixty islands lie upon this water, the haunt and home of innumerable birds. Each island holds an eyrie, where none but eagles repair to build their nests, to cry and fight together, and take their solace from the world. When evil folk arrive to raven and devour the realm, then all these eagles gather themselves together, making great coil and clamour, and arraying themselves proudly one against another. One day, or two days, three or four, the mighty birds will strive together; and the interpretation thereof portends horror and grim destruction amongst men.

On this fair lake the Scots sought hiding, going and coming upon its waters. Arthur followed swiftly after. He caused to be made shallows, barges, and light, speedy boats, and harassed them grievously in their refuge. By reason of famine and the sword, they died by twenties, by hundreds, and by thousands in those secret ways.

Now Guillomer, a certain king from Ireland, wishful to aid the Scots in this quarrel, drew towards Arthur with his host. Arthur went his way to give him battle. When the battle was joined the Irish king was discomfited anon. He and his men fled to their ships, getting them back to Ireland, and Arthur came again to the mere, where he had left his harrying of the Scots.

Then the bishops and abbots of the realm, with divers monks and other orders, carrying in their hands bodies of the saints and many holy relics, came before the king beseeching him to show mercy on the Scots. With these went a pitiful company of ladies of that country, naked of foot, spoiled of visage, with streaming hair and rent raiment, bearing their babes in their bosoms. These with tears and shrill lamentations fell at Arthur's knees right humbly, weeping, clamouring, and imploring his grace. "Sire, gentle king, have mercy and pity," cried these lamentable women, "on this wasted land, and on those wretched men who are dying of hunger and misery. If thou hast no bowels of pity for the fathers, look, sire, and behold these babes and these mothers; regard their sons and their daughters, and all the distressful folk thou art bringing down to death. Give again the fathers to the little children, restore to the ladies their husbands, and to this sad company of damsels return their brothers and their lords. Have we not paid enough by reason of the Saxon passing this way? It was not for our pleasure they

sojourned awhile in the land. We went the more heavily for their presence, for much pain and sorrow we suffered because of the heathen, and passing weary were we of their speech. If we sheltered them in our houses, the greater sorrow is ours, since we have endured the more at their hands. Our beasts they have slain and eaten; and for our goods, these they have taken, and sent the gear into their own realm. There was none to help us, nor was any man so strong as to deliver us from their power. Sire, if we prepared them a feast, it was because we feared to drink their wine cup to the dregs. Might was theirs, and we were as the captive who sees no succour on the road. These Saxons were pagan men. Thy servants are Christians. Therefore the heathen oppressed us the more mightily, and laid the heavier burdens upon us. But great as was the mischief these Saxons wrought us, thou hast done us the sorer harm. Theirs were the whips, but thine are the stinging scorpions. It should prove little honour to the Christian king that he slay by hunger amongst these rocks those folk who cry his pardon for their trespass. We die, sire, of famine and of all misease. Nothing is left us save cold and wretchedness. Thou hast overcome us, every one; destroy us not from the land, but suffer us to live of thy bounty. Grant that we and all our race—so it be thy pleasure—may find peace in the king's service. Have mercy on thy poor Christians. We hold the faith that you, too, count dear. How foully then should Christianity be wronged, if you destroy the whole realm. Alas, has not mischief enough been wrought already!" Arthur was tender of heart and marvellously pitiful. He took compassion on this doleful company of ladies, and by reason of those holy bodies of the saints and those fair prelates, he granted life and member to his captives, and forgave them their debts.

The Scots, having done homage to the king and owned themselves his men, departed, and went their way. Hoel gazed long upon the mere, calling to him the folk of his house. He wondered exceedingly because of the grandeur of the lake, and because of the greatness of the water. He marvelled altogether to behold so many islands therein, and at the rocks thereof. He was astonished beyond measure at the number of the eagles and their eyries, at the clamour and the shrilling of their cries. He deemed in his heart that never had he gazed upon so beautiful a sight. "Hoel, fair nephew," said Arthur, "very marvellous this water seems in

your eyes. Your astonishment will be the more when you look upon yet another mere that I know. Near this lake, in this very country, lies a water held in a cup, not round but square. This pond is twenty feet in length, twenty in breadth, and the water thereof is five feet deep. In the four corners of this pond are many fish of divers fashions. These fish pass never from their corner to another. Yet none can certify by touch or sight whether craft keeps these fish each in his place, or what is that hindrance they may not overcome. Yea, I cannot tell whether the pond was digged by the wit of man, or if Nature shaped it to her will. Moreover I know of another mere, whereof you would be more amazed than of both these marvels. This lake is close by the Severn. in the land of Wales. The sea pours its tide into this lake; yet empty itself as it may, the waters of the lake remain ever at the same height, never more and never less. The ocean itself may not suffice to heap its waters above the lake, neither to cover its shores. Yet at the ebbing of the tide, when the sea turns to flee, then the lake spues forth the water it has taken to its belly, so that the banks are swallowed up, the great waves rise tall in their wrath, and the wide fields round about are hid, and all is sodden with the foam. The folk of that country tell that should a man stare upon the wave in its anger, so that his vesture and body be wetted of the spray, then, whatever be his strength, the water will draw him to itself, for it is mightier than he. Many a man has struggled and fallen on the brink, and been drowned in its clutch. But if a man turn his back upon the water, then he may stand safely upon the bank, taking his pleasure as long as he will. The wave will pass by him, doing him no mischief; he will not be wetted even of the flying foam." So Hoel marvelled greatly at these wonders told him by the king. Then Arthur bade sound his horns, his clarions and trumpets to call his meinie to himself. He granted leave to all but the folk of his privy household to return to their homes. The host went therefore each to his own place, loudly praising the king. Even in Brittany men told that there was no more valiant captain than he.

Arthur turned south to York, abiding there till Christmas was past. He kept the Feast of the Nativity within its walls. He marked clearly the weakness and impoverishment of the city, and how deeply it was fallen from its former state. The churches were empty and silent; whilst for the houses they were either breached or fallen to the ground. The king

appointed Pyramus, a learned clerk who had been diligent in his service, to the vacant see, so that the chapels might be maintained, and those convents built anew which the heathen had destroyed. Arthur commanded that the criers should proclaim that all honest folk must return to their toil. He sent messages to every place, bidding those who were dispossessed of their lands to repair to his court. There he gave them again their heritage, and confirmed them in their fiefs and rents. Now there were three brethren of right good birth and high peerage, kin to many a fair family, having to name Lot, Aguisel, and Urian. The forefather of these lords was the earl of that great country beyond the Humber; and these in their turn held justly their father's lands, doing wrong to none. Arthur rendered these brothers their own, and restored them their heritage. On Urian, as head of his house, Arthur bestowed the province of Murray, and without fee or recompense proclaimed him king of that realm. Scotland was given to Aguisel, who claimed it as his fief. As for Lot, who had the king's sister to wife, Arthur confirmed him in that kingdom of Lyones, which he had held for a great while, and gave him many another earldom besides. This Lot was the father of Gawain, who as yet was a damoiseau, young and debonair.

When Arthur had settled his realm in peace, righted all wrongs, and restored the kingdom to its ancient borders, he took to wife a certain fresh and noble maiden, named Guenevere, making her his queen. This damsel was passing fair of face and courteous, very gracious of manner, and come of a noble Roman house, Cadour had nourished this lady long and richly in his earldom of Cornwall. The maiden was the earl's near cousin, for by his mother he, too, was of Roman blood. Marvellously dainty was the maiden in person and vesture; right queenly of bearing; passing sweet and ready of tongue. Arthur cherished her dearly, for his love was wonderfully set upon the damsel, yet never had they a child together, nor betwixt them might get an heir.

As soon as winter was gone, and the warm days were come when it was good to wend upon the sea, Arthur made ready his ships to cross the straits to Ireland and conquer the land. Arthur made no long tarrying. He brought together the most lusty warriors of his realm, both poor and rich, all of the people who were most vigorous and apt in war. With these he passed into Ireland, and sent about the country seeking

provand for his host. So the sergeants took seisin of cows and oxen, and brought to the camp in droves all that was desirable for meat. Guillomer, the king of that realm, heard that Arthur had fastened this quarrel upon him. He hearkened to the cries and the tidings, the plaints and the burdens, raised by those villeins whose granges and fields were pillaged for the sustenance of his foes. Guillomer went forth to give battle to Arthur, but in an ill hour he drew to the field. His men were naked to their adversaries, having neither helmets nor coats of leather nor shields. They knew nothing of archery, and were ignorant of catapults and slings. The Britons were mighty bowmen. They shot their shafts thickly amongst their enemies, so that the Irish dared not show their bodies, and might find no shelter. The Irish could endure the arrows no longer. They fled from the fight, taking refuge where they were able. They hid in woods and thickets, in towns and in houses, seeking refuge from the stour. Right grievous was their discomfiture. Guillomer, their king, sought shelter within a forest, but his fate was upon him, and he might not conceal him from his foes. Arthur searched him out so diligently, following so hotly on his track, that at the last he was taken captive. Guillomer did very wisely. He paid fealty and homage to Arthur, and owned that of him he held his heritage. Moreover he put hostages within Arthur's power, for surety that he would render a yearly tribute to the king. When Arthur had subdued Ireland, he went further and came even so far as Iceland. He brought the land in subjection to himself, so that the folk thereof owned themselves his men, and granted him the lordship. Now three princes, by name Gonfal, King of the Orkneys, Doldamer, King of Gothland, and Romarec, King of Finland, heard the rumour of these deeds. They sent spies to Iceland, and learned from their messengers that Arthur was making ready his host to pass the sea, and despoil them of their realms. In all the world—said these messengers—there was no such champion, nor so crafty a captain in the ordering of war. These three kings feared mightily in case Arthur should descend upon them, and waste their land. Lest a worse thing should befall them, with no compulsion and of their own free wills, they set forth for Iceland and came humbly before the king. They gave of their substance rich gifts and offerings, and kneeling before Arthur did him fealty, putting their countries between his hands, and proclaiming

themselves his men. They owned that of grace they held their inheritance; they swore to render tribute to his treasury, and gave hostages for assurance of their covenant. So they departed in peace to their own place. For his part Arthur came again to his ships. He returned to England, where he was welcomed of his people with marvellous joy. Twelve years he abode in his realm in peace and content, since none was so bold as to do him a mischief, and he did mischief to none. Arthur held high state in a very splendid fashion. He ordained the courtesies of courts, and bore himself with so rich and noble a bearing, that neither the emperor's court at Rome, nor any other bragged of by man, was accounted as aught besides that of the king. Arthur never heard speak of a knight in praise, but he caused him to be numbered of his household. So that he might he took him to himself, for help in time of need. Because of these noble lords about his hall, of whom each knight pained himself to be the hardiest champion, and none would count him the least praiseworthy, Arthur made the Round Table, so reputed of the Britons. This Round Table was ordained of Arthur that when his fair fellowship sat to meat their chairs should be high alike, their service equal, and none before or after his comrade. Thus no man could boast that he was exalted above his fellow, for all alike were gathered round the board, and none was alien at the breaking of Arthur's bread, At this table sat Britons, Frenchmen, Normans, Angevins, Flemings, Burgundians, and Loherins. Knights had their place who held land of the king, from the furthest marches of the west even unto the Hill of St. Bernard. A most discourteous lord would he be deemed who sojourned not awhile in the king's hall; who came not with the countenance, the harness, and the vesture that were the garb and usage of those who served Arthur about his court. From all the lands there voyaged to this court such knights as were in quest either of gain or worship. Of these lords some drew near to hear tell of Arthur's courtesies; others to marvel at the pride of his state; these to have speech with the knights of his chivalry; and some to receive of his largeness costly gifts. For this Arthur in his day was loved right well of the poor, and honoured meetly by the rich. Only the kings of the world bore him malice and envy, since they doubted and feared exceedingly lest he should set his foot upon them every one, and spoil them of their heritage.

I know not if you have heard tell the marvellous gestes and errant deeds related so often of King Arthur. They have been noised about this mighty realm for so great a space that the truth has turned to fable and an idle song. Such rhymes are neither sheer bare lies, nor gospel truths. They should not be considered either an idiot's tale, or given by inspiration. The minstrel has sung his ballad, the storyteller told over his story so frequently, little by little he has decked and painted, till by reason of his embellishment the truth stands hid in the trappings of a tale. Thus to make a delectable tune to your ear, history goes masking as fable. Hear then how, because of his valour, the counsel of his barons, and in the strength of that mighty chivalry he had cherished and made splendid, Arthur purposed to cross the sea and conquer the land of France. But first he deemed to sail to Norway, since he would make Lot, his sister's lord, its king. Sichelin, the King of Norway, was newly dead, leaving neither son nor daughter of his body. In the days of his health, as alike when he fell on death, Sichelin had appointed Lot to succeed him in his realm and fief. The crown was Lot's by right, even as Sichelin proclaimed, since Lot was the king's nephew, and there was no other heir. When the folk of Norway learned that Sichelin had bequeathed his realm to Lot, they held his command and ordinance in derision. They would have no alien for their lord, nor suffer a stranger to meddle in their business, lest he should deem them an ancient and feeble people, and give to outland folk what was due to the dwellers in the realm. The Norwegians resolved to make king one of their own house, that he might cherish them and their children; and for this reason they chose from amongst them a certain lord named Ridulph to be their king.

When Lot perceived that his right was despised, save that he took his heritage by force, he sought help of Arthur, his lord. Arthur agreed to aid him in his quarrel, promising to render him his own, and to avenge him bitterly on Ridulph. Arthur gathered together many ships and a mighty host. He entered into Norway with this great company, wasting the land, seizing on the manors, and spoiling the towns. Ridulph was no trembler, and had no thought to leave the country to its fate. He assembled his people, and prepared to give battle to the king. Since however his carles were not many, and his friends but few, Ridulph was defeated in the fight and slain. The greater part of his fellowship

perished with him, so that no large number remained. In this manner Lot the King of Lyones destroyed the Norwegians from the land. Having delivered Norway from itself Arthur granted the kingdom to Lot, so only that he did Arthur homage as his lord. Amongst the barons who rode in this adventure was Gawain, the hardy and famous knight, who had freshly come from St. Sulpicius the Apostle, whose soul may God give rest and glory. The knight wore harness bestowed on him by the Apostle, and wondrously was he praised. This Gawain was a courteous champion, circumspect in word and deed, having no pride nor blemish in him. He did more than his boast, and gave more largely than he promised. His father had sent him to Rome, that he might be schooled the more meetly. Gawain was dubbed knight in the same day as Wavain, and counted himself of Arthur's household. Mightily he strove to do his devoir in the field, for the fairer service and honour of his lord.

After Arthur had conquered Norway, and firmly established his justice in the land, he chose of his host those men who were the most valiant and ready in battle, and assembled them by the sea. He brought to the same haven many ships and barges, together with such mariners as were needful for his purpose. When a quiet time was come, with a fortunate wind, Arthur crossed the sea into Denmark; for the realm was very greatly to his desire. Acil, the Danish king, considered the Britons and the folk from Norway. He considered Arthur, who had prevailed against so many kings. Acil knew and was persuaded that Arthur was mightier than he. He had no mind to suffer hurt himself, or to see his goodly heritage spoiled in a useless quarrel. What did it profit to waste wealth and honour alike, to behold slain friends and ruined towers? Acil wrought well and speedily. He sought peace, and ensued it. He gave costly gifts, and made promises which were larger still; till by reason of his words, his prayers, and supplications, concord was established between Arthur and the king. Acil paid fealty and homage; he became Arthur's man, and owned that of Arthur's grace he held his fief. King Arthur rejoiced greatly at this adventure, and of the conquest he had made. He desired honour the more greedily because of the worship he had gained. From out of Denmark he chose, by hundreds and by thousands, the stoutest knights and archers he could find. These he joined to his host, purposing to lead this fair company into France.

Without any long tarrying the king acted on his purpose. Towns, cities, and castles fell before him, so that Flanders and the country about Boulogne were speedily in his power. Arthur was a prudent captain. He perceived no profit in wasting his own realm, burning his towns, and stealing from his very purse. His eyes were in every place, and much was forbidden by his commandment. No soldier might rob nor pill. If there was need of raiment, meat, or provand, then must he buy with good minted coin in the market. Nothing he dared to destroy or steal.

Now in Arthur's day the land of France was known as Gaul. The realm had neither king nor master, for the Romans held it strongly as a province. This province was committed to the charge of Frollo, and the tribune had governed the country for a great space. He took rent and tribute of the people, and in due season caused the treasure to be delivered to the emperor at Rome. Thus had it been since the time of Caesar, that mighty emperor, who brought into subjection France and Germany, and all the land of Britain. Frollo was a very worthy lord, come of a noble Roman race, fearful of none, however hardy. He knew well, by divers letters, the loss and the mischief done by Arthur and his host. Frollo had no mind tamely to watch the Romans lose their heritage. The tribune summoned to his aid all the men abiding in the province who carried arms and owned fealty to Rome. He assembled these together, ordaining a great company, clad in harness and plenteously supplied with stores. With these he went out to battle against Arthur, but he prospered less than his merit deserved. The Roman tribune was discomfited so grievously that he sought safety in flight. Of his fellowship he had lost a great number. Many were slain outright in battle, others were sorely wounded, or made captive, or returned sorrowing to their own homes. Out of the meinie Frollo had gathered from so many cities, more than two thousand were destroyed. This was no great marvel, since the count of Arthur's host was more than Frollo might endure. From every land he had subdued to himself, from every city that was taken, Arthur saw to it that not a spearman nor knight of fitting years and strength of body, but was numbered in the host, and commanded to serve Arthur as his lord. Of these outland folk, Arthur chose a fair company of the hardiest knights and most proven champions to be of his private household. The very French began to regard him as

their king, so only that they had the courage of their minds. This man loved him for his wise and comely speech: this by reason of his liberal hand: this because of his noble and upright spirit. Whether men were driven to his presence by fear, or considered him a refuge in the storm, all found cause enough to seek his court, to make their peace, and to acknowledge him as their suzerain. Now Frollo, after his discomfiture by the king, fled to Paris with all the speed he might, making no stop upon the road. The tribune feared Arthur and his power very sorely, and since he sought a fortress to defend his person, he would not trust his fortune to any other city. He resolved, therefore, to await Arthur within Paris, and to fight the king beneath the walls. Frollo called to himself such legions as were yet in towns near by. Because of the number of the fugitives who were come to that place, together with the burgesses abiding therein, a great concourse of people filled the city. All these folk toiled diligently to furnish the city with corn and meat, and to make sure the walls and gates against their foes.

Arthur learned that Frollo was making strong his towers, and filling the barns with victuals. He drew to Paris, and sat down without the city. He lodged his men in the suburbs beyond the walls, holding the town so close that food might not enter whether by the river or the gates. Arthur shut the city fast for more than a month, since the French defended them well and manfully. A mighty multitude was crowded within the walls, and there was a plentiful lack of meat. All the provand bought and gathered together in so short a space was quickly eaten and consumed, and the folk were afterwards anhungered. There was little flesh, but many bellies; so that the women and children made much sorrow. Had the counsel of the poor been taken, right soon would the keys of the city have been rendered. "Diva," clamoured the famished citizens, "what doest thou, Frollo? Why requirest thou not peace at Arthur's hand?" Frollo regarded the common people who failed for famine. He looked upon the folk dying by reason of their hunger, and knew that they would have him yield the city. Frollo perceived that of a surety the end of all was come. The tribune chose to put his own body in peril—yea, rather to taste of death, than to abandon Paris to her leaguers. Frollo had full assurance of Arthur's rectitude. In the simplicity of his heart he sent urgent messages to the king, praying him to enter in the Island, that

body to body they might bring their quarrel to an end. He who prevailed over his fellow, and came living from the battle, should take the whole realm as his own and receive all France for his guerdon. Thus the land would not perish, nor the folk be utterly destroyed. Arthur hearkened willingly to the heralds, for very greatly was their message to his mind. He accorded that the battle should be between the two captains, even as Frolo desired. Gauntlets were taken from one and the other, and hostages given on behalf of Paris and on the part of the besiegers for better assurance of the covenant that was made.

On the morrow the two champions arrayed them in harness, and coming to the Island, entered boldly in the lists. The banks were filled with a mighty concourse of people, making great tumult. Not a man or woman remained that day in his chamber. They climbed upon the walls, and thronged the roofs of the houses, crying upon God, and adjuring Him by His holy Name to give victory to him who would guard the realm in peace, and preserve the poor from war. Arthur's meinie, for their part, awaited the judgment of God, in praying the King of Glory to bestow the prize and honour on their lord. The two champions were set over against the other, laced each in his mail, and seated on his warhorse. The strong destriers were held with bit and bridle, so eager were they for the battle. The riders bestrode the steeds with lifted shields, brandishing great lances in their hands. It was no easy matter to perceive —however curiously men looked—which was the stouter knight, or to judge who would be victor in the joust. Certainly each was a very worthy lord and a right courageous champion. When all was made ready the knights struck spurs to their steeds, and loosing the rein upon the horses' necks, hurtled together with raised buckler and lance in rest. They smote together with marvellous fierceness. Whether by reason of the swerving of his destrier, I cannot tell, but Frolo failed of his stroke. Arthur, on his side, smote the boss of his adversary's shield so fairly, that he bore him over his horse's buttock, as long as the ash staff held. Arthur drew forth his sword, and hastened to Frolo to bring the battle to an end. Frolo climbed stoutly on his feet. He held his lance before him like a rod, and the king's steed ran upon the spear, so that it pierced deeply in his body. Of this thrust the destrier and his rider alike came tumbling to the ground. When the Britons saw this thing, they

might not contain themselves for grief. They cried aloud, and seizing their weapons, for a little would have violated the love-day. They made ready to cross the river to the Island, and to avenge their lord upon the Gauls. Arthur cried loudly to his Britons to observe their covenant, commanding that not a man should move to his help that day. He gripped Excalibur sternly in his hand, resolving that Frolo should pay dearly for his triumph. Arthur dressed his shield above his head, and handselling his sword, rushed upon Frolo. Frolo was a passing good knight, hardy and strong, in no whit dismayed by the anger of his adversary. He raised his own glaive on high, striking fiercely at Arthur's brow. Frolo was strong beyond the strength of man. His brand was great and sharp, and the buffet was struck with all his power. The blade sheared through helm and coif alike, so that King Arthur was wounded in his forehead, and the blood ran down his face.

When Arthur felt the dolour of his hurt, and looked upon his blood, he desired nothing, save to wreak evil on the man who had wrought this mischief. He pressed the more closely upon Frolo. Lifting Excalibur, his good sword, in both hands, he smote so lustily that Frolo's head was cloven down to his very shoulders. No helmet nor hauberk, whatever the armourer's craft, could have given surety from so mighty a blow. Blood and brains gushed from the wound. Frolo fell upon the ground, and beating the earth a little with his chausses of steel, presently died, and was still.

When men saw this bitter stroke the burgesses and sergeants raised a loud cry. Arthur's household rejoiced beyond measure; but those of the city wept, making great sorrow for Frolo, their champion. Nevertheless, the citizens of Paris ran to their gates. They set the doors wide, and welcomed Arthur, his meinie, and company within their walls. When Arthur perceived the French were desirous to offer him their fealty, he suffered them so to do, taking hostages that they would abide in peace. He lodged within the city certain days, and appointed governors, for the assurance of his power. After quiet was established, Arthur divided the host into two parts. The one of these companies he delivered into the charge of Hoel, the king's nephew. With the other half he devised to conquer Anjou, Auvergne, Gascony, and Poitou; yea, to overrun Lorraine and Burgundy, if the task did not prove beyond his power. Hoel did his

lord's commandment, even as Arthur purposed. He conquered Berri, and afterwards Touraine, Auvergne, Poitou, and Gascony. Guitard, the King of Poitiers, was a valiant captain, having good knights in his service. To uphold his realm and his rights Guitard fought many a hard battle. The luck went this way and that. Sometimes he was the hunter, sometimes the quarry: often he prevailed, and often, again, he lost. At the end Guitard was persuaded Arthur was the stronger lord, and that only by submission could he keep his own. The land was utterly wasted and ravaged. Beyond the walls of town and castle there was nothing left to destroy; and of all the fair vineyards not a vine but was rooted from the ground. Guitard made overtures of peace, and accorded himself with Hoel. He swore Arthur fealty and homage, so that the king came to love him very dearly. The other parcels of France Arthur conquered them every one by his own power. When there was peace over all the country, so that none dared lift a spear against the king, Arthur sought such men as were grown old in his quarrels, and desired greatly to return to their homes. To these feeble sergeants Arthur rendered their wages and gifts, and sent them rejoicing from whence they had come. The knights of his household, and such lusty youths as were desirous of honour, having neither dame nor children to their hearths, Arthur held in his service for yet nine years. During these nine years that Arthur abode in France, he wrought divers great wonders, reproving many haughty men and their tyrannies, and chastising many sinners after their deservings. Now it befell that when Easter was come, Arthur held high feast at Paris with his friends. On that day the king recompensed his servants for their losses, and gave to each after his deserts. He bestowed guerdon meetly on all, according to his zeal and the labour he had done. To Kay, the master seneschal of his house, a loyal and chivalrous knight, the king granted all Anjou and Angers. Bedevere, the king's cup-bearer and very privy counsellor, received that fief of Normandy, which aforetime was called Neustria. These lords, Kay and Bedevere, were Arthur's faithful friends, knowing the inmost counsel of his mind. Boulogne was given to Holden: Le Mans to Borel, his cousin. On each and all, according to his gentleness of heart and diligence in his lord's service, Arthur bestowed honours; and fees, and granted largely of his lands.

After Arthur thus had feoffed his lords, and given riches to his friends, in April, when winter was gone, he passed the sea to England, his own realm. Marvellous joy was shown of all good folk at the return of the king. Dames held those husbands close from whom they had been parted so long. Mothers kissed their sons, with happy tears upon their cheeks. Sons and daughters embraced their fathers. Cousin clipped cousin, and neighbour that friend who once was his companion. The aunt made much of her sister's son. Ladies kissed long that lover who returned from France; yea, when the place was meet, clasped him yet more sweetly in their arms. Wondrous was the joy shown of all. In the lanes and crossways, in the highways and by-ways, you might see friends a many staying friend, to know how it fared with him, how the land was settled when it was won, what adventures chanced to the seeker, what profit came to him thereof, and why he remained so great a while beyond the sea. Then the soldier fought his battles once again. He told over his adventures, he spoke of his hard and weary combats, of the tolls he had endured, and the perils from which he was delivered.

Arthur cherished tenderly his servants, granting largely, and promising richly, to the worthy. He took counsel with his barons, and devised that for the louder proclamation of his fame and wealth, he would hold a solemn feast at Pentecost, when summer was come, and that then in the presence of his earls and baronage he would be crowned king. Arthur commanded all his lords on their allegiance to meet him at Caerleon in Glamorgan. He desired to be crowned king in Caerleon, because it was rich beyond other cities, and marvellously pleasant and fair. Pilgrims told in those days that the mansions of Caerleon were more desirable than the palaces of Rome. This rich city, Caerleon, was builded on the Usk, a river which falls within the Severn. He who came to the city from a strange land, might seek his haven by this fair water. On one side of the town flowed this clear river; whilst on the other spread a thick forest. Fish were very plentiful in the river, and of venison the burgesses had no lack. Passing fair and deep were the meadows about the city, so that the barns and granges were very rich. Within the walls rose two mighty churches, greatly praised. One of these famed churches was called in remembrance of Saint Julius the Martyr, and held a convent of holy nuns for the fairer service of God. The second church was

dedicate to Saint Aaron, his companion. The bishop had his seat therein. Moreover, this church was furnished with many wealthy clergy and canons of seemly life. These clerks were students of astronomy, concerning themselves diligently with the courses of the stars. Often enough they prophesied to Arthur what the future would bring forth, and of the deeds that he would do. So goodly was the city, there was none more delectable in all the earth. Now by reason of the lofty palaces, the fair woods and pastures, the ease and content, and all the delights of which you have heard, Arthur desired to hold his court at Caerleon, and to bid his barons to attend him every one. He commanded, therefore, to the feast, kings and earls, dukes and viscounts, knights and barons, bishops and abbots. Nor did Arthur bid Englishmen alone, but Frenchman and Burgundian, Auvergnat and Gascon, Norman and Poitivin, Angevin and Fleming, together with him of Brabant, Hainault, and Lorraine, the king bade to his dinner. Frisian and Teuton, Dane and Norwegian, Scot, Irish, and Icelfander, him of Cathness and of Gothland, the lords of Galway and of the furthest islands of the Hebrides, Arthur summoned them all. When these received the king's messages commanding them to his crowning, they hastened to observe the feast as they were bidden, every one. From Scotland came Aguisel the king, richly vested in his royal robes; there, too, was Urian, King of Murief, together with his son Yvain the courteous; Lot of Lyones also, to take a brave part in the revels, and with him that very frank and gentle knight Gawain, his son. There besides were Stater and Cadual, kings of South Wales and of North; Cador of Cornwall, right near to Arthur's heart; Morud, Earl of Gloucester; and Guerdon, Earl of Winchester. Anavalt came from Salisbury, and Rimarec from Canterbury. Earl Baldulph drew from Silchester, and Vigenin from Leicester. There, too, was Algal of Guivic, a baron much held in honour by the court. Other lords were there a many, in no wise of less reputation than their fellows. The son of Po that was hight Donander; Regian, son of Abauder; Ceilus the son of Coll; that son of Chater named Chatellus; Griffin, the heir of Nagroil; Ron, the son of Neco; Margoil, Clefaut, Ringar, Angan, Rimar and Gorbonian, Kinlint, Neco and that Peredur, whom men deemed to be gotten by Eladur. Besides these princes there drew to Caerleon such knights as were of the king's house, and served him about his court.

These were his chosen friends, who had their seats at the King's Round Table, but more of them I cannot tell. Many other lords were there of only less wealth and worship than those I have named. So numerous was this fair company that I have lost count of their numbers. A noble array of prelates came also to Arthur's solemn feast. Abbots and mitred bishops walked in their order and degree. The three archbishops of the realm came in his honour, namely, the Archbishop of London, his brother of York, and holy Dubricius, whose chair was in that self same city. Very holy of life was this fair prelate. Very abundantly he laboured, being Archbishop of Caerleon and Legate of Rome. Many wonderful works were wrought by his hands. The sick were brought to him gladly, and by reason of his love and his prayers, oftentimes they were healed of their hurt. In olden days this Dubricius abode in London, but now was Bishop in Wales, by reason of the evil times when kings regarded not God, and the people forsook the churches of their fathers. These clergy assembled at Arthur's court, for the king's feast, together with so great a fellowship of barons that I know not even to rehearse you their names.

Yet these must be remembered, whomsoever I forget. Villamus, King of Ireland, and Malinus, King of Iceland, and Doldamer, lord of that lean and meagre country, known as the land of Goths. Acil, the King of the Danes; Lot, who was King of Norway, and Gonfal, jarl of the lawless Orkneys, from whence sail the pirates in their ships. From the parts beyond the seas came Ligier, holding the dukedom and honour of Burgundy; Holden, Earl of Flanders; and Guerin, Earl of Chartres, having the twelve peers of France in his company, for the richer dignity and splendour of his state. Guitard was there, the Earl of Poitiers; Kay, whom the king had created Earl of Angers; and Bedevere of Neustria, that province which men now call Normandy. From Le Mans drew Earl Borel, and from Brittany Earl Hoel. Passing noble of visage was Hoel, and all those lords who came forth from France. They voyaged to Arthur's court in chased harness and silken raiment, riding on lusty horses with rich trappings, and wearing jewels, with many golden ornaments. There was not a prince from here even unto Spain, yea, to the very Rhine in the land of Germany, but hastened to Arthur's solemn feast, so only that he was bidden to that crowning. Of these some came to look on the face of the king; some to receive of his largeness costly

gifts; some to have speech with the lords of his council. Some desired to marvel over the abundance of Arthur's wealth, and others to hear tell of the great king's courtesies. This lord was drawn by the cords of love; this by compulsion of his suzerain's ban; this to learn by the witness of his eyes whether Arthur's power and prosperity exceeded that fame of which the whole world bragged.

When this proud company of kings, bishops, and princes was gathered together to observe Arthur's feast, the whole city was moved. The king's servants toiled diligently making ready for so great a concourse of guests. Soldiers ran to and fro, busily seeking hostels for this fair assemblage. Houses were swept and garnished, spread with reeds, and furnished with hangings of rich arras. Halls and chambers were granted to their needs, together with stables for the horses and their provand. Those for whom hostelries might not be found abode in seemly lodgings, decently appointed to their degree. The city was full of stir and tumult. In every place you beheld squires leading horses and destriers by the bridle, setting saddles on hackneys and taking them off, buckling the harness and making the metal work shining and bright. Grooms went about their business. Never was such a cleansing of stables, such taking of horses to the meadows, such a currying and combing, shoeing and loosing of girths, washing and watering, such a bearing of straw and of grass for the litter, and oats for the manger. Nor these alone, but in the courtyards and chambers of the hostels you might see the pages and chamberlains go swiftly about their tasks, in divers fashions. The varlets brushed and folded the habiliments, and mantles of their lords. They looked to the stuff and the fastenings of their garments. You saw them hurry through the halls carrying furs and furred raiment, both vair and the grey. Caerleon seemed rather a fair than a city, at Arthur's feast.

Now telleth the chronicle of this geste, that when the morning was come of the day of the high feast, a fair procession of archbishops, bishops, and abbots wended to the king's palace, to place the crown upon Arthur's head, and lead him within the church. Two of these archbishops brought him through the streets of the city, one walking on either side of his person. Each bishop sustained the king by his arm, and thus he was carried to his throne. Four kings went before Arthur and the

clerks, bearing swords in their hands. Pommel, scabbard, and hilt of these four swords were of wrought gold. This was the office of these kings when Arthur held state at his court. The first of the princes was from Scotland, the second from South Wales, the third was of North Wales, and as to the last it was Cadour of Cornwall who carried the fourth sword. All these fair princes were at one in their purpose, being altogether at unity, when Arthur was crowned king. To holy Dubricius it fell, as prelate of Caerleon and Roman legate, to celebrate the office and perform such rites as were seemly to be rendered in the church.

That the queen might not be overshadowed by her husband's state, the crown was set on her head in another fashion. For her part she had bidden to her court the great ladies of the country, and such dames as were the wives of her friends. Together with these had assembled the ladies of her kindred, such ladies as were most to her mind, and many fair and gentle maidens whom she desired to be about her person at the feast. The presence of this gay company of ladies made the feast yet more rich, when the queen was crowned in her chamber, and brought to that convent of holy nuns for the conclusion of the rite. The press was so great that the queen might hardly make her way through the streets of the city. Four dames preceded their lady, bearing four white doves in their hands. These dames were the wives of those lords who carried the golden swords before the king. A fair company of damsels followed after the queen, making marvellous joy and delight. This fair fellowship of ladies came from the noblest of the realm. Passing dainty were they to see, wearing rich mantles above their silken raiment. All men gazed gladly upon them, for their beauty was such that none was sweeter than her fellows. These dames and maidens went clothed in their softest garments. Their heads were tired in their fairest hennins, and they walked in their most holiday vesture. Never were seen so many rich kirtles of divers colours, such costly mantles, such precious jewels and rings. Never were seen such furs and such ornaments, both the vair and the grey. Never was known so gay and noble a procession of ladies, as this which hastened to the church, lest it should be hindered from the rite.

Now within the church Mass was commenced with due pomp and observance. The noise of the organ filled the church, and the clerks sang

tunably in the choir. Their voices swelled or failed, according as the chant mounted to the roof, or died away in supplication. The knights passed from one church to the other. Now they would be at the convent of St. Julius, and again at the cathedral church of St. Aaron. This they did to compare the singing of the clerks, and to delight their eyes with the loveliness of the damsels. Although the knights passed frequently between the churches, yet no man could answer for certain at which they remained the longer. They could not surfeit the heart by reason of the sweetness of the melody. Yea, had the song endured the whole day through, I doubt those knights would ever have grown weary or content.

When the office drew to its appointed end, and the last words were chanted, the king put off his crown that he had carried to the church. He took another crown which sat more lightly on his head; and in such fashion did the queen. They laid aside their heavy robes and ornaments of state, and vested them in less tiring raiment. The king parted from St. Aaron's church, and returned to his palace for meat. The queen, for her part, came again to her own house, carrying with her that fair fellowship of ladies, yet making marvellous joy. For the Britons held still to the custom brought by their sires from Troy, that when the feast was spread, man ate with man alone, bringing no lady with him to the board. The ladies and damsels ate apart. No men were in their hall, save only the servitors, who served them with every observance, for the feast was passing rich, as became a monarch's court. When Arthur was seated in his chair upon the dais, the lords and princes sat around the board, according to the usage of the country, each in his order and degree. The king's seneschal, hight Sir Kay, served Arthur's table, clad in a fair dalmatic of vermeil silk. With Sir Kay were a thousand damoiseaux, clothed in ermine, who bore the dishes from the buttery. These pages moved briskly about the tables, carrying the meats in platters to the guests. Together with these were yet another thousand damoiseaux, gentle and goodly to see, clothed likewise in coats of ermine. These fair varlets poured the wine from golden beakers into cups and hanaps of fine gold. Not one of these pages but served in a vesture of ermine. Bedevere, the king's cupbearer, himself set Arthur's cup upon the board;

and those called him master who saw that Arthur's servants lacked not drink.

The queen had so many servitors at her bidding, that I may not tell you the count. She and all her company of ladies were waited on, richly and reverently. Right worshipfully were they tended. These ladies had to their table many rich meats, and wines and spiced drink of divers curious fashions. The dishes and vessels from which they ate were very precious, and passing fair. I know not how to put before you the wealth and the splendour of Arthur's feast. Whether for goodly men or for chivalrous deeds, for wealth as for plenty, for courtesy as for honour, in Arthur's day England bore the flower from all the lands near by, yea, from every other realm whereof we know. The poorest peasant in his smock was a more courteous and valiant gentleman than was a belted knight beyond the sea. And as with the men, so, and no otherwise, was it with the women. There was never a knight whose praise was bruited abroad, but went in harness and raiment and plume of one and the self-same hue. The colour of surcoat and armour in the field was the colour of the gown he wore in hall. The dames and damsels would apparel them likewise in cloth of their own colour. No matter what the birth and riches of a knight might be, never, in all his days, could he gain fair lady to his friend, till he had proved his chivalry and worth. That knight was accounted the most nobly born who bore himself the foremost in the press. Such a knight was indeed cherished of the ladies; for his friend was the more chaste as he was brave.

After the king had risen from the feast, he and his fellowship went without the city to take their delight amongst the fields. The lords sought their pleasure in divers places. Some amongst them jostled together, that their horses might be proven. Others fenced with the sword, or cast the stone, or flung pebbles from a sling. There were those who shot with the bow, like cunning archers, or threw darts at a mark. Every man strove with his fellow, according to the game he loved. That knight who proved the victor in his sport, and bore the prize from his companions, was carried before the king in the sight of all the princes. Arthur gave him of his wealth so goodly a gift, that he departed from the king's presence in great mirth and content. The ladies of the court climbed upon the walls, looking down on the games very gladly. She,

whose friend was beneath her in the field, gave him the glance of her eye and her face; so that he strove the more earnestly for her favour. Now to the court had gathered many tumblers, harpers, and makers of music, for Arthur's feast. He who would hear songs sung to the music of the rote, or would solace himself with the newest refrain of the minstrel, might win to his wish. Here stood the viol player, chanting ballads and lays to their appointed tunes. Everywhere might be heard the voice of viols and harp and flutes. In every place rose the sound of lyre and drum and shepherd's pipe, bagpipe, psaltery, cymbals, monochord, and all manner of music. Here the tumbler tumbled on his carpet. There the mime and the dancing girl put forth their feats. Of Arthur's guests some hearkened to the teller of tales and fables. Others called for dice and tables, and played games of chance for a wager. Evil befalls to winner and loser alike from such sport as this. For the most part men played at chess or draughts. You might see them, two by two, bending over the board. When one player was beaten by his fellow, he borrowed moneys to pay his wager, giving pledges for the repayment of his debt. Dearly enough he paid for his loan, getting but eleven to the dozen. But the pledge was offered and taken, the money rendered, and the game continued with much swearing and cheating, much drinking and quarrelling, with strife and with anger. Often enough the loser was discontented, and rose murmuring against his fellow. Two by two the dicers sat at table, casting the dice. They threw in turn, each throwing higher than his fellow. You might hear them count, six, five, three, four, two, and one. They staked their raiment on the cast, so there were those who threw half naked. Fair hope had he who held the dice, after his fellow had cried his number. Then the quarrel rose suddenly from the silence. One called across the table to his companion, "You cheat, and throw not fairly. Grasp not the dice so tightly in your hand, but shake them forth upon the board. My count is yet before yours. If you still have pennies in your pouch bring them out, for I will meet you to your wish." Thus the dicers wrangled, and to many of Arthur's guests it chanced that he who sat to the board in furs, departed from the tables clothed in his skin.

When the fourth day of the week was come, on a certain Wednesday, the king made knights of his bachelors, granting them rents to support their stations. He recompensed those lords of his household who held of

him their lands at suit and service. Such clerks as were diligent in their Master's business he made abbots and bishops; and bestowed castles and towns on his counsellors and friends. To those stranger knights who for his love had crossed the sea in his quarrel, the king gave armour and destrier and golden ornaments, to their desire. Arthur divided amongst them freely of his wealth. He granted lordship and delights, greyhound and brachet, furred gown and raiment, beaker and hanap, sendal and signet, bliaut and mantle, lance and sword and quivers of sharp barbed arrows. He bestowed harness and buckler and weapons featly fashioned by the smith. He gave largesse of bears and of leopards, of palfreys and hackneys, of chargers with saddles thereon. He gave the helm as the hauberk, the gold as the silver, yea, he bestowed on his servants the very richest and most precious of his treasure. Never a man of these outland knights, so only he was worthy of Arthur's bounty, but the king granted him such gifts as he might brag of in his own realm. And as with the foreign lords, so to the kings and the princes, the knights and all his barons, Arthur gave largely many precious gifts.

Now as King Arthur was seated on a dais with these princes and earls before him, there entered in his hall twelve ancient men, white and greyheaded, full richly arrayed in seemly raiment. These came within the palace two by two. With the one hand each clasped his companion, and in the other carried a fair branch of olive. The twelve elders passed at a slow pace down the hall, bearing themselves right worshipfully. They drew near to Arthur's throne, and saluted the king very courteously. They were citizens of Rome, said the spokesman of these aged men, and were ambassadors from the emperor, bringing with them letters to the king. Having spoken such words, one amongst them made ready his parchment, and delivered it in Arthur's hands. This was the sum of the writing sent by the Emperor of Rome.

"Lucius, the Emperor and lord of Rome, to King Arthur, his enemy, these, according to his deservings. I marvel very greatly, and disdain whilst yet I marvel, the pride and ill-will which have puffed you up to seek to do me evil. I have nothing but contempt and wonder for those who counsel you to resist the word of Rome, whilst yet one Roman draws his breath. You have acted lightly, and by reason of vanity have wrought mischief to us who are the front and avengers of the world. You

resemble a blind man, whose eyes the leech prepares to open. You know not yet, but very soon you will have learned, the presumption of him who teaches law to the justice of Rome. It is not enough to say that you have acted after your kind, and sinned according to your nature. Know you not whom you are, and from what dust you have come, that you dare to dispute the tribute to Rome! Why do you steal our land and our truage? Why do you refuse to render Caesar that which is his own? Are you indeed so strong that we may not take our riches from your hand? Perchance you would show us a marvellous matter. Behold—you say—the lion fleeing from the lamb, the wolf trembling before the kid, and the leopard fearful of the hare. Be not deceived. Nature will not suffer such miracles to happen. Julius Caesar, our mighty ancestor—whom, maybe, you despise in your heart—conquered the land of Britain, taking tribute thereof, and this you have paid until now. From other islands also, neighbours of this, it was our custom to receive truage. These in your presumption you have taken by force, to your own most grievous hurt. Moreover, you have been so bold as to put yet greater shame and damage upon us, since Frolo, our tribune, is slain, and France and Britain, by fraud, you keep wrongfully in your power. Since, then, you have not feared Rome, neither regarded her honour, the senate summon you by these letters, and command you under pain of their displeasure, to appear before them at mid August, without fail or excuse. Come prepared to make restitution of that you have taken, whatever the cost; and to give satisfaction for all those things whereof you are accused. If so be you think to keep silence, and do naught of that you are bidden, I will cross the Mont St. Bernard with a mighty host, and pluck Britain and France from your hand. Do not deem that you can make head against me, neither hold France in my despite. Never will you dare to pass that sea, for my dearer pleasure; yea, were your courage indeed so great, yet never might you abide my coming. Be persuaded that in what place soever you await me, from thence I will make you skip. For this is my purpose, to bind you with bonds, and bring you to Rome, and deliver you, bound, to the judgment of the senate.”

When this letter was read in the hearing of those who were come to Arthur’s solemnity, a great tumult arose, for they were angered beyond measure. Many of the Britons took God to witness that they would do

such things and more also to those ambassadors who had dared deliver the message. They pressed about those twelve ancient men, with many wild and mocking words. Arthur rose hastily to his feet, bidding the brawlers to keep silence. He cried that none should do the Romans a mischief, for they were an embassy, and carried the letters of their lord. Since they were but another's mouthpiece, he commanded that none should work them harm. After the noise was at an end, and Arthur was assured that the elders were no longer in peril, he called his privy council and the lords of his household together, in a certain stone keep, that was named the Giant's Tower. The king would be advised by his barons—so ran the summons what answer he should give to the messengers of Rome. Now as they mounted the stairs, earl and prince, pell-mell, together, Cador, who was a merry man, saw the king before him. "Fair king," said the earl gaily, "for a great while the thought has disturbed me, that peace and soft living are rotting away the British bone. Idleness is the stepdame of virtue, as our preachers have often told us. Soft living makes a sluggard of the hardiest knight, and steals away his strength. She cradles him with dreams of woman, and is the mother of chambering and wantonness. Folded hands and idleness cause our young damoiseaux to waste their days over merry tales, and dice, raiment to catch a lady's fancy and things that are worse. Rest and assurance of safety will in the end do Britain more harm than force or guile. May the Lord God be praised Who has jogged our elbow. To my mind He has persuaded these Romans to challenge our country that we may get us from sleep. If the Romans trust so greatly in their might that they do according to their letters, be assured the Briton has not yet lost his birthright of courage and hardness. I am a soldier, and have never loved a peace that lasts over long, since there are uglier things than war." Gawain overheard these words. "Lord earl," said he, "by my faith be not fearful because of the young men. Peace is very grateful after war. The grass grows greener, and the harvest is more plenteous. Merry tales, and songs, and ladies' love are delectable to youth. By reason of the bright eyes and the worship of his friend, the bachelor becomes knight and learns chivalry."

Whilst the lords jested amongst themselves in this fashion, they climbed the tower, and were seated in the chamber. When Arthur marked that each was in his place, silent and attentive to the business, he

considered for a little that he had to speak. Presently he lifted his head, and spoke such words as these. "Lords," said the king, "who are here with me, nay, rather my companions and my friends, companions alike, whether the day be good or evil, by whose sustenance alone I have endured such divers quarrels, hearken well to me. In the days that are told, have we not shared victory and defeat together; partners, you with me, as I with you, in gain and in loss? Through you, and by reason of your help in time of trouble, have I won many battles. You have I carried over land and sea, far and near, to many strange realms. Ever have I found you loyal and true, in business and counsel. Because of your prowess I hold the heritage of divers neighbouring princes in subjection. Lords, you have hearkened to the letters carried by the ambassadors of Rome, and to the malice they threaten if we do not after their commandment. Very despiteful are they against us, and purpose to work us bitter mischief. But if God be gracious to His people, we shall yet be delivered from their hand. Now these Romans are a strong nation, passing rich and of great power. It becomes us therefore to consider prudently what we shall say and do in answer to their message, looking always to the end. He who is assured of his mark gets there by the shortest road. When the arrows start to fly, the sergeant takes shelter behind his shield. Let us be cautious and careful like these. This Lucius seeks to do us a mischief. He is in his right; and it is ours to take such counsel, that his mischief falls on his own head. To-day he demands tribute from Britain and other islands of the sea. To-morrow he purposes in his thought to receive truage of France. Consider first the case of Britain, and how to answer wisely therein. Britain was conquered by Caesar of force. The Britons knew not how to keep them against his host, and perforce paid him their tribute. But force is no right. It is but pride puffed up and swollen beyond measure. They cannot hold of law what they have seized by violence and wrong. The land is ours by right, even if the Roman took it to himself by force. The Romans really reproach us for the shame and the damage, the loss and the sorrow Caesar visited upon our fathers. They boast that they will avenge such losses as these, by taking the land with the rent, and making their little finger thicker than their father's loins. Let them beware. Hatred breeds hatred again, and things despiteful are done to those who despitefully use you. They

come with threats, demanding truage, and reproving us for the evil we have done them. Tribute they claim by the right of the strong; leaving sorrow and shame as our portion. But if the Romans claim to receive tribute of Britain because tribute was aforetime paid them from Britain, by the same reasoning we may establish that Rome should rather pay tribute to us. In olden days there lived two brothers, British born, namely, Belinus, King of the Britons, and Brennus, Duke of Burgundy, both wise and doughty lords. These stout champions arrived with their men before Rome, and shutting the city close, at the end gained it by storm. They took hostages of the citizens to pay them tribute; but since the burgesses did not observe their covenant, the brethren hanged the hostages, to the number of four-and-twenty, in the eyes of all their kinsfolk. When Belinus went to his own place, he commended Rome to the charge of Brennus, his brother. Now Constantine, the son of Helena, drew from Brennus and Belinus, and in his turn held Rome in his care. Maximian, King of Britain, after he had conquered France and Germany, passed the Mont St. Bernard into Lombardy, and took Rome to his keeping. These mighty kings were my near kinsmen, and each was master of Rome. Thus you have heard, and see clearly, that not only am I King of Britain, but by law Emperor of Rome also, so we maintain the rights of our fathers. The Romans have had truage of us, and my ancestors have taken seisin of them. They claim Britain, and I demand Rome. This is the sum and end of my counsel as regards Britain and Rome. Let him have the fief and the rent who is mightier in the field. As to France and those other countries which have been removed from their hands, the Romans should not wish to possess that which they may not maintain. Either the land was not to their mind, or they had not the strength to hold it. Perchance the Romans have no rights in the matter, and it is by reason of covetousness rather than by love of law, that they seek this quarrel. Let him keep the land who can, by the right of the most strong. For all these things the emperor menaces us very grievously. I pray God that he may do us no harm. Our fiefs and goods he promises to take from us, and lead us captive in bonds to Rome. We care not overmuch for this, and are not greatly frightened at his words. If he seek us after his boast, please God, he will have no mind to threaten when he turns again to his own home. We accept his challenge, and appeal to

God's judgment, that all may be rendered to his keeping, who is able to maintain it in his hand."

When Arthur the king had made an end of speaking in the ears of his barons, the word was with those who had hearkened to his counsel. Hoel followed after the king. "Sire," said he, "you have spoken much, and right prudently; nor is there any who can add wisdom to your speech. Summon now your vassals and meinie, together with us who are of your household. Cross the sea straightway into France, and make the realm sure with no further tarrying. From thence we can pass Mont St. Bernard, and overrun Lombardy. By moving swiftly we shall carry the war into the emperor's own land. We shall fright him so greatly that he will have the less leisure to trouble Britain. Your movements, moreover, will be so unlooked for that the Romans will be altogether amazed, and quickly confounded. Sire, it is the Lord's purpose to exalt you over all the kings of the earth. Hinder not the will of God by doubtfulness. He is able to put even Rome in your power, so only it be according to His thought. Remember the books of the Sibyl, and of the prophecies therein. The Sibyl wrote that three kings should come forth from Britain, who of their might should conquer Rome. Of these three princes, two are dead. Belinus is dead, and Constantine is dead; but each in his day was the master of Rome. You are that third king destined to be stronger than the great city. In you the prophecy shall be fulfilled, and the Sibyl's words accomplished. Why then scruple to take what God gives of His bounty? Rise up then, exalt yourself, exalt your servants, who would see the end of God's purpose. I tell you truly that nothing of blows or hurt, neither weariness nor prison nor death, counts aught with us in comparison with what is due to the king's honour. For my part, I will ride in your company, so long as this business endures, with ten thousand armed horsemen at my back. Moreover, if your treasury has need of moneys for the quarrel, I will put my realm in pledge, and deliver the gold and the gain to your hand. Never a penny will I touch of my own, so long as the king has need."

After Hoel had ended his counsel, Aguisel, King of Scotland, who was brother to Lot and to Urian, stood on his feet. "Sire," said he, "the words you have spoken in this hall, where are gathered the flower of your chivalry, are dear to their ears, for we have listened to the

disdainful messages of Rome. Be assured that each of your peers will aid you to the utmost of his power. Now is the time and occasion to show forth the counsel and help we can afford to our king. Not one of us here who is a subject of your realm, and holds his manors of the crown, but will do his duty to his liege, as is but just and right. No tidings I have heard for a great while past sounded so good and fair as the news that presently we shall have strife with Rome. These Romans are a people whom I neither love with my heart, nor esteem in my mind; but hate because they are very orgulous and proud. Upright folk should avoid their fellowship, for they are an evil and a covetous race, caring for no other matter but to heap treasure together, and add to their store. The emperor of this people, by fraud and deceit, has fastened this quarrel upon us, sending you letters with an embassy. He deems that Britain is no other than it was, or he would not demand his measure of tribute, pressed down and running over. The Roman has raised such a smoke that his fingers will quickly be scorched in the flame. Moreover, had the Roman kept quiet, even had he refrained from threats, it becomes our honour, of our own choice, to enter on this war, to avenge the wrongs of our fathers, and to abase his pride. The Romans' logic is that they are entitled to receive tribute at our hands, by reason that their fathers in their day, took truage of our ancestors. If this be so, it was no free-will offering of our fathers, but was wrenched from them by force. So be it. By force we take again our own, and revenge ourselves for all the pilling of the past. We are a perilous people, who have proved victors in divers great battles, and brought many a bitter war to a good end. But what profit is ours of all these triumphs, so long as we cry not 'check' to Rome! I desire not drink to my lips when athirst, nor meat to my mouth when an hungered, as I desire the hour when we hurtle together in the field. Then hey for the helm laced fast, the lifted shield, for the brandished sword, and the mighty horse. God! what spoil and rich ransom will he gain whose body God keeps with His buckler that day. Never again will he be poor till his life's end. Cities and castles will be his for the sacking; and mules, sumpters, and destriers to the heart's desire. On then, comrades, to the conquest of Rome, and to the parcelling of the Romans' lands. When the proud city is destroyed, and its wardens slain, there remains yet a work for us to do. We will pass into Lorraine, and seize

the realm. We will make our pleasaunce of all the strongholds of Germany. So we will do, till there endures not a land to the remotest sea but is Arthur's fief, nor one only realm to pluck them from his power. Right or wrong this is our purpose. That my blow may be heavy as my word, and the deed accord with the speech, I am ready to go with the king, and ten thousand riders with me, besides men-at-arms in such plenty that no man may count them."

When the King of Scotland had spoken, there was much stir and tumult, all men crying that he would be shamed for ever who did not his utmost in this quarrel. Arthur and his baronage being of one mind together, the king wrote certain letters to Rome, and sealed them with his ring. These messages he committed to the embassy, honouring right worshipfully those reverend men. "Tell your countrymen," said the king, "that I am lord of Britain: that I hold France, and will continue to hold it, and purpose to defend it against the Roman power. Let them know of a surety that I journey to Rome presently at their bidding; only it will be not to carry them tribute, but rather to seek it at their hand." The ambassadors, therefore, took their leave, and went again to Rome. There they told where and in what fashion they were welcomed of the king, and reported much concerning him. This Arthur—said these ancient men—is a lord amongst kings, generous and brave, lettered and very wise. Not another king could furnish the riches spent on his state, by reason of the attendance of his ministers, and the glory of their apparel. It was useless to seek tribute from Arthur, since in olden days Britain received tribute of Rome.

Now when the senate had heard the report of the messengers, and considered the letters wherewith they were charged, they were persuaded of ambassador and message alike that Arthur neither would do homage nor pay them the tribute they demanded. The senate, therefore, took counsel with the emperor, requiring him to summon all the empire to his aid. They devised that with his host he should pass through the mountains into Burgundy, and giving battle to King Arthur deprive him of kingdom and crown. Lucius Tiberius moved very swiftly. He sent messages to kings, earls, and dukes, bidding them as they loved honour to meet him on a near day at Rome, in harness for the quest. At the emperor's commandment came many mighty lords, whose names I

find written in the chronicles of those times. To meet Lucius came Epistrophius, King of the Greeks; Ession, King of Boeotia; and Itarc, King of the Turks, a passing strong and perilous knight. With these were found Pandras, King of Egypt, and Hippolytus, King of Crete. These were lords of very great worship; a hundred cities owning their tyranny. Evander drew from Syria, and Teucer from Phrygia; from Babylon came Micipsa, and from Spain, Aliphatma. From Media came King Bocus, from Libya, Sertorius, from Bithynia, Polydetes, and from Idumea, King Xerxes. Mustansar, the King of Africa, came from his distant home, many a long days' journey. With him were black men and Moors, bearing their king's rich treasure. The senate gave of their number these patricians: Marcellus and Lucius Catellus, Cocta, Caius, and Metellus. Many other lords gladly joined themselves to that company, whose names for all my seeking I have not found. When the host was gathered together, the count of the footmen was four hundred thousand armed men, besides one hundred and eighty thousand riders on horses. This mighty army, meetly ordered and furnished with weapons, set forth on a day to give Arthur battle from Rome.

Arthur and his baronage departed from the court to make them ready for battle. The king sent his messengers to and fro about the land, calling and summoning each by his name, to hasten swiftly with his power, so that he valued Arthur's love. Not a knight but was bidden to ride on his allegiance, with all the men and horses that he had. The lords of the isles, Ireland, Gothland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway and the Orkneys, promised for their part one hundred and forty thousand men, armed and clad according to the fashion of their country. Of these not a horseman but was a cunning rider; not a footman but bore his accustomed weapon, battle axe, javelin, or spear. Normandy and Anjou, Auvergne and Poitou, Flanders and Boulogne promised, without let, eighty thousand sergeants more, each with his armour on his back. So much it was their right and privilege to do, they said. The twelve peers of France, who were of the fellowship of Guerin of Chartres, promised every one to ride at Arthur's need, each man with a hundred lances. This was their bounden service, said these peers. Hoel of Brittany promised ten thousand men; Aguisel of Scotland two thousand more. From Britain, his proper realm, that we now call England, Arthur numbered forty

thousand horsemen in hauberks of steel. As for the count of the footmen-arbalestriers, archers, and spearmen—it was beyond all measure, for the number of the host was as the grains of the sand. When Arthur was certified of the greatness of his power, and of the harness of his men, he wrote letters to each of his captains, commanding him that on an appointed day he should come in ships to Barfleur in Normandy. The lords of his baronage, who had repaired from the court to their fiefs, hastened to make ready with those whom they should bring across the sea. In like manner Arthur pushed on with his business, that nothing should hinder or delay.

Arthur committed the care of his realm, and of Dame Guenevere, his wife, to his nephew, Mordred, a marvellously hardy knight, whom Arthur loved passing well. Mordred was a man of high birth, and of many noble virtues, but he was not true. He had set his heart on Guenevere, his kinswoman, but such a love brought little honour to the queen. Mordred had kept this love close, for easy enough it was to hide, since who would be so bold as to deem that he loved his uncle's dame? The lady on her side had given her love to a lord of whom much good was spoken; but Mordred was of her husband's kin! This made the shame more shameworthy. Ah, God, the deep wrong done in this season by Mordred and the queen.

Arthur, having put all the governance in Mordred's power, save only the crown, went his way to Southampton. His meinie was lodged about the city, whilst his vessels lay within the haven. The harbour was filled with the ships. They passed to and fro; they remained at anchorage; they were bound together by cables. The carpenter yet was busy upon them with his hammer. Here the shipmen raised the mast, and bent the sail, There they thrust forth bridges to the land, and charged the stores upon the ship. The knights and the sergeants entered therein in their order, bearing pikes, and leading the fearful horses by the rein. You could watch them crying farewell, and waving their hands, to those remaining on the shore. When the last man had entered in the last ship the sailors raised the anchors, and worked the galleys from the haven. Right diligently the mariners laboured, spreading the sails, and making fast the stays. They pulled stoutly upon the hoists and ropes, so that the ships ran swiftly out to sea. Then they made the ropes secure, each in its wonted

place. The captain who was charged with the safety of the ship set his course carefully, whilst pilot and steersman heedfully observed his word. At his bidding they put the helm to port, to lee, as they might better fill their sails with the wind. As need arose the shipmen drew upon the cords and bowlines, or let the canvas fall upon the deck, that the vessel might be the less beaten of the waves. Thus, loosing and making fast, letting go and bringing quickly to the deck, hauling and tugging at the ropes—so they proceeded on their way. When night was come, they steered their courses by the stars, furling the sails that the wind should not carry them from their path. Very fearful were the mariners of the dark, and went as slowly as they were able. Passing bold was he, that first courteous captain, who builded the first ship, and committing his body to the wind and waves, set forth to seek a land he might not see, and to find such haven as men had never known.

Now it came to pass that whilst the host voyaged in great content with a fair wind towards Barfleur, that Arthur slept, for he was passing heavy, and it was night. As the king slumbered he beheld a vision, and, lo, a bear flying high in air towards the east. Right huge and hideous of body was the bear, and marvellously horrible to see. Also the king saw a dragon flying over against him towards the west. The brightness of his eyes was such, that the whole land and sea were filled with the radiance of his glory. When these two beasts came together, the dragon fell upon the bear, and the bear defended himself valiantly against his adversary. But the dragon put his enemy beneath him, and tumbling him to the earth, crushed him utterly in the dust. When Arthur had slept for awhile, his spirit came to him again, and he awoke and remembered his dream. The king called therefore for his wise clerks, and related to them and his household the vision that he had seen of the bear and of the dragon. Then certain of these clerks expounded to the king his dream, and the interpretation thereof. The dragon that was beholden of the king signified himself. By the bear was shown forth a certain horrible giant, come from a far land, whom he should slay. The giant desired greatly that the adventure should end in another fashion; nevertheless all would be to the king's profit. But Arthur replied, "My interpretation of the dream is other than yours. To me it typifies rather the issue of the war between myself and the emperor. But let the Creator's will be done."

After these words no more was spoken until the rising of the sun. Very early in the morning they came to haven at Barfleur in Normandy. Presently the host issued from the ships, and spread themselves abroad, to await the coming of those who tarried on the way. Now they had but dwelled for a little while in the land when tidings were brought to the king that a marvellously strong giant, newly come from Spain, had ravished Helen, the niece of his kinsman, Hoel. This doleful lady the giant had carried to a high place known as St. Michael's Mount, though in that day there was neither church nor monastery on the cliff, but all was shut close by the waves of the sea. There was none in the country so hardy and strong, whether gentle or simple of birth, that dared to do battle with the giant, or even to come where he lay. Often enough the folk of the land had gathered themselves together, and compassed about the rock both by land and sea, but little had they gained from their labour. For the giant had beaten their boats amongst the rocks, so that they were slain or drowned. Therefore they left him to himself, since there was none to hinder his pleasure. The peasants of the realm were exceeding sorrowful. Their enemy spoiled their houses, harried their cattle, bore away their wives and children, and returned to his fastness on the mount. The villeins lurked in the woods from his wrath. They perished of misery in secret places, so that the whole land was barren, because there was none to labour in the fields. This marvellous giant had to name Dinabuc. Not a soul but prayed that he might come to an evil end. When Arthur heard these lamentable tidings he called to him Kay the seneschal and Bedevere his cupbearer, for he would open his counsel to no other man. He told them his purpose to depart from the camp that same night privily, taking none with him, save themselves alone. None but they would know of his errand, for he rode to the mount to be assured as to whether he or the giant was the stouter champion, All through the night the three rode together, sparing not the spur. At daybreak they came upon the ford that leads across the water to the mount. Looking towards the mount they beheld a burning fire upon the hill, that might be seen from very far. Over against the mount was set another hill, near by, and of lesser height, and upon this hill also a fire of coals. Arthur gazed from hill to mountain. He doubted where the giant lodged, and in which of these two high places he should come upon him.

There was no man to ask of his dwelling, nor to tell of his outgoings. Arthur bade Bedevere to go first to the one and then to the other hill, seeking news of the giant. When he had found that which he sought, he must return swiftly, bringing good tidings. Bedevere set forth upon his quest. He entered into a little boat, and rowed over to that mount which was nearer. He could cross in no other manner, for the tide was very full, and all the sand was covered of the sea. Bedevere got him from the boat, and began to climb the hill. As he climbed he stood still for a space, and hearkened. From above Bedevere might hear a noise of sore weeping, and loud lamentation, and doleful sighs. The knight grew cold at the heart root by reason of his exceeding fear, since he deemed to have come upon the giant at his play. Presently the courage returned to his breast, and drawing the sword from its sheath, he advanced stoutly up the hill. Bedevere considered within himself that it were better for a knight to die, rather than know himself a coward. He reproached himself for his fearfulness, and in heart and hope desired only to bring the adventure to a good end. His wish proved but vain. When Bedevere won the summit of the mountain, there was no giant, but only a flaming fire, and close by the fire a new-dug grave. The knight drew near this fire, with the sword yet naked in his hand. Lying beside the grave he found an old woman, with rent raiment and streaming hair, lamenting her wretched case. She bewailed also the fate of Helen, making great dole and sorrow, with many shrill cries. When this piteous woman beheld Bedevere upon the mount, "Oh, wretched man," she exclaimed, "what is thy name, and what misadventure leads you here? Should the giant find thee in his haunt, this very day thy life will end in shame and grief and hurt. Flee, poor wretch, upon thy road, before he spies thee. Be pitiful to thyself, nor seek to die, for who art thou to deliver thyself from his wrath!" "Good dame," made reply Sir Bedevere, "give over weeping and answer my words. Tell me who you are, and why you shed these tears. For what reason do you abide in this isle, and crouch beside this tomb? Answer me plainly concerning your adventure." "Fair lord," replied the ancient lady, "I am a forsaken and a most unhappy woman. I make my lamentation for a damsel, named Helen, whom I nourished at my breast, the niece of Duke Hoel of this realm. Here lies her body in this tomb, that was given to me to cherish. Alas, for her who was set

upon my knees! Alas, for her I cherished in my bosom! A certain devil ravished her away, and me also, bearing us both to this his lair. The giant would have had to do with the maiden, but she was so tender of her years that she might not endure him. Passing young was the maid; whilst he, for his part, was so gross and weighty of bone and flesh, that her burden was more than she could bear. For this the soul departed from her body. Alas, wretch that I am, I remain alive, and she, my joy and my love, my sweetness and my delight, was foully done to death by this giant. Nothing was left for me to do, but to put her body in the earth." "For what reason do you abide in this hill," asked Sir Bedevere, "since Helen is gone before?" "Will thou learn of the reason," said the ancient damsel, "then it shall not be hidden; for easy it is to see that thou art a gentle and a courteous man. When Helen had gone her way in shame and sorrow, the giant constrained me to abide that I might suffer his pleasure. This he did, although my heart was hot because I had seen my lady die in sore anguish. Force keeps me in this haunt; force makes me his sport. You cannot think that I stay of my own free will on the mount. I but submit to the will of the Lord. Would to God that I were dead, as for a little more I should be slain of the giant. But if I am older of years, I am also stronger, and harder, and more firm in my purpose, than ever was my frail Lady Helen. Nevertheless I am well-nigh gone, and have little longer to endure. Perchance even this very day will be my last. Friend, tarry here no further whomsoever thou mayst be. Flee while you can, for behold the fire smokes upon the mountain, and the devil makes him ready to ascend, according to his custom. Be not snared within his net. Depart, and leave an old woman to her tears and sorrow; for I have no care to live, since Helen and her love are spoiled with dust."

When Bedevere heard this adventure he was filled with pity, With his whole heart he comforted the damsel as gently as he might. He left her for a season, and hastening down the hill came straightway to the king. Bedevere showed his lord of all that he had heard and seen. He told over the tale of that ancient nurse lamenting by a grave; of Helen who was dead, and of the giant's haunt upon the higher of the hills which smoked. Arthur was passing heavy at Helen's fate. He wasted no time in tears, nor suffered himself to be fearful. Arthur bade his companions get into their harness, and ride with him to the ford. The tide was now at

the ebb, so that they crossed on their horses, and came speedily to the foot of the hill. There they dismounted, giving their mantles and destriers to the charge of the squires. Arthur, Bedevere, and Kay, the three together, began briskly to climb the mount. After they had climbed for a while Arthur spake to his fellows: "Comrades, I go before to do battle with the giant. For your part you must follow a little after. But let neither of you be so bold as to aid me in my quarrel, so long as I have strength to strive. Be the buffets what they may, stand you still, unless he beats me to the ground. It is not seemly that any, save one, should have lot in this business. Nevertheless so you see me in utmost peril and fear, come swiftly to my succour, nor let me find death at his hands." Sir Kay and Sir Bedevere made this covenant with their lord, and the three knights together set forth again up the hill. Now when Arthur drew near to the summit of the mount, he beheld the giant crouched above his fire. He broiled a hog within the flame upon a spit. Part of the flesh he had eaten already, and part of the meat was charred and burning in the fire. He was the more hideous to see because his beard and hair were foul with blood and coal. Arthur trusted to take him thus unready, before he could get to his mace. But the giant spied his adversary, and all marvelled leapt lightly on his feet. He raised the club above his shoulder, albeit so heavy that no two peasants of the country could lift it from the ground. Arthur saw the giant afoot, and the blow about to fall. He gripped his sword, dressing the buckler high to guard his head. The giant struck with all his strength upon the shield, so that the mountain rang like an anvil. The stroke was stark, and Arthur stood mazed at the blow, but he was hardy and strong, and did not reel. When the king came to himself, and marked the shield shattered on his arm, he was marvellously wroth. He raised his sword and struck full at the giant's brow. The blow was shrewd, and would have brought the combat to an end had not the giant parried with his mace. Even so, his head was sorely hurt, and the blood ran down his face, that he might not see. When the giant knew that he was wounded to his hurt, he became in his rage as a beast possessed. He turned grimly on his adversary, even as the boar, torn of the hounds and mangled by the hunting knife, turns on the hunter. Filled with ire and malice the giant rushed blindly on the king. Heedless of the sword, he flung his arms about him, and putting

forth the full measure of his might, bore Arthur to his knees. Arthur was ardent and swift and ready of wit. He remembered his manhood, and struggled upright on his feet. He was altogether angered, and fearful of what might hap. Since strength could not help, he called subtlety to his aid. Arthur made his body stiff like a rod, and held himself close, for he was passing strong. He feigned to spring on his foe, but turning aside, slipped quickly from under the giant's arms. When Arthur knew his person free of these bands, he passed swiftly to and fro, eluding his enemy's clasp. Now he was here, now there, oftentimes striking with the sword. The giant ran blindly about, groping with his hands, for his eyes were full of blood, and he knew not white from black. Sometimes Arthur was before him, sometimes behind, but never in his grip; till at the end the king smote him so fiercely with Excalibur that the blade clove to his brain, and he fell. He cried out in his pain, and the noise of his fall and of this exceeding bitter cry was as fetters of iron tormented by the storm.

Arthur stood a little apart, and gazed upon his adversary, He laughed aloud in his mirth; for his anger was well-nigh gone, He commanded Bedevere, his cupbearer, to strike off the giant's head, and deliver it to the squires, that they might bear it to the host, for the greater marvel. Bedevere did after his lord's behest. He drew his sword, and divided the head from the shoulders. Wonderfully huge and hideous to sight was the head of this giant. Never, said Arthur, had he known such fear; neither had met so perilous a giant, save only that Riton, who had grieved so many fair kings. This Riton in his day made war upon divers kings. Of these some were slain in battle, and others remained captive in his hand. Alive or dead, Riton used them despitefully; for it was his wont to shave the beards of these kings, and purfle therewith a cloak of furs that he wore, very rich. Vainglorious beyond measure was Riton of his broidered cloak. Now by reason of folly and lightness, Riton sent messages to Arthur, bidding him shave his beard, and commend it forthwith to the giant, in all good will. Since Arthur was a mightier lord and a more virtuous prince than his fellows, Riton made covenant to prefer his beard before theirs, and hold it in honour as the most silken fringe of his mantle. Should Arthur refuse to grant Riton the trophy, then nought was there to do, but that body to body they must fight out their quarrel, in single combat, alone. He who might slay his adversary, or

force him to own himself vanquished, should have the beard for his guerdon, together with the mantle of furs, fringes and garniture and all. Arthur accorded with the giant that this should be so. They met in battle on a high place, called Mount Aravius, in the far east, and there the king slew Riton with the sword, spoiling him of that rich garment of furs, with its border of dead kings' beards. Therefore, said Arthur, that never since that day had he striven with so perilous a giant, nor with one of whom he was so sorely frightened. Nevertheless Dinabuc was bigger and mightier than was Riton, even in the prime of his youth and strength. For a monster more loathly and horrible, a giant so hideous and misshapen, was never slain by man, than the devil Arthur killed to himself that day, in Mont St. Michel, over against the sea.

After Arthur had slain the monster, and Bedevere had taken his head, they went their way to the host in great mirth and content. They reached the camp, and showed the spoil to all who would, for their hearts were high with that which they had done. Hoel was passing sorrowful for that fair lady, his niece, making great lamentation for a while over her who was lost in so fearsome a fashion. In token of his dolour he builded on the mount a chapel to Our Lady St. Mary, that men call Helen's Tomb to this very day. Although this fair chapel was raised above the grave of this piteous lady, and is yet hight, Tombelaine, none gives a thought to the damsel after whom it is named. Nothing more have I to relate concerning this adventure, and would tell you now of that which happened to the host.

When the men of Ireland, and those others for whom Arthur tarried, had joined themselves to the host, the king set forth, a day's march every day, through Normandy. Without pause or rest he and his fellowship passed across France, tarrying neither at town nor castle, and came speedily into Burgundy. The king would get to Autun as swiftly as he might, for the Romans were spoiling the land, and Lucius their emperor, together with a great company, purposed to enter in the city. Now when Arthur drew to the ford, leading across the waters of the Aube, his spies and certain peasants of those parts came near and warned him privily concerning the emperor, who lay but a little way thence, so that the king could seek him, if he would. The Romans had sheltered them in tents, and in lodges of branches. They were as the sand of the shore for

multitude, so that the peasants marvelled that the earth could bring forth for the footmen and horses. Never might the king store and garner in that day; for where he reaped with one, Lucius the emperor would reap with four. Arthur was in no wise dismayed at their words. He had gone through many and divers perils, and was a valiant knight, having faith and affiance in God. On a little hill near this river Aube, Arthur builded earthworks for his host, making the place exceeding strong. He closed the doors fast, and put therein a great company of knights and men-at-arms to hold it close. In this fortress he set his harness and stores, so that he could repair thither to his camp in time of need. When all was done Arthur summoned to his counsel two lords whom he esteemed for fair and ready speech. These two lords were of high peerage. Guerin of Chartres was one, and the other was that Boso, Earl of Oxford, right learned in the law. To these two barons Arthur added Gawain, who had dwelt in Rome for so long a space. This Arthur did by reason that Gawain was a good clerk, meetly schooled, and held in much praise and honour by his friends in Rome. These three lords the king purposed to send as an embassy to the emperor. They were to bear his message, bidding the Romans to turn again to their own land, nor seek to enter France, for it pertained to the king. Should Lucius persist in his purpose, refusing to return whence he came, then let him give battle on the earliest day, to determine whether Arthur or he had the better right. This thing was certain. So long as Arthur had breath he would maintain his claim to France, despite the Roman power. He had gained it by the sword, and it was his by right of conquest. In ancient days Rome, in her turn, held it by the same law, Then let the God of battles decide whether Britain or Rome had the fairer right to France.

The messengers of the king apparelled themselves richly for their master's honour. They mounted on their fairest destriers, vested in hauberks of steel, with laced helmets, and shields hung round their necks. They took their weapons in their hands, and rode forth from the camp. Now when certain knights and divers bold and reckless varlets saw the embassy make ready to seek the emperor, they came to Gawain and gave him freely of their counsel. These exhorted him that when he reached the court, to which he fared, he should act in such fashion, right or wrong, that a war would begin which had threatened overlong. Yea,

to use such speech that if no matter of dispute should be found at the meeting, there might yet be quarrel enough when they parted. The embassy accorded, therefore, that they would so do as to constrain the Romans to give battle. Gawain and his comrades crossed a mountain, and came through a wood upon a wide plain. At no great distance they beheld the tents and lodges of the host. When the Romans saw the three knights issue from the wood, they drew near to look upon their faces and to inquire of their business. They asked of them concerning whom they sought, and if for peace they had come within the camp. But the three knights refused to answer, for good or evil, until they were led before the lord of Rome. The embassy got from their horses before the emperor's pavilion. They gave their bridles to the hands of the pages, but as to their swords concealed them beneath their mantles. The three knights showed neither salutation nor courtesy when they stood in the emperor's presence. They rehearsed over Arthur's message, whilst Lucius hearkened attentively to their words. Each of the ambassadors said that which pleased him to be said, and told over what he held proper to be told. The emperor listened to each and all without interruption. After he had considered at his leisure he purposed to reply. "We come from Arthur, our lord," said Gawain, "and bear to thee his message. He is our king, and we are his liegemen, so it becomes us to speak only the words he has put in our mouth. By us, his ambassadors, he bids you refrain from setting a foot in France. He forbids you to intermeddle with the realm, for it is his, and he will defend his right with such power, that very certainly you may not snatch it from his hand. Arthur requires you to seek nothing that is his. If, however, you challenge his claim to France, then battle shall prove his title good, and by battle you shall be thrown back to your own land. Once upon a time the Romans conquered this realm by force, and by force they maintained their right. Let battle decide again whether Rome or Britain has the power to keep. Come forth to-morrow with thy host, so that it may be proven whether you or we shall hold France. If you fear this thing, then go your way in peace, as indeed is best, for what else is there to do! The game is played, and Rome and you have lost." Lucius the emperor made answer that he did not purpose to return to his realm. France was his fief, and he would visit his own. If he might not pursue his road to day,

why, then to-morrow. But in heart and hope he deemed himself mighty enough to conquer France, and to take all in his seisin.

Now Quintilian, the nephew of the emperor, was seated by his side. He took the word suddenly from his uncle's mouth, for he was a passing proud youth, quick to quarrel, and very bitter in speech. "The Britons," cried he, "are known to all as a vainglorious people. They threaten readily, and they boast and brag more readily still. We have listened to their menaces, but we remember they are of those who boast the more because they act the less." Quintilian, as I deem, would have continued with yet other grievous words, but Gawain, who was hot with anger, drew forth his sword, and springing forward, made the head fly from his shoulders. He cried to his comrades that they should get to their horses, and the earls won their way from the pavilion, Gawain with them, and they with him. Each seized his steed by the bridle, and climbed nimbly in the saddle. Then they rode forth from the camp, shield on shoulder, and lance in hand, asking no leave of any.

The patricians within the pavilion sat silent for a space after that bitter stroke. The emperor was the first to come from his amazement. "Why sit you here?" cried Lucius; "Follow after those men who have set this shame upon us. Ill fall the day, if they come not to my hand!" The bravest of his household ran from the tent crying for harness and horses. From every side arose the shouting, "Swiftly, swiftly; bridle and spur; gallop, gallop." The whole host was mightily moved together. They set saddles on destriers, and led the steeds from the stable. They girt their baldrics about them, and taking their lances, spurred after the fugitives. The three barons pricked swiftly across the plain. They looked this way and that; often glancing behind them to mark how nearly they were followed. The Romans pursued them pell-mell; some on the beaten road, and others upon the heavy fields. They came by two, or three, or five, or six, in little clumps of spears. Now a certain Roman rode in advance of his fellows, by reason of his good horse, which was right speedy. He followed closely after the Britons, calling loudly, "Lords, stay awhile. He knows himself guilty who flees the pursuer." At his word Guerin of Chartres turned him about. He set his buckler before him, and lowering the lance, hurtled upon his adversary. Guerin rode but the one course. He smote the Roman so fiercely, midmost the body, that he fell from his

destrier, and died. Guerin looked on the fallen man. He said, "A good horse is not always great riches. Better for you had you lain coy in your chamber, than to have come to so shameful an end." When Boso beheld this adventure of Guerin, and heard his words, he was filled with desire of such honour. He turned his horse's head, and seeing before him a knight seeking advancement, ran upon him with the spear. Boso smote his adversary in the throat, where the flesh is soft and tender. The Roman fell straightway to the ground, for his hurt was very grievous. Boso cried gaily to his stricken foe, "Master Roman, you must needs be fed with gobbets and dainties. Take now your rest, till your comrades may tend you. Then give them the message that I leave you in their care." Among the pursuers spurred a certain patrician named Marcellus, who was come of a very noble house. This Marcellus was amongst the last to get in his saddle, but by reason of the strength and swiftness of his destrier he rode now with the foremost. He had forgotten his lance, in his haste to follow his fellows. Marcellus strove hotly to overtake Gawain. He rode furiously with bloody spur and loosened rein. His horse approached nearly to Gawain's crupper, and the knight was persuaded that in no wise might he shake off his pursuer. Already Marcellus had stretched forth his hand, promising Gawain his life if he would yield as his prisoner. Gawain watched his hunter warily. When Marcellus was upon him, Gawain drew his rein sharply, so that the Roman overran the chace. As he passed, Gawain plucked forth his sword, and smote Marcellus terribly on the helmet. No coif could have hindered the stroke, for it divided the head down to the very shoulders. Marcellus tumbled from his horse and went to his place. Then said Gawain, of his courtesy, "Marcellus, when you greet Quintilian deep in hell, tell him, I pray, that you have found the Britons as bold as their boast. Tell him that they plead the law with blows, and bite more fiercely than they bark." Gawain called upon his companions, Guerin and Boso, by their names, to turn them about, and enter the lists with their pursuers. The two knights did cheerfully after his counsel, so that three Romans were shocked from their saddles. Then the messengers rode swiftly on their way, whilst the Romans followed after, seeking in all things to do them a mischief. They thrust at the Britons with lances, they struck mightily with the sword, yet never might wound nor hurt, neither

bring them to the earth, nor make them their captives. There was a certain Roman, a kinsman of Marcellus, who bestrode a horse that was right speedy. This Roman was very dolent, because of his cousin's death, for he had seen his body lying in the dust. He spurred his steed across the plain, and gaining upon the three kinsman's blood. Gawain watched him ride, with lifted sword, as one who deemed to smite the shield. When Gawain perceived his purpose, he dropped the lance, for he had no need of a spear. He drew his sword, and as the Roman, with brand raised high above his head, prepared to strike, Gawain smote swiftly at the lifted limb. Arm and sword alike flew far off in the field, the fist yet clasped about the hilt. Gawain dressed his glaive again. He would have bestowed yet another buffet, but the Romans hastened to the succour of their fellow, and he dared not stay. In this fashion the huntsmen followed after the quarry, till the chase drew near a wood, close by the entrance to that fortress Arthur had newly built.

Now Arthur had appointed six thousand horsemen of his host to follow after his messengers. He commanded these horsemen to go by hill and valley to guard against surprise. They were to watch diligently for the ambassadors, affording them succour, so they were beset. This great company of spears was hidden in the wood. They sat upon their horses, helmet on head, and lance in hand, scanning the road for the return of Arthur's embassy. Presently they were aware of many armed men riding swiftly across the plain, and in their midst three knights, in harness, fleeing for their lives. When the Britons marked the quarry, and were assured of the hunters, they cried out with one voice, and burst from their ambush. The Romans dared not abide their coming, but scattered on the plain. The Britons rode hardly upon them, doing them all the mischief they might, for they were passing wroth to see their comrades handselled so despitefully. Many a Roman had reason to rue his hunting, for some were seized and made captive, others were sorely wounded, and divers slain. There was a certain rich baron named Peredur. Amongst the captains of Rome not one was counted his peer. This captain had ten thousand armed men in his bailly, who marched at his bidding. Tidings were carried to Peredur of the snare the Britons had limed. Peredur moved promptly. He hastened with ten thousand shields to the plain, and by sheer force and numbers bore the Britons back to the

wood, for they were not mighty enough to contend against him in the field. The Britons held the wood strongly, and defended it right manfully. Peredur might not take it for all his cunning, and lost there largely of his company. The Britons lured the Romans within the covert, and slew them in the glooms. So hot and so perilous was the melley, fought between the valley and the wood.

Arthur took thought to the tarrying of his messengers, and remembered that those came not again whom he sent to their aid. The king summoned Yder, the son of Nut, to his counsel. He committed to his charge seven thousand horses and riders, and despatched them after the others, bidding him seek until he found. Yder drew to the plain. Gawain and Boso yet strove like champions, and for the rest there was not one but did what he could. From afar Yder heard the cry and the tumult as the hosts contended together. When the Britons beheld Yder's company, they were refreshed mightily in heart and hope. They assailed their adversaries so fiercely that they won back the ground which was lost. Yder led his horsemen like a brave knight and a cunning captain. He charged so vigorously with his company, that many a saddle was emptied, many a good horse taken, and many a rider shocked. Peredur sustained the battle stoutly, and wheeling about, returned to the field. He was a crafty captain, knowing well the hour to charge and to wheel, to press hard on the fugitive, or to wait. Many a fair charge did he lead that day. He who was valiant, found Peredur yet more bold. Whoso was minded to tourney, found Peredur yet more willing to break a spear. His bailly smote more terribly with the sword than ever they were stricken, so that three hundred horsemen and over lay dead upon the field. When the Britons marked the deeds of Peredur they could not be contained. They broke from their ranks and companies, and ran upon the foe. They were desirous beyond measure to joust with their adversaries, and to show forth their prowess. Above all things they were covetous of honour, so that for chivalry they brought the battle to confusion. So only they strove hand to hand with the Romans, they gave no thought to the end. Peredur wished nothing better. He held his bailly closely together, pushing home and drawing off according to need. Many a time he charged amongst the Britons, and many a time he returned, bringing his wounded from their midst. Boso of Oxford regarded the battle. He saw

his dead upon the ground. He marked the craft with which Peredur—that great captain—sustained the Romans, and knew well that all was lost, save that Peredur were slain. How might the courage of a rash and foolish company prevail against the discipline of the Roman host! Boso called about him the best and bravest of his captains. “Lords,” he said, “give me your counsel. You, in whom Arthur put his trust, have entered on this battle without any commandment of our lord. If well befalls, all will be well; if ill, he will require his sergeants at our hands. Should we be vile and niddering enough to gain no honour on the field, very surely we shall receive yet more shame as our portion when we come into his presence. Our one hope is to fight against none, great or small, save only with Peredur. Alive or dead he must be made captive, and delivered into Arthur’s power. Until Peredur be taken we shall never draw off in honour from the stour, but must suffer yet greater loss than before. If then you would make him prisoner, follow after where I will lead, and do that thing which you shall see me do.” The captains, therefore, plighted faith to follow his ensample, and in no wise to depart from his command.

Boso brought together as many horsemen as he might, and ranged them in order of battle. He sent out spies to bring him tidings where that Peredur should be met, who led the Romans so craftily. The spies departed on their perilous errand, and returning presently, proclaimed that Peredur rode with the host in that place where the press was thickest, and the battle drew never to an end. Boso rode with his company straight to the heart of the stour. He hurtled upon the Romans, and looking on Peredur, fought his way to his side. When their horses stood together, Boso flung his arms about his adversary, and dragged him amongst the Britons. Then of his will he hurled himself to the ground, and with him tumbled Sir Peredur. A very marvellous adventure was it to behold Boso fall from his destrier in the hottest of the battle, clasping Peredur closely in his arms. The two champions strove mightily, but Boso was above, and for nothing would unloose his hold. The bailly of Peredur hastened fiercely to the rescue of their captain. Those whose lances were still unbroken charged till the staves were splintered; when their lances failed them at need, they laid on with their swords, working havoc amongst the Britons. At any price the Romans would rescue their

captain, and the Britons were in same mind to succour Boso in his jeopardy. Never might heart desire to see battle arrayed more proudly. Never was there a fairer strife of swords; never a more courteous contention of valiant men. Plume and helmet were abased to the dust, shields were cloven, the hauberk rent asunder, ash staves knapped like reeds, girths were broken, saddles voided, and strong men thrown, and brave men wounded to the death. The thunder of the shouting filled the field. The Britons cried as Arthur had taught them, and the Romans answered with the name of Rome. The one party did all that valiant men were able to guard their captive in their midst, and the other to pluck their captain from amongst them. So confused was the contention, so disordered the combat, that men as they strove together hardly knew Roman from Briton, friend from foe, save only by the cry they shouted, and by the tongue they spoke in the stour. Gawain flung himself in the press, hewing a path towards Boso, with mighty strokes of the sword. With point and edge, thrust and cut, he beat down many, and put divers to flight. Not a Roman of them all could prevail against him, nor, so he might, would strive to hinder him in his road. From another side of the field Yder set his face to the same end. A woodman was he, clearing a bloody path amongst the trees. Guerin of Chartres aided him like a loyal comrade, each covering his fellow with the shield. The three champions drew before Peredur and Boso, and dragged them to their feet. They brought a steed to Boso, and gave a sword to his hand. As for Peredur, the crafty captain who had done them so many and such great mischiefs, they held him strongly. They carried him from the press to their own lines for the greater surety. There they left him, bound, under the charge of trusty warders, and straightway returned to the battle. Now the Romans had lost their captain. They were as a ship upon the waters, without a rudder, that drifts here and there, having neither aim nor direction, at the bidding of the winds and waves. Such was the plight of the bailly which was spoiled of its captain; for an army without a constable is less an army than a flock of sheep. The Britons dealt mercilessly with their beaten foe. They pressed hardly upon the Romans, smiting down and slaying many. They made captives of the fallen, stripping them of wealth and armour, and pursued hotly after the fugitives. These they bound with cords, and came again in triumph to

their companions in the wood, together with their prisoners. The Britons carried Peredur, the wise captain, to the camp, and bestowed him upon Arthur, their lord. They rendered also to his hand divers other prisoners of less value than he. Arthur thanked them for their gift. He promised to recompense each for his goodwill, when he returned a victor to his realm. Arthur set his captives fast in prison, whence they could in nowise break out. Afterwards he took counsel with his barons to convey the prisoners to Paris, and guard them close in his castle, until the king's pleasure concerning them was known. He feared to keep them with the host, lest—watch as he would—they should escape from his ward. Arthur made ready a strong company to bring them to Paris, and set governors over them. He gave Peredur and his fellows into the charge of four earls of high lineage, namely, Cador, Borel, Richier, and Bedevere his butler. These barons rose very early in the morning, and brought the Romans from their prison. Like careful warders they put the captives in their midst, and set out on their journey, riding right warily.

Now Lucius, the emperor, had learned from his spies that the earls purposed to start at daybreak on their road to Paris. Lucius prepared ten thousand riders on horses. He bade them travel the whole night through, outstripping the Britons, and devise such ambush as would rescue their comrades from these barons. He committed this company to Sertorius, lord of Libya, and Evander, the King of Syria. With these princes were Caritius and Catellus Vulteius, patricians of Rome. Each of these lords was a wealthy man of his lands, and a skilful captain in war. Lucius had chosen them from all their fellows, and laid his charge straitly upon them, to succour their comrades in their need. These were the lords of the host. The ten thousand horsemen in mail set out at nightfall on their errand. Certain peasants of the land went with them, to guide them by the surest way. They travelled throughout the night, sparing not the spur, till they came forth on the Paris road. There they searched out a likely place where they might hide them in ambush, and held themselves close and coy until it was day. Very early in the morning the pricklers of the host sent tidings that the Britons were near at hand. Arthur's men rode in all surety, deeming they had nought to fear. They were ordered in two companies. Cador and Borel led the first company, and were the vanguard of the host. A little space after came Richier, the earl, and

Bedevere, the king's cupbearer. These had Peredur and his fellows in their care. Six hundred horsemen in harness followed at the earls' backs, having the captives in their midst. They had tied their wrists behind them, and fastened their feet with ropes under the bellies of the horses. So they pricked, all unwitting, into the snare the Romans had spread. When Cador and Borel were in the net, the Romans sallied forth from their hiding. The hard ground trembled beneath the thunder of the destriers' hoofs. They charged home fiercely amongst their adversaries; but for all their amazement the Britons sustained the shock like men. Bedevere and Richier gave ear to the tumult, and the noise of the shouting. Their first thought was to the prisoners. These they set in a sure place, giving them to the charge of their squires, and commanding that they should be guarded strictly. Then they hastened amain to the breaking of spears. The adversaries clashed together with all their strength. The Romans drifted here and there, in little clumps of lances, for their mind was less to discomfit the Britons than to release the captives from their bonds. For their part the Britons kept their order, and fared boldly among the enemy. Passing heavy were the Romans because of the prisoners they might not find. Very grievous was the count of their horsemen who perished in the search. Now the captains divided the Britons by companies into four strong columns of battle. Cador of Cornwall commanded the folk of his earldom; Bedevere the Frenchmen of Beauce; Borel had with him the levies of Le Mans, and to Richier was committed a company drawn from the men of his household. King Evander perceived the loss and the peril caused to his host by reason of their divided mind. Since the captives could not be met with, he checked the hastiness of his meinie. He drew back his horsemen, and ranged them in order. Then he returned to the battle. It befell, therefore, that the Romans bore away the prize, and had the better of their adversaries. They wrought much damage to the Britons, making many prisoners. They slew, moreover, four of the mightiest and most valiant lords of their enemies. At that time perished Yder, a faithful knight, courageous and passing strong. Hirelgas of Peritum died, too, this day; there was no hardier knight than he. Aliduc of Tintagel also, for whom his kin made wondrous sorrow. Besides these was slain Sir Amaury of the Islands; but whether he was Welsh or Briton I do not know. Earl

Borel of Le Mans, a rich lord, and a right honoured and puissant prince amongst his own, did well and worshipfully. He checked the Romans boldly, slaying of them more than one hundred men. Evander hastened against him. He thrust his lance head through Borel's throat, so that the point came out at his neck. Borel fell from his horse, for he was sped. The Britons were dismayed beyond measure. They fled before their adversaries, since many were killed, and where one Briton stood, ten Romans opposed themselves over against him. Doubtless they had been utterly discomfited, and the captives wrested from their hand, had not Guitard of Poitiers drawn to their succour. Earl Guitard, that day, was warden of the marches. He learned from his prickers tidings that a company of Romans was despatched to rescue the captives. Guitard saddled his destrier. He took with him three thousand horsemen, without counting the spearmen and archers, and rode swiftly in aid. As they drew near to the battle they heard the shouts of the Romans in praise of their victory. Guitard and his company rode into the press with lowered lances and scarlet spurs. A hundred horsemen and more were hurled from their steeds in that shock, never to climb in the saddle again. The Romans were altogether fearful and esmayed, making complaint of their pitiful plight. They deemed that Arthur himself had fallen upon them with all his meinie at his back. Their hearts turned to water, by reason of the number of their dead. The levies of Poitou closed about them, and the Britons failed not at need. Each company strove to outvie its fellow, contending earnestly for the greater glory. The Romans could do no more. They turned about and fled the field, utterly discomfited and abased. Their one thought was to get to shelter, or else they were all dead men. The Britons pressed hardly on the fugitives, slaying many. In the flight King Evander and Catellus were taken, and of their fellowship six hundred and more were destroyed. Of these divers were slain, and others made captive. The Britons took spoil of prisoners according to their desire, and retained of these as they might. Then they returned by the road, to the place where the combat was won. The Britons went about the field searching amongst the dead for Borel, the stout Earl of Le Mans. They found him among the fallen, bebled with blood, and gashed with many a grisly wound. Afterwards they carried the hurt to the surgeons, and the dead they laid in their graves. As for Peredur and his

companions they committed them afresh to those whom Arthur had charged with their keeping, and sent them on their way to Paris. The rest of the prisoners they bound straitly, and carrying them before Arthur, delivered them to his hand. They rehearsed to the king the tale of this adventure, and not a man of them all but pledged his word that so the Romans made offer of battle, without doubt they should be utterly destroyed.

The tidings of this heavy discomfiture were brought to the emperor. Lucius learned of the capture of Evander, and of the others who were slain. He saw his men had no more spirit in them, and that the beginning of the war went very ill. Lucius considered the failure of his hopes; that in nothing was he conqueror. He was passing heavy, being altogether cast down and dismayed. He thought and thought and feared. He knew not whether to give Arthur battle without delay, or to await the coming of the rearward of his host. He doubted sorely that which he should do, for wondrously affrighted was he of this battle, by reason of the losses he had known. Lucius took counsel with his captains, and devised to bring his company to Autun, passing by way of Langres. He set forth with the host, and moving towards Langres, entered the city when the day was far spent. Now Langres is builded on the summit of a mount, and the plain lies all about the city. So Lucius and part of his people lodged within the town, and for the rest they sought shelter in the valley. Arthur knew well where the emperor would draw, and of his aim and purpose. He was persuaded that the Roman would not fight till the last man was with him. He cared neither to tarry in the city, nor to pacify the realm. Arthur sounded his trumpets, and bade his men to their harness. As speedily as he might he marched out from camp. He left Langres on the left hand, and passed beyond it bearing to the right. He had in mind to outstrip the emperor, and seize the road to Autun. All the night through, without halt or stay, Arthur fared by wood and plain, till he came to the valley of Soissons. There Arthur armed his host, and made him ready for battle. The highway from Autun to Langres led through this valley, and Arthur would welcome the Romans immediately they were come. The king put the gear and the camp followers from the host. He set them on a hill near by, arrayed in such fashion as to seem men-at-arms. He deemed that the Romans would be the more fearful,

when they marked this multitude of spears. Arthur took six thousand six hundred and sixty-six men, and ranged them by troops in a strong company. This company he hid within a wood upon a high place. Mordup, Earl of Gloucester, was the constable of the meinie. "Your part in the battle," said Arthur, "is to be still. Let nothing induce you to break from your post. Should evil befall, and the battle roll back to the wood, charge boldly on your adversaries, that your comrades may find rest. If it chance that the Romans turn their backs in the battle, then hurtle upon them without delay, sparing none in the flight." So these answered, promising to do after his word. Arthur straightway ordered another legion. It was formed of mighty men, chosen from amongst his vassals, with laced helmets, riding on their destriers. This fair company he arrayed in open ground, and it owned no other captain save the king. With this legion rode those of his privy household, whom he had cherished and nourished at his own table. In their midst was guarded the royal Dragon, that was the king's own gonfalon. From the rest of his host the king made six companies, each company having ten captains. Half of these companies were horsemen, and the others went on foot. On each and all Arthur laid prayer and commandment, that rider and sergeant alike should bear them as men, and contend earnestly against the Romans. Not one of these legions but was numbered of five thousand five hundred and fifty-five horsemen, chosen soldiers, mighty men of valour, and mightily armed for war. Of the eight legions, four companies were set over against their enemy, supported by four behind. Every man was armed and clad according to the custom of his land. Aguisel of Scotland had the forefront of the first legion in his keeping; Cador of Cornwall being charged with the rear. Boso and Earl Guerin of Chartres were the constables of another company. The third company, formed of outland folk, and armed in divers manners, was delivered to Echil, King of the Danes, and to Lot, the King of Norway. The fourth had Hoel for constable, and with him Gawain, who, certes, was no faintheart. Behind these four legions were arrayed and ordered yet four other companies. Of one, Kay the sewer and Bedevere the cupbearer were the captains. With Kay were the men of Chinon and the Angevins; whilst under Bedevere were the levies of Paris and of Beauce. To Holdin of Flanders and Guitard the Poitivin were committed another company—right glad

were they of their trust. Earls Jugein of Leicester and Jonathan of Dorchester were lords and constables of the seventh legion. Earl Curfalain of Chester and Earl Urgain of Bath held the eighth legion as their bailly; for these were lords by whom Arthur set great store. As for the spearmen, the archers, and the stout arbalestriers Arthur separated them from the press. He divided them into two portions—one for either wing of his army. All these were about the king's person, and embattled near his body.

When Arthur had arrayed his legions, and set his battle in order, hearken now that which he spake to his lords, his household, and his vassals. "Lords," said Arthur, "I take wondrous comfort when I remember your manhood and virtues, seeing you always so valiant and praiseworthy. In the past you have accomplished great things; but day by day your prowess grows to the full, abating the pride of all who set themselves against you. When I call to mind and consider that Britain, in our day, is the lady of so many and so far lands by reason of you and your fellows, I rejoice mightily, mightily I boast thereof, and in my God and you right humbly do I put my trust. God grant that you may do more marvellous works than ever you have wrought, and that your orb has not yet reached its round. Lords, your valiance and manhood have conquered these Romans twice already. My heart divines the decree of fate that you will overthrow them once again. Three times then have we discomfited these Romans. You have smitten down the Danes; you have abated Norway, and vanquished the French. France we hold as our fief in the teeth of the Roman power. Right easily should you deal with the varlet, who have overborne so many and such perilous knights. The Romans desire to make Britain their province, to grow fat with our tribute, and to bring France once more to their allegiance. For this cause they have ransacked the east, and carried hither these strange, outland people, who amaze Christendom, to fight in their quarrel. Be not fearful of their numbers. Ten christened men are worth a hundred of such paynims. The battle will be less a battle, than a tournament of dames. Have therefore good trust in God, and be confident of the issue. We shall deal with them lightly, so only we show a little courage. Well I am assured what each of you will do this day, and how he will bear him in the melley. For my part I shall be in the four quarters of the field, and

with every one of my legions. Where the press is thickest, where the need most dire, my Dragon shall raise his crest."

When the proud words were ended which Arthur rehearsed in the ears of his people, the host made answer with one loud voice. Not a man of them all, who hearkened to his speech, but replied that he loved better to lie stark upon the field, than to know himself vanquished at the end. The whole host was mightily moved together. They defied the foe; they promised with oaths to bear them like men, and there were those who wept. Such tears were not shed by reason of fearfulness. It was the weeping of men who were utterly purposed never to fail their king.

Now Lucius, the emperor, was born in Spain, of a valiant and noble stock. He was in the most comely flower of his age, having more than thirty years, but less than forty. He was a proven knight, of high courage, who had done great deeds already. For such feats of arms the Roman senate had chosen him to be their emperor. Lucius rose early in the morning, purposing to set forth from Langres to Autun. His host was now a great way upon the road, when tidings were brought of the stratagem Arthur had practised against him. The emperor knew well that either he must fight or retreat. Go back he would not, lest any deemed him fearful. Moreover, should the Britons follow after, their triumph was assured, for how may soldiers bear them with a stout heart, who flee already from the field! Lucius called about him his kings, his princes, and his dukes. He drew together his wisest counsellors, and the most crafty captains of his host. To these he spake, and to the bravest of his legions, numbering one hundred thousand men and more besides. "Hearken, gentle lords," cried Lucius, "give ear, ye liege men, fair conquerors, honest sons of worthy sires, who bequeathed you so goodly an inheritance. By reason of your fathers' glorious deeds, Rome became the empery of the world. That she will remain whilst one only Roman breathes. Great as is the glory of your fathers who subdued this empire, so great will be the shame of their sons in whose day it is destroyed. But a valiant father begets a valiant son. Your ancestors were gentle knights, and you do them no wrong. Not one of you but comes of hardy stock, and the sap rises in your blood like wine. Let every man strive valiantly this day to be what his father was in his. Remember the grief that will be his lot who loses his heritage, and whose cowardice gives to another

what he holds of his father's courage. But I know, and am persuaded, that you will maintain your portions. Bold as were the dead, so bold are the living, and I speak to knights who are mighty men of valour. Lords, the road is shut which would lead us to Autun. We cannot wend our way till we have forced the gate. I know not what silent thief, or picker, or sturdy knave, has closed the road by which we fared. He deems that I shall flee, and abandon the realm like a dropped pouch. He is wrong. If I went back it was but to lure him on. Now that he has arrayed his battle against you, brace your harness and loosen your swords. If the Briton awaits us, he shall not be disappointed of his hope. Should he flee he shall find us on his track. The time is come to put bit and bridle in the jaws of this perilous beast, and to hinder him from further mischief."

The Romans hastened to get to their arms, for they were passing eager to fight. They arrayed and embattled the host, setting the sergeants in rank and company, and forming the columns in due order. The Romans were a mingled fellowship. Divers outland kings, and many paynim and Saracens, were mixed with the Christian folk; for all these people owned fealty to Rome, and were in the service of the emperor. By thirties and forties, by fifties, by sixties, by hundreds and by legions, the captains apparelled the battle. In troops and in thousands the horsemen pricked to their appointed place. Multitudes of spearmen, multitudes of riders, were ranged in close order, and by hill and valley were despatched against Arthur's host. One mighty company, owning fealty to Rome and employed in the service of the emperor, descended within the valley. Another great company assaulted the Britons where they lay. Thereat broke forth a loud shrilling of clarions and sounding of trumpets, whilst the hosts drew together. As they approached, the archers shot so deftly, the spearmen launched their darts so briskly, that not a man dared to blink his eye or to show his face. The arrows flew like hail, and very quickly the melley became yet more contentious. There where the battle was set you might mark the lowered lance, the rent and pierced buckler. The ash staves knapped with a shriek, and flew in splinters about the field. When the spear was broken they turned to the sword, and plucked the brand from its sheath. Right marvellous was the melley, and wondrously hideous and grim. Never did men hew more mightily with the glaive. Not a man who failed at need; not a man of

them all who flinched in the press; not one who took thought for his life. The sword smote upon the buckler as on an anvil. The earth shuddered beneath the weight of the fighting men, and the valley rang and clanged like a smithy with the tumult. Here a host rushed furiously against a legion which met it with unbroken front. There a great company of horsemen crashed with spears upon a company as valiant as itself. Horse and rider went down before the adversary; arrows flew and darts were hurled; lances were splintered and the sword shattered upon the covering shield. The strong prevailed against the weak, and the living brought sorrow to the dead. Horses ran madly about the field, with voided saddles, broken girths, and streaming mane. The wounded pitied their grievous hurts, choosing death before life; but the prayer of their anguish was lost in the tumult and the cries. Thus for a great while the two hosts contended mightily together, doing marvellous damage, one to the other. Neither Roman nor Briton could gain ground, so that no man knew who would triumph in the end. Bedevere and Kay considered the battle. They saw that the Romans held themselves closely. They were filled with anger at the malice of the Romans, and led their company to that place where the press was the most perilous. Ah, God, but Arthur had men for his seneschal and cupbearer. Knights of a truth were these who sat at his table. Kay and Bedevere smote like paladins with their brands of steel. Many fair deeds had they done, but none so fair as they did that day. They divided the forefront of the battle, and cleaving a passage with the sword, opened a road for their fellows. The Britons followed after, taking and rendering many strokes, so that divers were wounded and many slain. Blood ran in that place like water, and the dead they lay in heaps. Bedevere adventured deeper into the melley, giving himself neither pause nor rest. Kay came but a stride behind, beating down and laying low, that it was marvellous to see. The two companions halted for a breathing space, turning them about to encourage their men. Great was the praise and worship they had won, but they were yet desirous of honour. They were over anxious for fame, and their courage led them to rashness. In their hope of destroying the Romans, they took no heed to their own safety. They trusted beyond measure in their strength, and in the strength of their company. There was a certain pagan, named Bocus, King of the Medes. He was a rich lord

in his land, and captain of a strong legion. Bocus hastened his men to the battle, for he was fearful of none, however perilous the knight. When the two hosts clashed together the contention was very courteous, and the melley passing well sustained. Pagan and Saracen were set to prove their manhood against Angevins and the folk of Beauce. King Bocus took a sword, and discomfited the two paladins. May his body rot for his pains. He thrust Bedevere through the breast, so fiercely that the steel stood out beyond his back. Bedevere fell, for his heart was cloven. His soul went its way. May Jesus take it in His keeping! Kay lighted upon Bedevere lying dead. Since he loved him more than any living man, he was determined the pagans should not triumph over his body. He called around him as many men as he might, and did such deeds that the Medians fled before him, leaving the Britons on the field. Sertorius, King of Libya, beheld this adventure, and was passing wroth. He had with him a great company of pagans whom he had carried from his realm. Sertorius, hot with anger, drew near, and dealt much mischief to his adversaries. He wounded Kay to the death, and slew the best of his men. Mauled as he was with many grim strokes, Kay guarded his comrade's body. He set it amidst his men, and carried the burthen from the press, fighting as they went. With him, also, he bore Arthur's banner, the golden Dragon, let the Romans rage as they would. Now Hiresgas, the nephew of Bedevere, loved his uncle passing well. He sought his kinsfolk and friends, and gathered to his fellowship some three hundred men. This company wore helmet and hauberk and brand, and rode fair destriers, fierce and right speedy. Hiresgas ordered his house for the battle. "Come now with me," said he to his friends, "and crave the price of blood." Hiresgas drew near that place where Bocus, King of the Medians, displayed his banner. When Hiresgas beheld his enemy he became as a man possessed. He cried the battle cry of Arthur, and together with his company charged terribly upon Bocus. He had but one only thought, to avenge his uncle's death. Hiresgas and his fellows burst amongst the Medians with lowered lances and covering shields. They slew many, and flung many others from their saddles. They rode over the fallen, trampling them beneath the hoofs of the horses, till they reached the very cohort of that king who had slain Sir Bedevere. Mounted on strong destriers the bold vassals followed after Hiresgas,

wheeling to right or left, as he led, till they pierced to the gonfalon, showing the arms of the king. Hiresgas spied his foe. He turned his horse, and pushing through the press, drew near, and smote Bocus full on the helm. The baron was a mighty man; the stroke was fierce, and his blade was keen and strong. He struck well and craftily. The blow sheared through helmet and coif. It divided the head to the shoulders, so that the soul of King Bocus sped away to the Adversary. Hiresgas stretched out his arm, seizing the body ere it might fall to the ground. He set his enemy before him on his horse, and held him fast, the limbs hanging on either side. Then he made his way from the stour, the dead man uttering neither lamentation nor cry. The knight was grim, and his war horse mighty. His kinsfolk gathered behind him, that the Medians should do him no mischief. By the aid of his fellows he won out of the battle, and carried his burthen to the very place where his uncle lay. There, joint by joint, he hacked King Bocus asunder. When his task was ended, Sir Hiresgas called his comrades about him. "Come," said he, "come, true men's sons, to the slaying of these Romans. Romans! nay, cutpurses, rather, whoresons, paynims who have neither trust in God, nor faith in our true religion. Rome has brought them from the east for the destruction of our lives and our kin. On then, friends, let us wipe out these pagans; the pagans, and such renegade Christians as have joined them to slay Christendom more surely. Forward, to sharpen your manhood upon them." Hiresgas led his household back to the battle. Tumult and shouting filled the plain. Helmet and brand glittered in the sun, but the steel often was dulled with blood, or was shattered on the shield. The fair duke, Guitard of Poitiers, bore him as a valiant man. He held his own stoutly against the King of Afric. The two lords contended together, hand to hand, but it was the King of Afric died that day. Guitard passed across his body, smiting down many Africans and Moors. Holdin, Duke of the Flemings, was a wise prince, circumspect and sober in counsel. He strove with the legion of Aliphatma, a King of Spain. The two princes fought one with the other, in so great anger, that Aliphatma was wounded to the death, and Holdin was in no better case. Ligier, Earl of Boulogne, ran a course with the King of Babylon. I know not who was the fairer knight, for both were shocked from their seats. Dead upon the field lay earl and king alike. With Ligier were slain three other earls,

masters of many carles in their own lands. Urgent, Lord of Bath, Balluc, Earl of Guitsire, and Earl Cursa of Chester, warden of the marches of Wales, perished in a little space, so that their men were sorely grieved. The company which followed after their pennons flinched in the press. It gave back before the Romans, and fled for shelter to the legion which had Gawain for its captain, and with him Hoel, his fair friend and companion. Two such champions you would not find, search the whole world through. Never had knighthood seen their peers for courtesy and kindness, as for wisdom and chivalry.

Now Hoel was captain of the men of Brittany. His fellowship were proud and debonair. They were reckless of danger to such a degree that they neither cared nor feared to whom they were opposed. As one man they charged, and as one man they pierced through the foe. The men of Brittany swept down on the Romans, who were pursuing their comrades, and trampling them under in thousands. They put them speedily to the rightabout, and rode over many in their turn. Ahi, for the griding of their swords, and, ahi, for the captives who were taken. The company hurtled on, till they drew to the golden eagle which was the gonfalon of the emperor. Lucius, himself, was very near his pennon, and with him the flower of his meinie, the gentle men and gallant knights of Rome. Then angels and men witnessed so mortal an encounter, as never I deem was beheld of any, since time began. Chinmark, Earl of Tigel, rode in Hoel's cohort. He was a great baron, and wrought much mischief to his adversaries. His day was come; for a Roman, mean of his station, and fighting on his feet, flung a javelin at his body, so that he died. With the earl perished two thousand of the Britons, every man hardier than his fellows. There, too, were slain three other earls. Jagus, to his loss, had come from Boloan. The second was hight Cecormanus; the third, Earl Boclonius. Few indeed of Arthur's barons might compare with these lords in valour and worth. Had they been sons of kings, who were but earls, the story of their gestes would be sung by the minstrels, as I deem, about the world; so marvellous were their feats. These three fair lords raged wondrously amongst the Romans. Not one who came to their hands but gasped out his life, whether by lance-thrust or sword. They forced a path to the eagle of the emperor, but the bearers arrayed themselves against them, and cutting them off from their companions,

slew them amidst their foes. Hoel and Gawain, his cousin, were distraught with anger when they regarded the mischief dealt them by the Romans. To avenge their comrades, to wreak damage upon their adversaries, they entered amongst them as lions in the field. They smote down and did much havoc to their adversaries, cleaving a way with many terrible blows of their swords. The Romans defended their bodies to the death. If strokes they received, strokes they rendered again. They opposed themselves stoutly to those who were over against them, and were as heroes contending with champions. Gawain was a passing perilous knight. His force and manhood never failed, so that his strength was unabated, and his hand unwearied in battle. He showed his prowess so grimly that the Romans quailed before him. Gawain sought the emperor in every place, because of his desire to prove his valour. He went to and fro, seeking so tirelessly and diligently, that at the last he found. The captains looked on the other's face. The emperor knew again the knight, and Gawain remembered Lucius. The two hurtled together, but each was so mighty that he fell not from his horse. Lucius, the emperor, was a good knight, strong and very valiant. He was skilled in all martial exercises and of much prowess. He rejoiced greatly to adventure himself against Gawain, whose praise was so often in the mouths of men. Should he return living from the battle, sweetly could he boast before the ladies of Rome. The paladins strove with lifted arm and raised buckler. Marvellous blows they dealt with the sword. They pained themselves greatly, doing all that craft might devise to bring the combat to an end. Neither of them flinched, nor gave back before the other. Pieces were hewn from the buckler, and sparks flew from the brands. They joined together, smiting above and thrusting under, two perfect knights, two gentle paladins, so fierce and so terrible, that had they been left to themselves very quickly must one have come to a fair end.

The Roman legions recovered from the panic into which they had fallen. They ranged themselves beneath the golden eagle, and brought succour to the emperor at the moment of his utmost need. The legions swept the Britons before them, and won again the field from which they were driven. Arthur watched the fortunes of the day. He marked the discomfiture of his host, and hearkened to the triumphant shouts of the legionaries. He could not, and dared not, wait longer. Arthur hastened

with his chosen company to the battle. He rallied the rout, crying to the fleeing sergeants, "Whom seek you? Turn about, for it were better to be slain of the Romans than by your king. I am Arthur, your captain; and mortal man shall not drive me from the field. Follow me, for I will open a road; and beware lest the maidens of Britain hold you as recreant. Call to mind your ancient courage, by which you have overcome so many proud kings. For my part I will never go from this field alive, till I have avenged me on my adversaries." Arthur did wondrously in the eyes of all the people. He struck many a Roman to the ground. Shield, and hauberk, and helmet he hewed asunder; heads, arms, and gauntlets were divided by his sword. Excalibur waxed red that day, for whom Arthur smote he slew. I cannot number the count of his blows, and every blow a death, For as the ravenous lion deals with his prey, so likewise did the fair king raven amongst his enemies. Not one he spared; he turned aside from none. That man he wounded required no surgeon for his hurt. All the press gave back before so stark a champion, till in his path stood neither great nor small. The King of Libya—Sertorius to name—was a lord exceeding rich. Arthur struck the head from his shoulders. "In an ill hour you drew from the east to bear arms in this quarrel, and to furnish drink for Excalibur." But the dead man answered never a word. Polybetes, King of Bithynia, fought upon his feet. This was a pagan lord, and passing rich. Arthur found the paynim before him. He smote but one marvellous blow, and divided his head to the shoulders. Polybetes crashed to the earth. His soul rushed from his body, and his brains were spattered about the field. "Roman, speed to your doom," cried Arthur loudly, in the hearing of all. When the Britons beheld Arthur's deeds, and hearkened to his high words, they took courage and charged upon the Romans. The Romans met them boldly with sword and spear, doing them many and great mischiefs. When Arthur saw that the battle was stayed, he increased in valour, and did yet more dreadfully with Excalibur. He slew and cast down divers, so that the ground was cumbered with the fallen. Lucius, the emperor, for his part, was not backward in the melley, and avenged himself grievously on the Britons. Emperor and king, for all their seeking, might not come together. This was heavy upon them, for each was a very courteous champion. The battle rolled this way and that, since the contention was passing perilous.

The Romans did well, nor might the Britons do better. A thousand men came swiftly to their deaths, for the two hosts arrayed themselves proudly one against the other, and strove right scornfully. Not a judge on earth could declare which host should be vanquished, nor what man of them all would come victor and quick from the tourney.

Now Mordup, Earl of Gloucester, was constable of the bailly Arthur had hidden on a high place within a wood. Mordup remembered Arthur's counsel that should evil befall, and the battle draw back to the wood, he must charge boldly on his adversaries. Mordup rode from his hiding with a company of six thousand six hundred and sixty-six riders, clad in gleaming helmets and coats of mail, and carrying sharp lances and swords. These drew down the hillside, unnoticed of the Romans, and coming out on their rear, charged hotly on the legion. The legion was altogether discomfited. Its ranks were pierced, its order was broken, with the loss of more than one thousand men. The Britons rode amongst the Romans, parting each from his fellow, trampling the fallen beneath the horses' hoofs, and slaying with the sword. The Romans could endure no longer, for the end of all was come. They broke from their companies, and fled fearfully down the broad road, climbing one upon the other in their haste. There Lucius, the emperor, fell on death, being smitten in the body by a spear. I cannot tell who smote him down, nor of whose lance he was stricken. He was overtaken in the press, and amongst the dead he was found slain. Beneath the thickest of the battle he was discovered, dead, and the hurt within his breast was dealt him by a spear. The Romans and their fellows from the east fled before the pursuers, but the Britons following after did them sore mischief. They waxed weary of slaying, so that they trod the Romans underfoot. Blood ran in runnels, and the slain they lay in heaps. Fair palfreys and destriers ran masterless about the field, for the rider was dead, and had neither joy nor delight in the sun. Arthur rejoiced and made merry over so noble a triumph, which had brought the pride of Rome to the dust. He gave thanks to the King of Glory, who alone had granted him the victory. Arthur commanded search to be made about the country for the bodies of the slain, whether they were friend or foe. Many he buried in the self-same place, but for the others he carried them to certain fair abbeys, and laid them together to rest. As for the body of Lucius, the emperor, Arthur bade it to be held

in all honour, and tended with every high observance. He sealed it in a bier, and sent it worshipfully to Rome. At the same time he wrote letters to the senate that no other truage would he pay them for Britain, which he guarded as his realm. If truage they yet required, then truage they should receive coined in the very mint. Kay, who was wounded to death in the battle, was carried to Chinon, the castle he had builded, and called after his own name. There he was interred in a holy hermitage, standing in a little grove, near by the city. Bedevere was brought to Bayeux in Normandy, a town of his lordship. He was lain in the ground beyond the gate, looking over towards the south. Holdin was borne to Flanders, and buried at Tervanna. Ligier was buried at Boulogne.

Arthur, for his part, sojourned all through the winter in Burgundy, giving peace and assurance to the land. He purposed when summer was come to pass the mountains, and get him to Rome. He was hindered in his hope by Mordred, of whose shame and vileness you shall now hear. This Mordred was the king's kin, his sister's very son, and had Britain in his charge. Arthur had given the whole realm to his care, and committed all to his keeping. Mordred did whatever was good in his own eyes, and would have seized the land to his use. He took homage and fealty from Arthur's men, demanding of every castle a hostage. Not content with this great sin he wrought yet fouler villainy. Against the Christian law he took to himself the wife of the king. His uncle's queen, the dame of his lord, he took as wife, and made of her his spouse.

These tidings were carried to Arthur. He was persuaded that Mordred observed no faith towards him, but had betrayed the queen, stolen his wife, and done him no fair service. The king gave half his host to Hoel, committing Burgundy and France to his hand. He prayed him to keep the land shut from its foes till he came again in peace. For himself he would return to Britain, to bring the kingdom back to its allegiance, and to avenge himself on Mordred, who had served his wife and honour so despitefully. Britain, at any cost, must be regained, for if that were lost all the rest would quickly fall a prey. Better to defer for a season the conquest of Rome, than to be spoiled of his own realm. In a little while he would come again, and then would go to Rome. With these words Arthur set forth towards Wissant, making complaint of the falseness of

Mordred, who had turned him away from his conquest; for the warships lay at Wissant ready for sea.

Mordred learned of Arthur's purpose. He cared not though he came, for peace was not in his heart. He sent letters to Cheldric of Saxony, praying him to sail to his aid. The Saxon came with seven hundred galleys, furnished with all manner of store, and laden with fighting men. Mordred plighted faith that so Cheldric would help him with all his power, he would grant him the land from beyond Humber to the marches of Scotland, besides all the land in Kent that Hengist held of Vortigern's gift, when the king espoused Rowena. Mordred and Cheldric gathered together a right fair company. Counting Saxon pagans and christened men there assembled sixty thousand riders on horses, in coats of mail. Mordred numbered his army with a quiet mind. He considered he was so strong as to drive Arthur from any haven. Let come what might he would never abandon his spoil. For him there was no place for repentance; yea, so black was his sin that to proffer peace would be but a jest. Arthur saw to the harness of his men. He got them on the ships, a multitude whom none could number, and set forth to Romney, where he purposed to cast anchor. Arthur and his people had scarcely issued from the galleys, when Mordred hastened against him with his own men, and those folk from beyond the sea who had sworn to fight in his quarrel. The men in the boats strove to get them to shore; whilst those on the land contended to thrust them deeper in the water. Arrows flew and spears were flung from one to the other, piercing heart and bowels and breast of those to whom they were addressed. The mariners pained themselves mightily to run their boats aground. They could neither defend themselves, nor climb from the ships; so that those were swiftly slain who struggled to land. Often they staggered and fell, crying aloud; and in their rage they taunted those as traitors who hindered them from coming on shore. Ere the ships could be unladen in that port, Arthur suffered wondrous loss. Many a bold sergeant paid the price with his head. There, too, was Gawain, his nephew, slain; and Arthur made over him marvellous sorrow; for the knight was dearer to his heart than any other man. Aguisel was killed at Gawain's side; a mighty lord, and very helpful at need. Many others also were slain, for whom Arthur, the courteous prince, felt sore dolour. So long as Mordred kept the shipmen

from the sand, he wrought them much mischief. But when Arthur's sergeants won forth from the boats, and arrayed them in the open country, Mordred's meinie might not endure against them. Mordred and his men had fared richly and lain softly overlong. They were sickly with peace. They knew not how to order the battle, neither to seek shelter nor to wield arms, as these things were known to Arthur's host, which was cradled and nourished in war. Arthur and his own ravened amongst them, smiting and slaying with the sword. They slew them by scores and by hundreds, killing many and taking captive many more. The slaughter was very grievous, by reason of the greatness of the press. When daylight failed, and night closed on the field, Arthur ceased from slaughter, and called his war hounds off. Mordred's host continued their flight. They knew not how they went, nor whither; for there was none to lead them, and none took heed to his neighbour. Each thought of himself, and was his own physician. Mordred fled through the night to London, where he hoped to find succour. He leaned on a reed, for the citizens would not suffer him to enter in their gates. He turned from the city, and passing the fair water of the Thames, rode to Winchester without stay. Mordred sought refuge at Winchester, and tarrying awhile, summoned his friends to his side. He took hostages and sureties from the citizens, that peace and faith should be observed between them, and that they would maintain his right.

Arthur might find no rest by reason of the hatred he bore to Mordred. Great grief was his for Aguisel and Gawain, the friends whom he had lost. He sorrowed heavily above his nephew, and offered him seemly burial, though in what place I cannot tell. The chronicles are silent, and meseems there is not a man who knows where Gawain was laid, nor the name of him who slew him with the sword. When Arthur had performed these fitting rites he gave himself over to his wrath, considering only in what way he could destroy Mordred. He followed after the traitor to Winchester, calling from every part his vassals as he went. Arthur drew near the city, and lodged his host without the walls. Mordred regarded the host which shut him fast. Fight he must, and fight he would, for the army might never rise up till he was taken. Once Arthur had him in his grip well he knew he was but a dead man. Mordred gathered his sergeants together, and bade them get quickly

into their armour. He arrayed them in companies, and came out through the gates to give battle to the pursuers. Immediately he issued from the barriers the host ran to meet him. The contention was very grievous, for many were smitten and many overthrown. It proved but an ill adventure to Mordred, since his men were not able to stay against their adversaries. Mordred was persuaded that for him there was only one hope of safety; for his trespass was beyond forgiveness, and much he feared the king. He assembled privily the folk of his household, his familiar friends, and those who cherished against Arthur the deepest grudge. With these he fled over by-ways to Southampton, leaving the rest of his people to endure as they could. At the port he sought pilots and mariners. These he persuaded by gifts and fair promises straightway to put out to sea, that he might escape from his uncle. With a favourable wind the shipmen carried him to Cornwall. Mordred feared exceedingly for his life, and rejoiced greatly to be gone.

King Arthur besieged Winchester strictly. At the end he took burgesses and castle. To Yvain, son of Urian, a baron beloved of the court, Arthur granted Scotland as a heritage. Yvain paid homage for the gift. Of old Aguisel claimed lordship in the realm; but he was dead, leaving neither son nor dame to come before Yvain. This Yvain was a right worshipful knight, worthy, and of passing great valour. Very sweetly was he praised of many.

That queen, who was Arthur's wife, knew and heard tell of the war that was waged by Mordred in England. She learned also that Mordred had fled from before the king, because he might not endure against him, and durst not abide him in the field. The queen was lodged at York, in doubt and sadness. She called to mind her sin, and remembered that for Mordred her name was a hissing. Her lord she had shamed, and set her love on her husband's sister's son. Moreover, she had wedded Mordred in defiance of right, since she was wife already, and so must suffer reproach in earth and hell. Better were the dead than those who lived, in the eyes of Arthur's queen. Passing heavy was the lady in her thought. The queen fled to Caerleon. There she entered in a convent of nuns, and took the veil. All her life's days were hidden in this abbey. Never again was this fair lady heard or seen; never again was she found or known of

men. This she did by reason of her exceeding sorrow for her trespass, and for the sin that she had wrought.

Mordred held Cornwall in his keeping, but for the rest the realm had returned to its allegiance. He compassed sea and land to gather soldiers to his banner. Saxon and Dane, the folk of Ireland and Norway, Saracen and pagan, each and all of them who hated Arthur and loathed his bondage, Mordred entreated to his aid. He promised everything they would, and gave what he could, like a man whom necessity drives hard. Arthur was sick with wrath that he was not avenged of Mordred. He had neither peace nor rest whilst the traitor abode in his land. Arthur learned of Mordred's strength in Cornwall, and this was grievous to him. His spies brought tidings of the snares that Mordred spread, and the king waxed heavier thereat. Arthur sent after his men to the very Humber. He gathered to himself so mighty a host that it was as the sand for multitude. With this he sought Mordred where he knew he could be found. He purposed to slay and make an end of the traitor and his perjury alike. Mordred had no desire to shrink from battle. He preferred to stake all on the cast, yea, though the throw meant death—rather than be harried from place to place. The battle was arrayed on the Camel, over against the entrance to Cornwall. A bitter hatred had drawn the hosts together, so that they strove to do each other sore mischief. Their malice was wondrous great, and the murder passing grim. I cannot say who had the better part. I neither know who lost, nor who gained that day. No man wists the name of overthrower or of overthrown. All are alike forgotten, the victor with him who died. Much people were slain on either side, so that the field was strewn with the dead, and crimson with the blood of dying men. There perished the brave and comely youth Arthur had nourished and gathered from so many and far lands. There also the knights of his Table Round, whose praise was bruited about the whole world. There, too, was Mordred slain in the press, together with the greater part of his folk; and in the selfsame day were destroyed the flower of Arthur's host, the best and hardiest of his men. So the chronicle speaks sooth, Arthur himself was wounded in his body to the death. He caused him to be borne to Avalon for the searching of his hurts. He is yet in Avalon, awaited of the Britons; for as they say and deem he will return from whence he went and live again. Master Wace, the writer of

this book, cannot add more to this matter of his end than was spoken by Merlin the prophet. Merlin said of Arthur—if I read aright—that his end should be hidden in doubtfulness. The prophet spoke truly. Men have ever doubted, and—as I am persuaded—will always doubt whether he liveth or is dead. Arthur bade that he should be carried to Avalon in this hope in the year 642 of the Incarnation. The sorer sorrow that he was a childless man. To Constantine, Cador's son, Earl of Cornwall, and his near kin, Arthur committed the realm, commanding him to hold it as king until he returned to his own. The earl took the land to his keeping. He held it as bidden, but nevertheless Arthur came never again.